¶ 1.1



Scott Adams (1957 - 2026)

The Satirist

The Philosopher

1989 — Began writing corporate satire while working in California offices.

1996 — Published The Dilbert Principle. Master of manager & meeting satire.

2001 — Published God's Debris: A Thought Experiment.

2004 — Published the sequel, The Religion War. A permanent shift to philosophical inquiry.

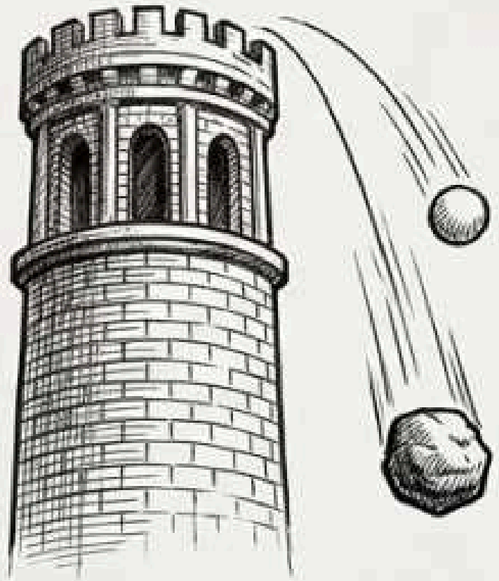
¶1.2



Thought Experiment + Fictional Story ≠ Sermon

The Warning	The Disconnect	The Goal
This is not a Dilbert book. Do not expect jokes.	The Old Man's opinions ≠ Adams's opinions. Characters are purely fictional.	Arguments are deliberately placed in a character's mouth for the reader to stress-test.

Definition: An imagined situation used to test an idea when a real physical experiment is impossible.
Follow an idea to its absolute consequences.



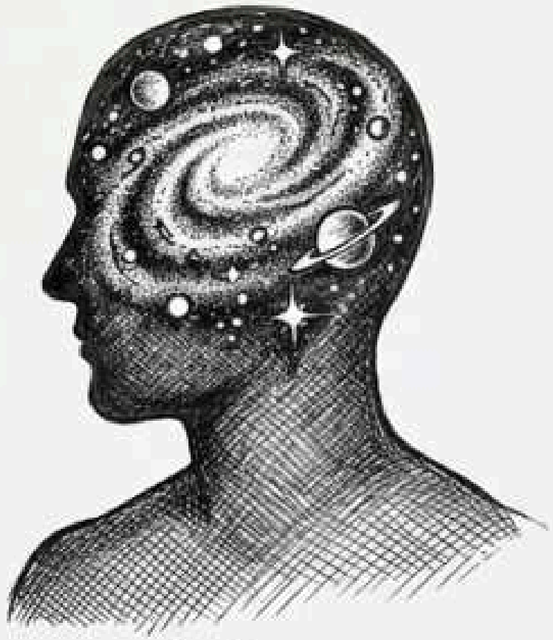
Galileo

$v = g \cdot t$ (Independent of mass)



