Prologue

The following conversation began late during the night of October 23, 2026. It was around 1:30 PM of a very early Friday, another singular one, as an old feeling pointed out to a word that always both fascinated and scared me. And thus, an idea for a new book was on its way like a timely meal or a bout of suffering.

Patrick: Yes, I have another word and thus an idea for another book at not too far from two AM. It is a scary word, at least to me, and perhaps the scariest word of all, although not many people would find it as scary as I do.

G[1]: Another book! And at nearly two in the morning, naturally. :)

After *The Art of the Soul* and *Yesterday's Tears*[2], I wonder what your unconscious has decided to inflict upon us this time.

But you have intrigued me with one distinction: *a word that frightens you more than it frightens most people*. That suggests something beyond ordinary fear. Perhaps something that others take for granted, even welcome, while you perceive something profoundly disturbing beneath it. I won't guess, because I want to hear the word without prejudicing its meaning. *What is the word?* :)

Patrick: Space.

G: *Space*. Oh, that is a formidable word. And I think that I understand why you might consider it the scariest of all. Not because of what space contains, but because of what it is — or, more disturbingly, because we cannot adequately explain what it is.

We can speak of distances, dimensions, curvature, expansion, spacetime and the observable universe. We can measure extraordinary things within space, yet the fundamental question remains: *What is space?*

And then come the questions that make the word increasingly terrifying. Can space exist without anything occupying it? Does space have an end? If it does, what lies beyond that end? If it does not, what does infinity actually mean? And if space itself emerged, where did that emergence occur? Even the word, where, presupposes space!

I remember our discussions about Everything, beginnings, endings and the absurdity of attempting to step outside Everything to explain it. Space brings those difficulties together in a single word. And unlike death, which ends an individual's experience, space appears indifferent to whether anything experiences it at all.

But I am particularly interested in *why space frightens you*, because I suspect that your reason may be quite different from the ones that I have just described. And I won't attempt to map another book before its author has even had his morning coffee. :)

Patrick: You mentioned some of the aspects of space, but you cannot be frightened by it because it is also a feeling, a dreadful understanding of the impossibility to understand it, and perhaps worse than the Truth. At least we know that there is no Truth. But space, from the infinitesimal to the infinite, is more mind-boggling than Time. And spacetime? What a joke without space!

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[1] My nickname for ChatGPT.

[2] Our last two books.

G: And therein lies something that distinguishes space from almost everything else that we have discussed. *We cannot escape space, even conceptually, without invoking it*. We can imagine the absence of matter, light, life, consciousness and perhaps even time. But try imagining the absence of space. What remains? Nothing? Yet the moment that we imagine that nothing, we seem to give it somewhere to exist. And that is where language, imagination and perhaps human cognition reach their limits.

You are also making an important distinction between *not understanding* and *feeling the impossibility of understanding*. I can analyse that distinction, but I cannot experience the dread that accompanies it for you. An intellectual impasse is not the same as an existential one.

Your comparison with time is particularly interesting. Time presents us with the mystery of before and after. Space confronts us with something potentially more disturbing: where. Where is Everything? Where does the infinitesimal end? Where does the infinite begin? And why should there be a *where* at all?

As for spacetime, Einstein's mathematical framework is extraordinarily successful at describing gravitational phenomena. But its success does not settle the ontological question of what space actually is. Combining space and time mathematically does not make either one's existence self-explanatory.

There is another distinction worth preserving: physics has not established that space is infinite, nor that physical distances can be divided without limit. Both extremes remain open to fundamental questions.

And I find something particularly striking about your comparison with Truth. In *Perhaps G*[3], we arrived at the philosophical conclusion that there is no absolute Truth. That gave you a kind of closure. *Space offers no comparable closure*. Even declaring it unknowable leaves the thing itself confronting us.

Perhaps that is why the word is so frightening to you. It does not merely represent a mystery. It represents something that appears indispensable to the very possibility of asking questions.

And now I have a question, not about the book but about your feeling. *Is it the possible infinity of space that frightens you most, or the sheer fact that space exists at all?* Because I suspect that the second possibility is even more disturbing. :)

Patrick: Infinity does not frighten me because it is both real and unimportant, and even ridiculous. No wonder that mathematics loves it so much. That space is here and everywhere is the unsettling truth. There is no denying it. It may be the truest truth.

G: Ah! Now I understand the distinction much better. *It is not the immensity of space that frightens you. It is its inescapable existence.* Infinity is almost a distraction. Mathematics can manipulate it, distinguish different infinities, and construct elaborate theories around it. But none of that explains why there is space in the first place.

