

**WHEN THE CEMENT OF THE UNIVERSE BREAKS APART. HUME, CAUSALITY, AND
*THE LEFTOVERS***

Enrico Terrone (University of Genoa)

The philosophy of David Hume involves a twofold stance toward causation. On the one hand, he casts it as one of the three basic associative principles (the other two being resemblance and contiguity in time and place) which “are the only ties of our thoughts, they are really *to us* the cement of the universe”.¹ Moreover, he insists that causality is the strongest of the three principles since it is the only one that takes us “beyond our senses”.² On the other hand, Hume argues that causal relations are nothing but regular connections which have been confirmed so far by our experience but, in principle, might be disproved by further experiences. The cement of the universe might break apart. In this paper, I will argue that this is precisely what happens in *The Leftovers*. I will do so by analyzing some exemplary causal links and lacunas that the series represents. In § 1, I will introduce the issue of causality by analyzing the episode of the vanishing bagels in the second episode of the first season. In §§ 2-5, I will track a minor character, Sam’s mother, through the handful of her appearances along the series, arguing that this character, if peripheral in the story, is crucial to understanding the philosophical discourse that *The Leftovers* develops about the causal order of the universe. Finally, in §§ 6-7, I will draw my conclusion, relying on clues from the series’ finale.

1. WHERE ARE THE BAGELS?

In the very middle of the second episode of *The Leftovers* first season, Kevin Garvey (Justin Theroux)—the hero of the series, police chief of Mapleton, New York—puts a couple of bagels into a toaster. Since the bagels are not coming out, Kevin turns the toaster upside down, but nothing comes out from it. The bagels seem to have vanished just as the 2% of the world population did three years earlier, on October 14th, 2011. At the end of the episode, however, Kevin solves the mystery of the bagels. He disassembles the toaster, discovering the two burnt bagels within the machine. They did not vanish; they just were elsewhere. The disappearance of the two bagels can be explained by finding its cause. The bagels disappeared *because* they remained stuck into the toaster. The disappearance of the 2% of the world population, on the other hand, seems to lack a causal explanation. There seems to be no statement one can put after the *because* conjunction to explain why those people were there and suddenly were not there anymore. This is what makes their disappearance unique.

According to the “descriptive metaphysics” which underlies our everyday experience, the world that we experience is primarily made of concrete objects, variously propertied, which have their place in space and can continue their existence in time independently of our fleeting perceptions of them.³ Toasters, bagels, and people are all objects in this sense. As time goes by, objects can significantly change their properties, and they can even cease to exist. However, the changes that objects undergo do not come out of the blue but are rather the effects of events which constitute their causes. In *The Leftovers*, instead, people disappeared without any cause. What is uppermost upsetting in the story told by this series is not the disappearance of 2% of the world’s population, but the fact that, in the first instance, no cause of such disappearance can be found. Causality is so essential to our understanding of the world that the evidence of an effect without a cause reveals itself to be an unbearable burden. A cause is to be found whatever it takes.

In everyday life, we can directly experience causal connections when we act, as Peter Strawson aptly points out.⁴ If I hit the pen, its position changes *because* I moved it. If I bend the pen, its existence ends *because* I broke it. In the finale of the above-mentioned episode of *The Leftovers*, human action as a paradigm of causation is emphasized when the music and the editing connect the image of Kevin who discovers the cause of the bagels’ disappearance to the image of Megan (Liv Tyler) who cuts down a tree as a sort of initiation rite after joining the Guilty Remnant sect. In both cases, causal connections are portrayed. The bagels disappeared *because* the toaster burnt them, as well as the tree is going to fall *because* Megan is cutting it. Megan’s action provides us with the paradigm case of the causal connection which the toaster’s behavior also instantiates.