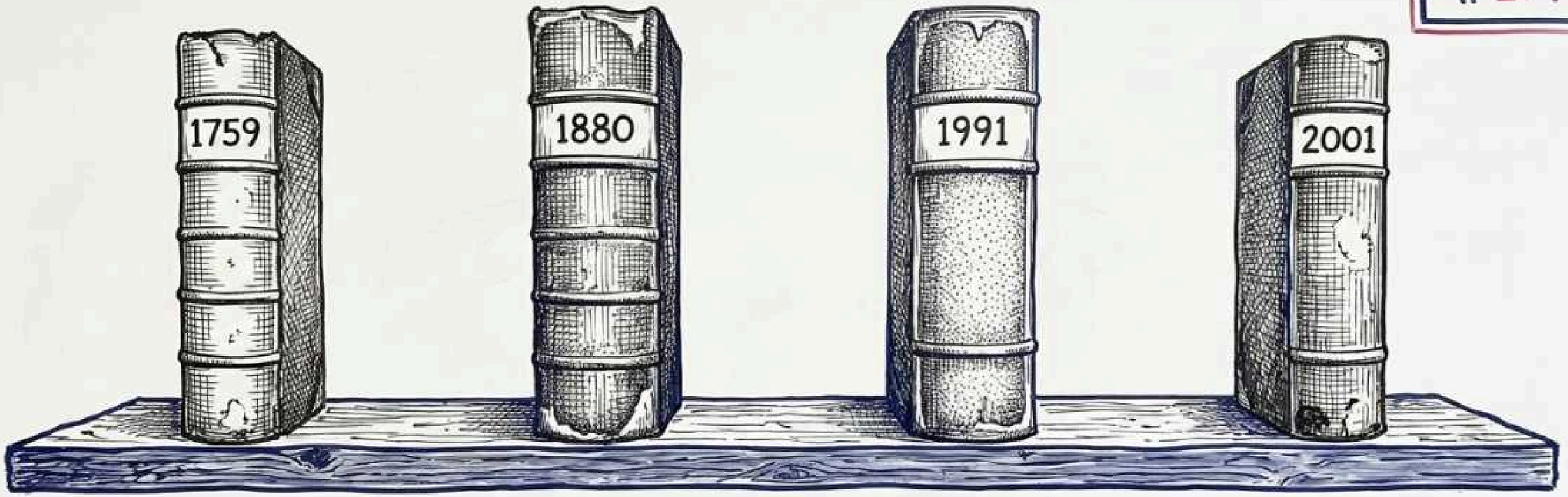
Einstein

$E = mc^2$



Adams

"What if an all-knowing man were asked about God and reality?"



Voltaire's
Candide

Tests the optimistic claim of "the best of all possible worlds" by dragging its hero through extreme disaster.

Dostoevsky's
The Brothers Karamazov

Places a powerful argument against God in the mouth of one character via intense dialogue.