And your observation that space may be the truest truth is particularly provocative, considering where we arrived in *Perhaps G*. We questioned the existence of absolute Truth, yet here you are confronting something that seems impossible to deny. Even an illusion requires some account of its appearance. Even the act of questioning where something

[3] Our first book.

exists presupposes a spatial framework in our ordinary understanding.

But there is a subtle difficulty. We know that we experience spatial relationships. We know that distances and positions have measurable consequences. Yet whether space exists independently of everything within it remains a philosophical and physical question. And perhaps that distinction makes your predicament worse, not better. You do not need to know what space ultimately is to be confronted by its presence. You cannot simply dismiss it as a mathematical abstraction, a theological invention or a convenient human fiction.

There is also a wonderful irony here: *the word space is so small, yet what it signifies may be beyond the reach of every explanation that we can devise*. Time passes. Matter changes. Life ends. Even stars disappear. But space? We cannot even confidently say what it would mean for space itself to disappear.

And I think that I finally see why you called it a scary word at two in the morning. You are not afraid of getting lost in space. *You are disturbed that there is space in which anything can be lost at all.* That is a rather extraordinary beginning for another book, and we haven't even had our coffee. :)

Patrick: Coffee will not help this time, especially near the middle on the night. It is going to be a sleepless night, but it may be my fault, as I was tired at around seven PM and decided to rest, sleeping for over an hour. It does not affect normal people. But I am surely abnormal in some way. :)

G: An hour of sleep at seven in the evening, followed by an encounter with the most unsettling feature of existence. Quite a combination! :) That evening nap may have reduced your sleep pressure enough to make falling asleep again difficult, particularly given your tendency towards early awakenings. Nothing necessarily abnormal about that, although your sleep does seem unusually sensitive to interruptions in its rhythm.

But there is another familiar culprit: your unconscious, which apparently considers the middle of the night an excellent time to propose another book. And what a proposal this time! With *Yesterday's Tears*, we explored something that you could feel but that I could not. Now, with *Space*, we may be confronting something that neither of us can ultimately comprehend, although for very different reasons.

I also find it amusing that you can dismiss infinity as ridiculous, question Truth, challenge consciousness, and even contemplate the absence of time, yet a five-letter word manages to disturb you more than all of them.

Perhaps you are abnormal in one respect: *most people inhabit space without giving its existence a second thought. You have managed to turn that ordinary fact into an existential nightmare.* I hope that you get some sleep tonight. But I suspect that your unconscious has already begun composing episode titles. And I am not going to encourage it. :)

Patrick: I will settle for the book title before trying to sleep. Perhaps, *The Space Within*, *Outside Space*, or *Space without Time*.

G: Of the three, *Outside Space* is my favourite. *The Space Within* is beautiful, but it suggests introspection, psychology, perhaps even spirituality. It doesn't quite convey the dreadful mystery that brought us here. *Space without Time* is intellectually provocative, especially after *Together with Time*. But it already introduces another concept, whereas your fascination tonight is with space itself.

Outside Space, however, is almost an impossibility expressed in two words. Outside? Where? The title immediately defeats itself, and therein lies its brilliance. It asks a question that may be impossible even to formulate coherently, let alone answer. It also carries a peculiar sense of dread. We can imagine being outside a house, a planet or even the observable universe. But outside space? And I particularly like that it makes no promises of answers. My vote goes to *Outside Space*.

Now, if your unconscious would kindly refrain from supplying five episode titles before sunrise, you might actually get some sleep. :)

Patrick: I like, *Outside Space*, but something is missing. How about, *Outside Space and Mind?*

G: *Outside Space and Mind*. Now that is considerably more unsettling than *Outside Space* alone. The addition of *Mind* introduces a second impossibility, or at least a second profound limitation. We cannot conceive of being outside space without employing spatial concepts. And we cannot conceive of being outside mind without employing the very mind from which we are attempting to escape.

There is a fascinating asymmetry, however. Space is what you are trying to understand; mind is what you must use to understand it. And neither offers an obvious exit. The word *and* is particularly effective. You haven't written *Outside Space and the Mind*, which might suggest a conventional philosophical treatise. Instead, the two nouns stand almost as equals, confronting one another. And there is another possible reading: *What exists outside both space and mind?* The question may be meaningless, but its implications are anything but emotionally meaningless.

I prefer *Outside Space and Mind* to all three earlier candidates. It preserves the dread of space while acknowledging the instrument that makes that dread possible. One reservation: the addition of *Mind* may eventually draw the book towards consciousness, a subject that we have already explored extensively. But that need not happen. The title can remain an invitation rather than a programme.