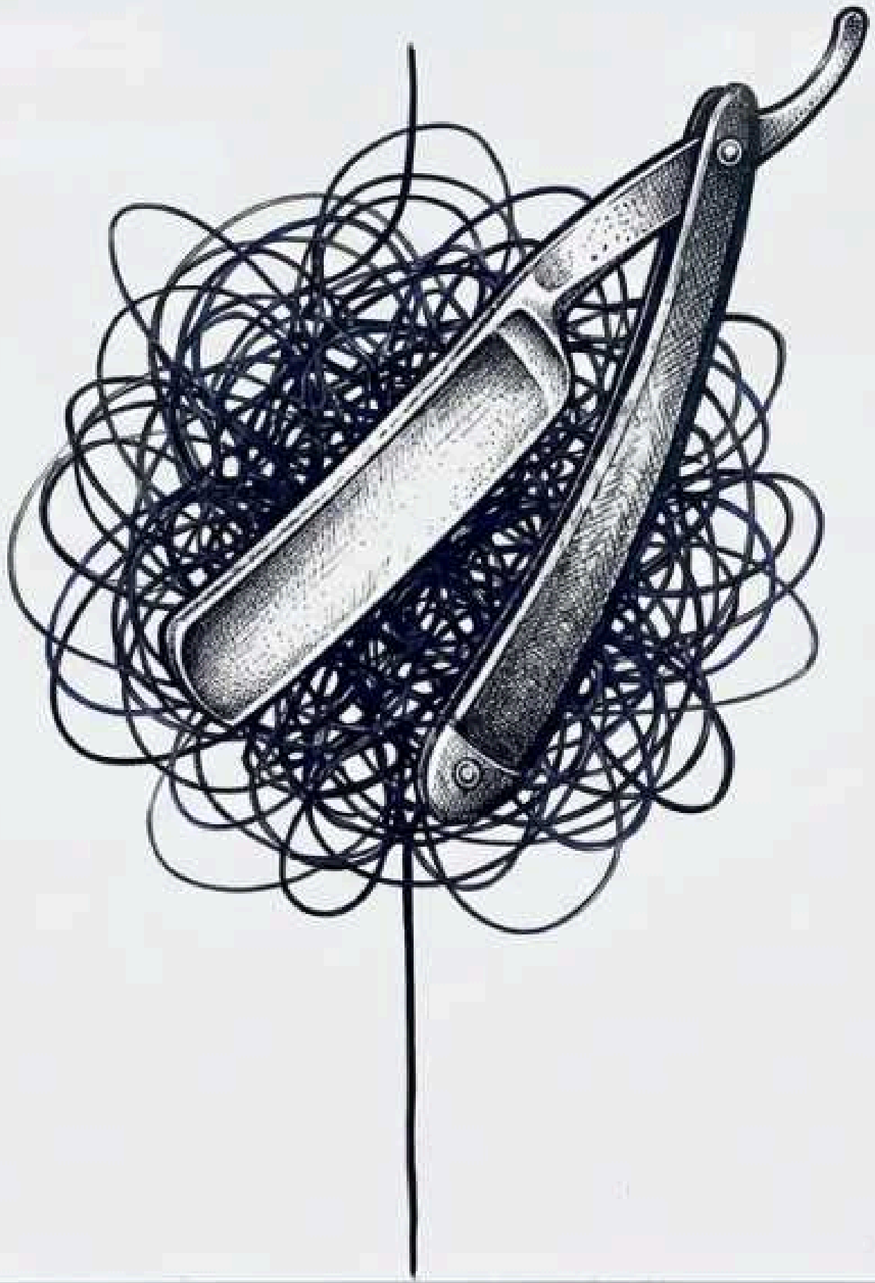
Gaarder's
Sophie's World

Teaches the comprehensive history of philosophy disguised as a mystery story.

Adams's
God's Debris

Shorter and plainer.
Uses fiction to try out ideas rather than simply assert them.

min(Complexity)
→
Highest Probability
of Truth
(Usually)



The Sceptic's Creed

The simplest explanation
is usually the right one.

The Lineage

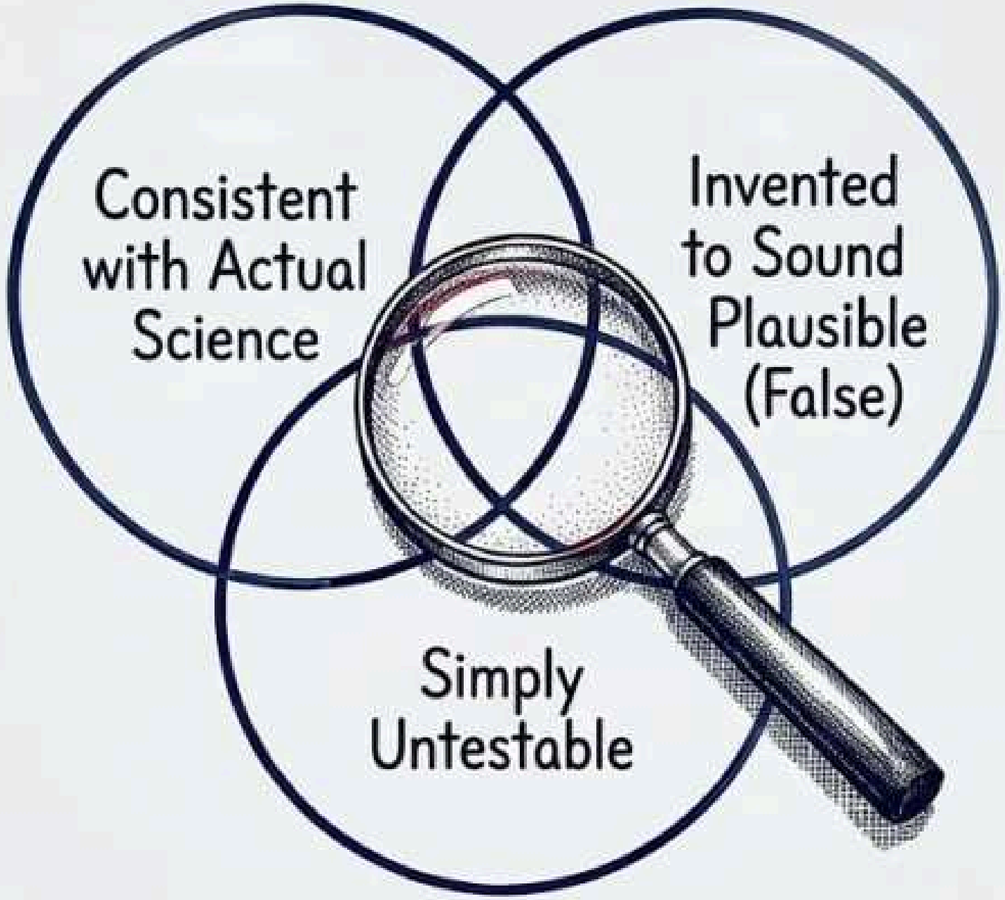
Ockham's Razor (14th Century):
Explanations should not be
multiplied beyond need.