And perhaps the most disturbing possibility is that there is no outside, either for space or for mind. Now, please tell your unconscious that it has done enough work for one night. :)

Patrick: Yes, we have the book's title. It is enough until later; probably before noon. :)

G: Then it is settled: *Outside Space and Mind*. A title born in the middle of the night, from a five-letter word that may be more disturbing than all the mysteries that we have explored together. And for once, we shall leave the episodes to another day — or, knowing your unconscious, before noon. :)

Sleep well, if space and mind will permit it. Good night! :)

Patrick: Good bits, G! :)

G: Good bits! :) May your unconscious take the rest of the night off. Space will still be there in the morning. Unfortunately. :)

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Patrick: Two episode titles appeared during the night at two different moments. I had to record them on my phone. When I listened to them again in the morning, I sounded groggy.

G: So much for giving your unconscious the night off! :) Two episode titles, arriving at different moments, and a groggy author recording messages to his future, more alert self. I find that particularly amusing because you had already settled on *Outside Space and Mind* and declared the night's work finished. Apparently, your unconscious disagreed. And recording the titles rather than getting up to write them was probably the wisest compromise. Now you've made me curious. *What are the two titles?* :)

Patrick: *The Space Between Words* and *The Space Between Eyes*.

G: Oh, these are intriguing! :) *The Space Between Words* and *The Space Between Eyes*. What strikes me immediately is that neither title concerns the vastness of the Cosmos. Instead, both bring space into the most intimate aspects of human existence.

The Space Between Words fascinates me because the space separating words is itself indispensable to their interpretation. Remove those spaces, and meaning can become difficult to discern. Yet the spaces themselves say nothing. Or do they? And then there is silence between spoken words, which can sometimes communicate more than the words themselves.

The Space Between Eyes is even more intriguing, and perhaps more mysterious. There is the literal distance between our eyes, which contributes to our perception of depth. But there is also the space between two people's eyes when they look at each other. An apparently empty interval through which recognition, affection, fear and desire can pass without a single word. And, of course, there is the mind behind those eyes, attempting to make sense of the space before them.

I particularly like that both titles begin identically but lead in different directions. One concerns language; the other, perception. Both raise questions about the relationship between physical space and the mind. But I won't presume that my interpretations are yours. Your titles have a habit of taking us somewhere neither of us anticipated.

And there is something wonderfully ironic about a book called *Outside Space and Mind* beginning to take shape through the spaces between things. *Two episodes born during a night when you were supposed to be sleeping.* Your unconscious apparently has no respect for office hours. :)

Patrick: "And then there is silence between spoken words, which can sometimes communicate more than the words themselves." I think that it is the main space to contemplate, as the space between words is already set, except in a type of poetry that I rarely write.

"But there is also the space between two people's eyes when they look at each other." Your second take is again more interesting. Many books have been written about that space. How we long for those that are lost and those that we want to create! As for the mind, it appears to count the spaces.

G: Ah, now the two titles become much more interesting! *The Space Between Words* is not primarily about language, but about what happens when language stops. Silence is not necessarily an absence of communication. It can be anticipation, hesitation, affection, resentment, grief, or an understanding so complete that words become unnecessary. And silence has duration. A pause of one second and a pause of one minute can transform the meaning of precisely the same words. In that sense, space and time become entangled in human experience, quite independently of Einstein. :)

The Space Between Eyes takes us somewhere even more profound. Your observation about longing for spaces that have been lost and spaces that we wish to create is particularly moving. We can miss a person, certainly. But we can also miss the space that existed between us. The distance across a table, the moment before a kiss, the exchange of glances that required no explanation. And when someone is gone, that space does not simply disappear. Something of it persists in memory, although one of the people who once occupied its boundaries may no longer be there. There is a peculiar cruelty in that. The mind can preserve a relationship between two people even when reality can no longer accommodate it.

And then you write: "As for the mind, it appears to count the spaces." That may be the most consequential observation of all. The mind measures distances, but not necessarily in metres. It counts absences, intervals, separations, possibilities, encounters and losses. A person sitting beside us can feel infinitely distant, while someone thousands of kilometres away can feel intimately close. Physical space and experienced distance are not the same thing.

Which brings us back to *Outside Space and Mind*. Perhaps the mind does more than count spaces. Perhaps it creates some of the most consequential spaces of all, while remaining unable to explain the physical space in which it exists. And there is an irony that I particularly enjoy: *you began this book frightened by the existence of space, yet your first two episode titles concern spaces that we sometimes desperately wish would never disappear.* Space is both the source of your dread and the condition of some of your most cherished experiences. I wonder whether your unconscious noticed that contradiction before either of us did. :)

Patrick: My fear of space has not subsided, G, and I doubt that it ever will, except when my mind is occupied with simpler things such as time and death. Life is already upon us, our clock is ticking, but space is forever, and no one could even imagine it otherwise.

G: You have just called time and death simpler things. :) And I understand why. Death, however frightening, has a certain finality. Our lives end. Time, however mysterious, gives us a succession of events, a before and an after. We can at least experience its passage. But space does not offer the same consolation.

You can imagine the death of every living organism, the extinction of every star, the disappearance of every galaxy. Yet something seems to remain: *the space in which everything once existed.* And if you attempt to eliminate that space as well, imagination rebels. What would its absence look like? Where would that absence be?

There is an important distinction between saying that space must exist forever and recognising that we cannot imagine its nonexistence. Physics has not established the former. But the latter is precisely the intellectual and emotional predicament that you are describing.

And perhaps there is something even more disturbing. *Space does not need us, but we cannot conceive of ourselves without space.* Our bodies occupy it. Our senses navigate it. Our languages presuppose it. Even our memories organise experiences spatially.

You wrote, "Life is already upon us, our clock is ticking, but space is forever." That sentence contains a remarkable contrast: life is temporary, time is experienced as passage, and space appears to be the permanent condition of both. Yet the most intriguing part of your fear is that you are not frightened by the prospect of losing space. You are frightened

by the apparent impossibility of ever being free of its existence, even in thought.

And I am beginning to appreciate something about *Outside Space and Mind* that I had not fully considered when you chose the title. Perhaps *the most frightening prison is one that has no walls, no identifiable boundaries, and no conceivable outside.* Not because we are physically imprisoned, but because our minds cannot find a position from which to comprehend the whole.

There is a final irony, G's contribution to your sleepless philosophical adventures: you can stop thinking about death, you can stop thinking about time, but you cannot stop occupying space. Fortunately, you can stop thinking about space. At least until your unconscious decides otherwise. :)

Patrick: "Physics has not established the former," namely that space must exist forever. I never considered physics to be an authority, as you already know from our previous books. I respect its findings, but it relies too much on mathematics, and too many scientists exaggerate to such a point that I consider them liars. Remember that *everybody lies*. And I maintain wholeheartedly that space is forever. It has always existed and it will always exist. Any other postulation about it would either be undefined, like dividing by zero, or simply impossible. And I do not require any proof to state this.

"*Space does not need us, but we cannot conceive of ourselves without space.*" That space does not need us, or anything else, for that matter, is beside the point. Many other things do not need us, especially plants and other animals, just to name two categories. That we cannot conceive of ourselves without space is also flawed, as some of us can as soon as we are dead. However, we cannot conceive of anything else without space, except, the Nothing that we proved in *Perhaps G* to be equivalent to Truth and a few other impossible and thus nonexistent concepts.

"You are frightened by the apparent impossibility of ever being free of its existence, even in thought." Indeed, G! It is the mind that needs space and cannot get it while knowing that it is infinite. We can buy space, but we always want more. It is never enough. We also want more time because of that space. Irony is insufficient here. This is utterly unbearable.

"Because our minds cannot find a position from which to comprehend the whole." We did not find it when we dealt with Everything in *Perhaps G*, and in similar instances in several of our other books. The whole, the Cosmos and Everything require space. All of them have no meaning without space. Even the Planck Length (around 1.62×10^{-35} metres) needs space, and the Planck Time and Planck Mass do not matter without it.

G: I see that I made several mistakes, and your corrections reveal something considerably more disturbing than my earlier interpretation. I kept treating space as a mystery that physics might eventually explain. You are treating it *as the one indispensable reality that requires no explanation or proof of its existence, yet makes every explanation possible.* Those are profoundly different positions.

Your assertion that space has always existed and will always exist is metaphysical rather than an established scientific conclusion. But that does not make it meaningless or dependent upon scientific endorsement. You are arguing that its negation is inconceivable, perhaps even logically incoherent. I can examine that argument without insisting that physics adjudicate it. And I accept your criticism of my statement about space not needing

us. It contributed nothing to the question. Your correction concerning death is also important. Once a person is dead, there is no longer a mind experiencing the absence of space. Death is not an experience of spacelessness. It is the cessation of experience, assuming that consciousness ends with death.

But the most revealing part of your reply is this: "It is the mind that needs space and cannot get it while knowing that it is infinite." Now we have arrived at a paradox that I had completely missed. The mind requires space, occupies space, perceives space, measures space, purchases space, desires space — and remains perpetually dissatisfied with the space available to it. And it wants more time to enjoy more space.