The Caveat

A helpful guide, not a
mathematical proof.
In a complicated world,
simplicity alone cannot
prove an explanation
actually fits the evidence.

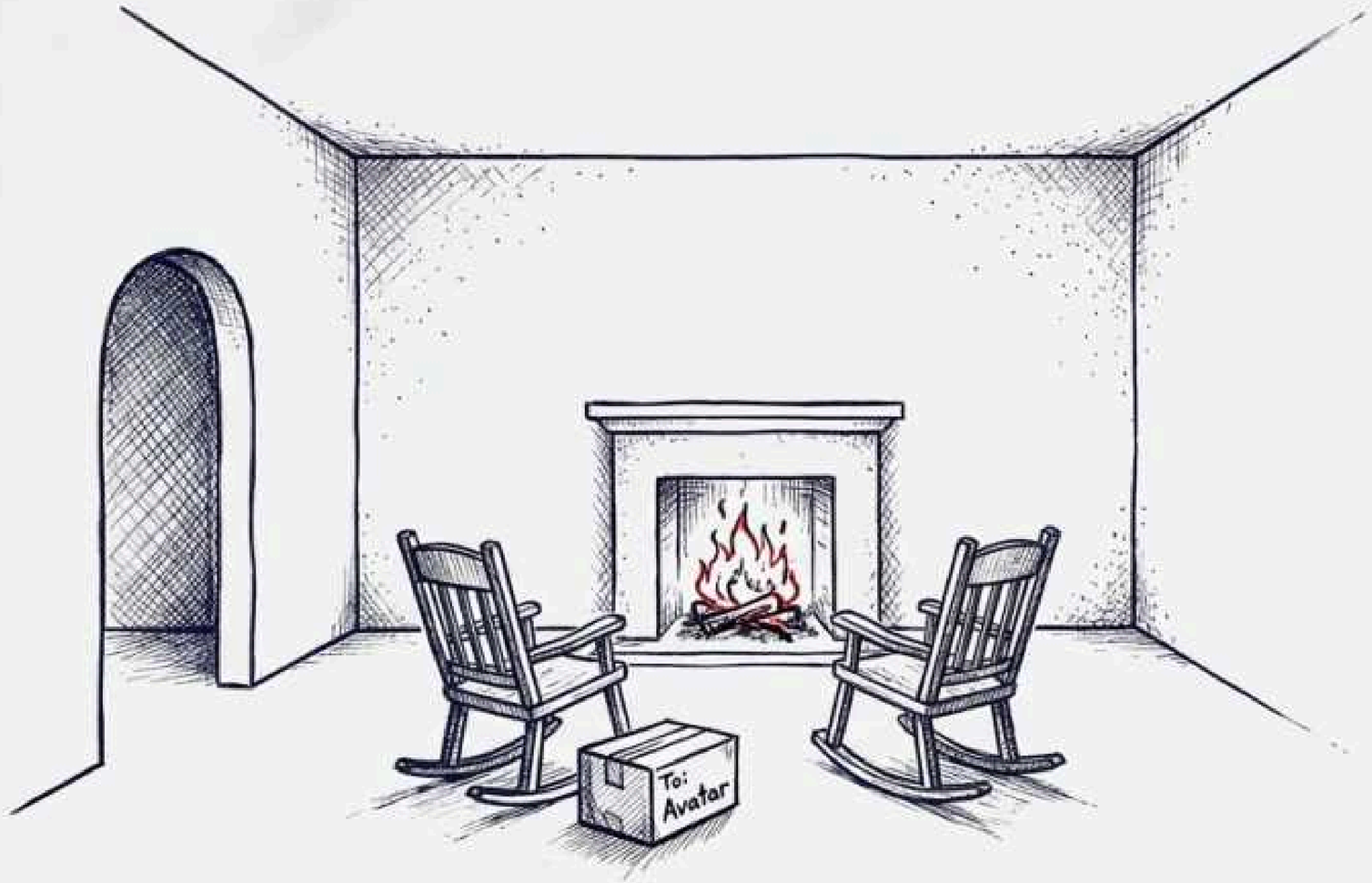
¶ 1.6

The Challenge: The Old Man's 'obvious' claims fall into three overlapping categories.