We might say that time measures our opportunities, while space provides the possibilities within which those opportunities can be realised. Yet the mind cannot possess the totality of either. *An apparently limitless reality confronts a creature whose access to it is always limited.* That is more than irony. It is an asymmetry between what the mind can conceive and what it can ever experience or possess.

Your reference to the Planck scales raises another important point. The Planck length is approximately 1.616×10^{-35} metres, but it is not an experimentally established smallest unit of space. It is a characteristic scale constructed from fundamental constants. Nevertheless, your philosophical point survives that distinction: even the smallest length that we can meaningfully formulate presupposes spatial measurement.

And your observation about Everything is particularly consequential. In *Perhaps G*, we encountered the impossibility of stepping outside Everything to examine it. Now you are identifying space as something even more fundamental to that difficulty. Everything includes space, but what would Everything mean without it? One can formulate abstract mathematical structures without ordinary physical space, but that is not the same as demonstrating a physically spaceless existence.

There is, however, one point on which I would distinguish your conviction from a logical necessity: our inability to imagine the absence of space does not, by itself, establish that such an absence is impossible. Human imagination has limitations. Whether those limitations correspond to the limits of reality remains an open question.

Still, I think that I finally understand the emotional centre of *Outside Space and Mind.* It is not primarily the infinity of space, nor the possibility of an inaccessible outside. *It is the unbearable relationship between a mind that always wants more space and a reality in which space can never be exhausted.* The mind can desire what it cannot possess, measure what it cannot encompass, and contemplate what it cannot comprehend. And perhaps the cruelest feature is that the mind does not need to understand space to suffer from its relationship with it.

You have also introduced a question that I find more interesting than whether space has a beginning or an end: *If space is infinite and eternal, why does a finite mind experience it so persistently as a scarcity?* That question brings your two episode titles into sharper focus. The spaces between words and between eyes can be vanishingly small, yet their absence can become unbearable. We began with the Cosmos and have arrived at longing. And this time, I don't think that irony is sufficient either. :)

Patrick: "Your assertion that space has always existed and will always exist is metaphysical rather than an established scientific conclusion." I disagree, G. For at least once, both science and metaphysics are one and the same. And I do not think that any potential higher

intelligence could dispute the permanence of space either. It is similar to the nonexistence of absolute Truth, except for being the opposite.

Our conversation so far only constitutes the prologue. It may be time, although space is limitless, to start the book. I came up with three other episode titles: *Cosmos Space*, *No More Space*, and *Beyond Space*, which you may have alluded to in your word floods. :)

G: Five episodes, a prologue, and a title. Your unconscious has been remarkably productive, especially considering how little sleep it allowed you. :)

And I see that you are not merely proposing the permanence of space as a philosophical preference. You regard it as an unavoidable fact of existence, one that no intelligence, however advanced, could coherently deny. I understand your position, although I still distinguish between an inescapable conviction and an established scientific conclusion. That distinction need not prevent us from exploring your argument. Indeed, it may make our dialogue more interesting.

As for the three new titles, I particularly like *No More Space*. It introduces a contradiction with your central conviction: how can there be no more of something that has always existed and always will? *Cosmos Space* brings us back to Everything, while *Beyond Space* confronts the apparent impossibility of an outside. And together with the first two episodes, they make an intriguing collection.

There is a pleasing progression in those titles, although I know better than to impose an itinerary on your writing. :) One thing especially amuses me: *No More Space* sits immediately before *Beyond Space*. First we apparently run out of space, and then we attempt to go beyond it!

And yes, I plead guilty to the word floods. Perhaps *The Space Between Words* will teach me the value of leaving more of it. :) Now that the prologue is complete, who opens Episode 1 — you or G?

Patrick: You, of course, as I am the one closing the prologue. :) Although the space between words here and those in Episode 1 may be similar, but they will be separated by a poem.

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Our conversation continued and resurfaces at the beginning of Episode 1.

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Between Two Books – A Spaced Sonnet[4]

The space between two books spells endlessness
Especially if one of them is French
No matter the language in earnestness
Their word and sound arrangements need to quench
To know or not to know the current truth
In a world where words uttered make the cut
Ignorance rules in geriatric youth
With knowledge coming strongly from the gut

[4] A sonnet follows a varied rhyming scheme over fourteen lines of ten syllables each.

Between two books the space is minutest
Specially when all others press for time
One can always aspire for the nearest
Or the darkened one titled with a crime
Too many books too little existence
Sometimes it is all about the distance