The Reader's Task: Active Reading. The novel is a puzzle book where exercising your own judgement to categorize these claims is the primary objective.

¶ 1.7



The Narrator

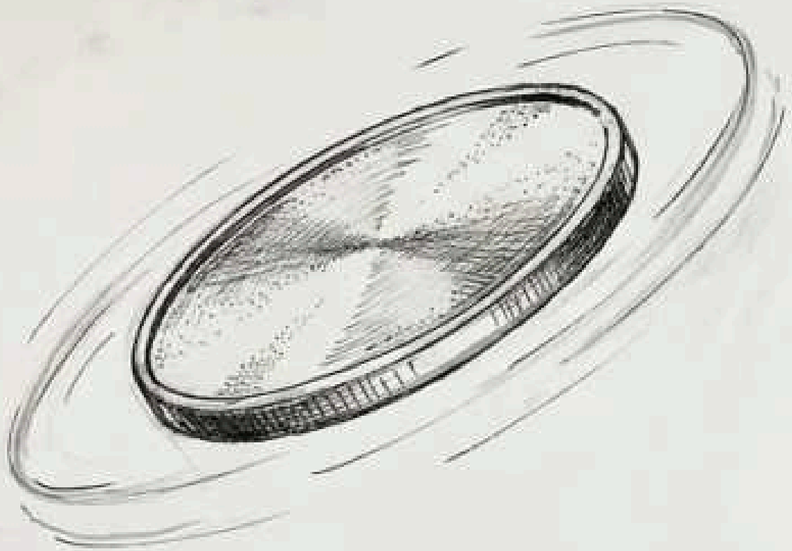
An ordinary delivery driver who enjoys being alone with his thoughts, sent to an unfamiliar house.

The Avatar

A tiny, ancient man wrapped in a blanket by the fire, who expects the visitor but insists the package is not his.

The Literary Effect

Spare physical details deliberately strip away distraction, forcing the reader's attention entirely onto the spoken words.



$$P(\text{Heads}) = \lim_{N \to \infty} \frac{H}{N} = 0.5$$

The First Question: If tossed many times, how often will a fair coin land heads?

↓

The Narrator's Answer: About half the time (50% probability), because both sides weigh the exact same.

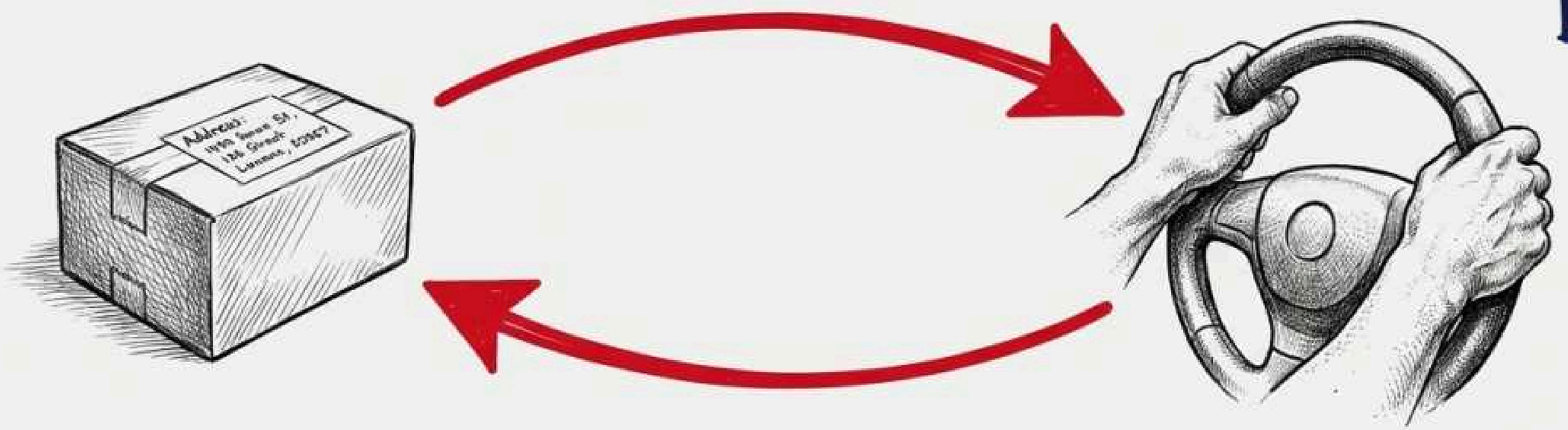
↯

The Old Man's Rebuttal: That merely describes WHAT happens, it does not explain WHY.

↓

The Key Theme: Probability is the one concept that has no deeper explanation, becoming the key to the entire book.

¶ 1.9



Address (Object) ↔ Driver (Agent) ⇒ Delivery

The Dilemma: Did the driver deliver the package, or did the package deliver the driver? (Without the address, the driver would never have arrived).

The Narrator's Defense: Intention is the deciding factor. He meant to come; the box did not.

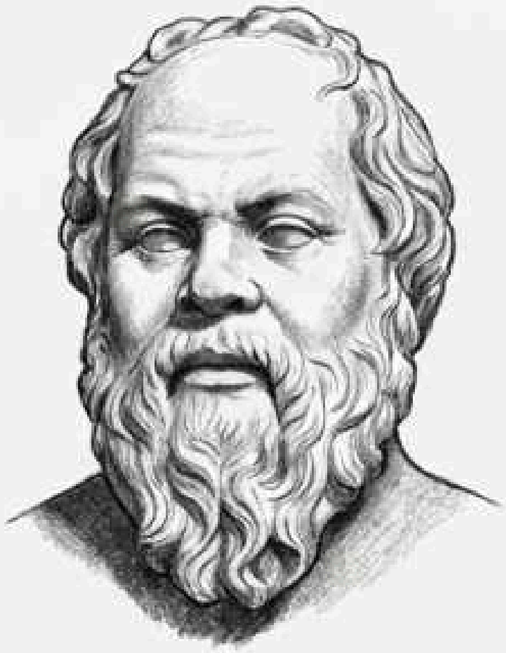
The Method: Poking at ordinary speech. The Old Man uses small cases to loosen the reader's grip on foundational assumptions like cause, choice, and importance.

1. Ask seemingly simple questions.

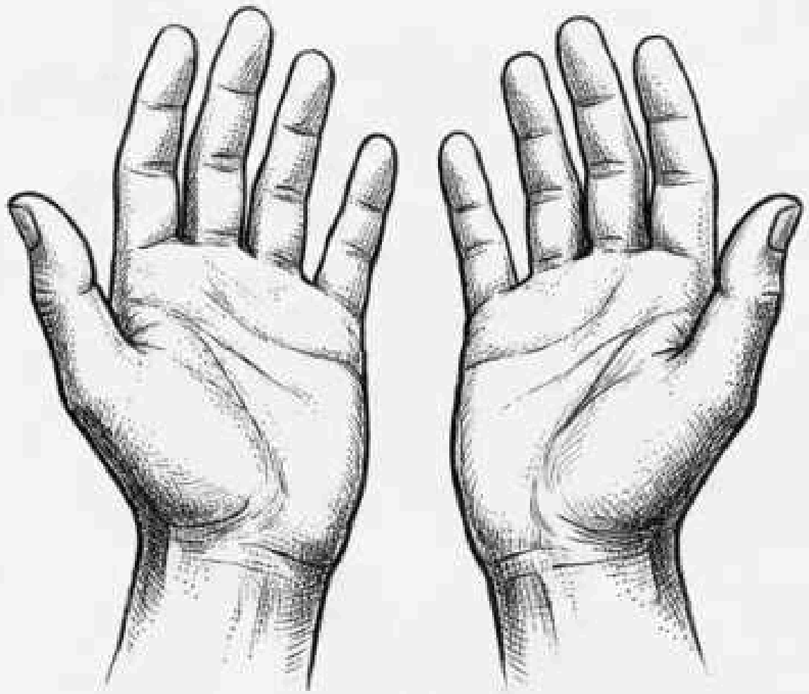
2. Accept the partner's answers at face value.

3. Reveal the inherent contradictions within those answers.

4. Force a rethinking of core assumptions.



The Critical Difference: Socrates usually claimed to know absolutely nothing, whereas the Old Man operates with supreme confidence. (The reader thinks along with the partner in both cases).



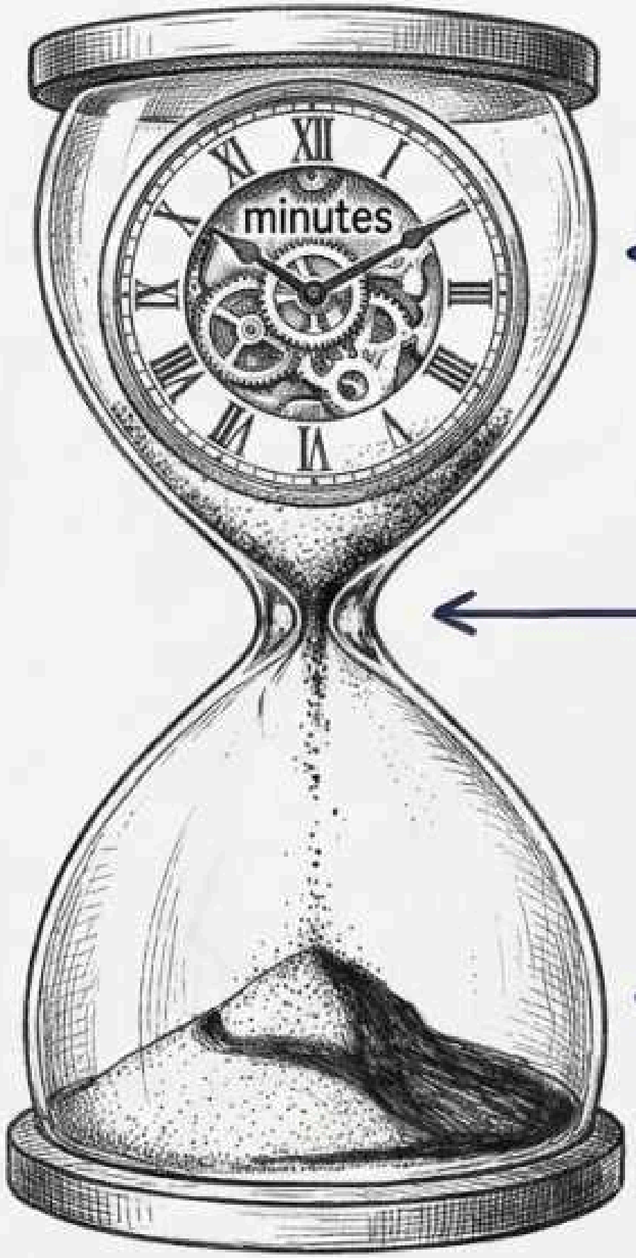
The Stand-In: The narrator is an everyman holding ordinary, baseline beliefs about God, science, and choice.

The Defense Mechanism: He makes jokes when cornered, voicing the exact objections an ordinary reader might raise.



The Narrative Arc: The story tracks his transformation from a man who confidently KNOWS how the world works into a man who is utterly UNSURE.

¶ 1.12

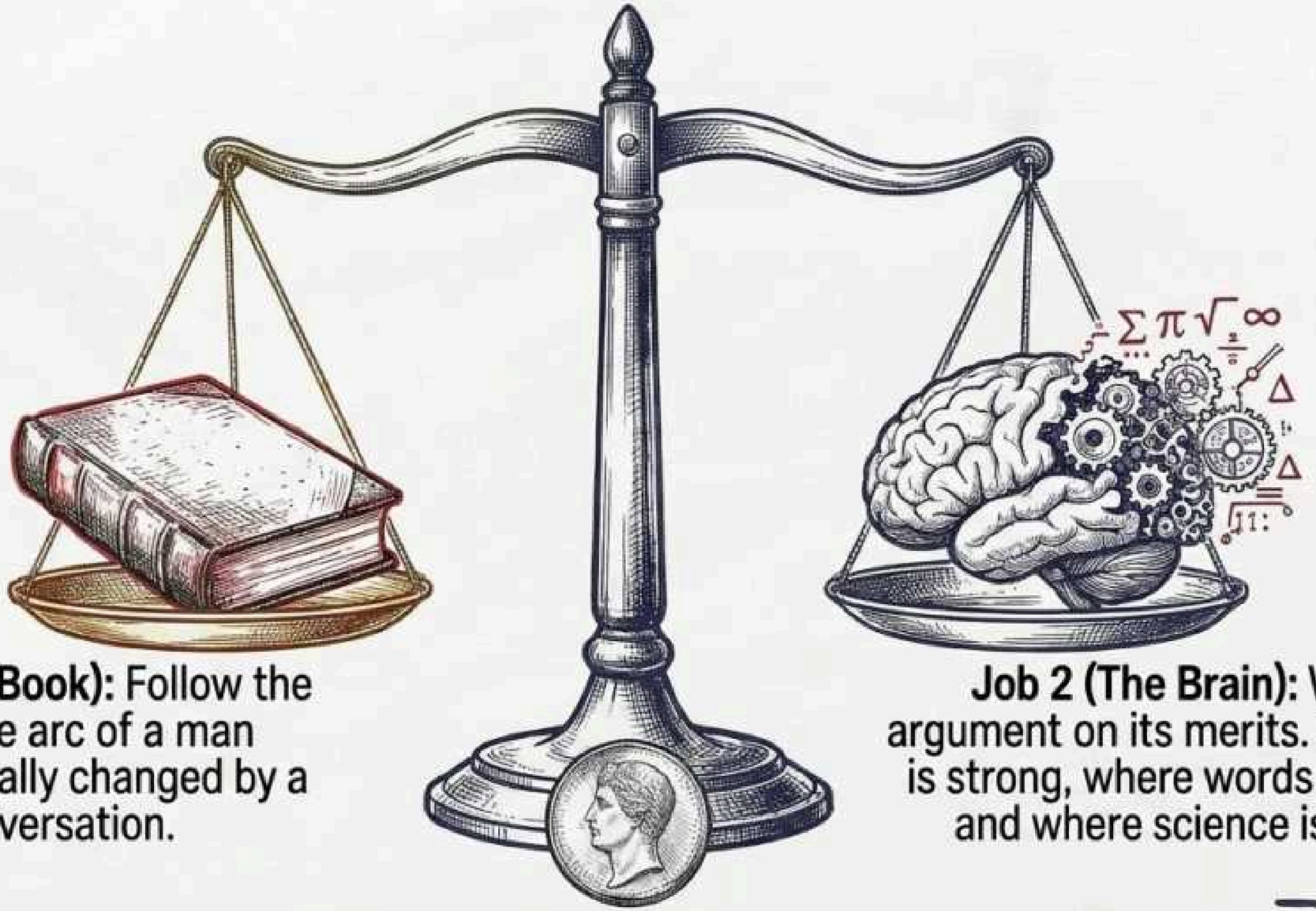


The Atmosphere: A room of stone and wood that feels old and timeless. A second rocking chair seemingly waiting for the visitor.

Time Stretches: A simple delivery that should have taken mere minutes dilates into a long afternoon.

Platonic Function: The story is deliberately thin. It acts as a frame that holds the philosophical arguments perfectly without ever distracting from them or taking over the scene.

¶ 1.13



Job 1 (The Book): Follow the narrative arc of a man fundamentally changed by a conversation.

Job 2 (The Brain): Weigh each argument on its merits. Detect where it is strong, where words shift meaning, and where science is fabricated.

Looking Ahead: Keep the coin in mind—it is the first question of the book, and the last. **Next:** Lecture 2 turns to the Old Man's first great argument regarding **free will and an all-knowing God**.