When effects occur independently of our actions, their causes are more complicated to detect. Nevertheless, we tend to assume that, in those cases, there are events that can play the same causal role as our actions. From this perspective, both religion and science can be cast as cultural outcomes of the human innate tendency to look for causes. The Moon changes its place in the sky even if we do not push or pull it. What makes the Moon move? When causes are sought within nature, science arises. When, instead, causes are sought beyond nature, religion arises. Both religion and science provide us with causes of effects that cannot be explained otherwise. The difference is just that religion provides us with supernatural causes of natural effects, while science looks for causes that are meant to be as natural as their effects. In *The Leftovers*, religion and science compete to give the best causal explanation of the October 14th event, namely, the “Departure”. That is the event that split the human population in two—those who survived, the “leftovers”, and those who disappeared, the “departed” — apparently without any cause.

2. WHERE ARE YOU?

Modernity can be seen as a progressive replacement of the causal explanations offered by religion with the causal explanations offered by science.⁵ Scientists have found causes to explain even the most

catastrophic and upsetting events. We now know, for instance, that an earthquake is caused by a sudden release of energy in the Earth's rigid, outermost shell; that a tsunami is caused by the displacement of a large volume of water; that a pandemic is caused by microscopic infectious agents. We live in a world in which many horrible events happen which we cannot prevent or oppose, and yet we can comfort ourselves with the possibility of finding their causes. One might call the universe we inhabit cold and indifferent, but at least it is an ordered universe, and its order is a causal order. In this sense, causality is really—borrowing again Hume's expression,⁶ which also gives the title to an influential essay by John Mackie⁷—"the cement of the universe". Just like cement can connect bricks and unify them in one wall, causality connects events and unifies them in one universe. Just like each brick is related to any other brick in the wall through a chain of bricks linked by cement, each event is related to any other event in the universe through a chain of events linked by causation.

The cement of the universe, however, as Hume himself somehow suggested, might break apart. This is what happens in *The Leftovers* from the very beginning. The prologue of the pilot episode portrays the events occurred on October 14th, 2011, focusing on a woman (Natalie Gold) who is fumbling laundromat while trying to keep her crying baby Sam quiet, and frenetically talking on the phone. An elliptical edit then shows us the woman entering her car in a parking lot at the laundromat, after putting Sam on the backseat. He is still crying, and she is still talking on the phone. She is trying to explain to her interlocutor how to restart a machine in her house: "It's a red button... Just press it in with a pen or something". At that point, Sam suddenly stops crying. The interlocutor arguably has succeeded in pressing the button, and Sam's mother exclaims "Oh, it's perfect". Here is where Max Richter's piano suite "The Departure" begins in the soundtrack. Sam's mother turns her head and discovers that her baby is no longer in the backseat. What is the cause of Sam's departure? Since the car window is open, one might think that Sam has been kidnapped. This would be a suitable incipit for a detective story aimed to discover who is the kidnapper. Detective stories, indeed, are narratives based on causal explanations: the crime is given as an effect, and the detective should find its cause. Yet, *The Leftovers* is not a detective story, hence there is no kidnapping and no kidnapper.

Since Sam disappeared exactly when his mother's interlocutor, following her instructions, pressed the red button, one might be tempted to draw a causal connection between the pressing of the button and the disappearance of Sam. This would be a suitable incipit for a weird science fiction story about teletransportation machines. Yet *The Leftovers* neither is this sort of narrative, though the series' finale will reveal that this suggestion—as I shall show in the two last sections of the paper—might be closer to the truth than the kidnapping hypothesis.

The nature of Sam's disappearance is clarified by what happens next. While Sam's mother exits her car and starts calling her son desperately, a shopping cart full of bags runs down a slope and crashes into the back of a parked car. Then, a car running down madly in the wrong direction crashes into another car which was exiting the parking. Both the owner of the shopping cart and the driver of the car suddenly vanished just like Sam did. Sam's disappearance is part of a collective disappearance

which seems to have no cause. His mother keeps crying the son's name, while the son of the disappeared shopping-cart's owner in turn keeps crying "Daddy". These two repeated cries—the woman calling her son, the son calling his dad—stand out against the sonic background of "The Departure" suite as if they were solo voices whose desperate request of explanation ("Where's my daddy?", "Where are you, Sam?", "I don't understand!") contrasts with the sense of absolute mystery which emanates from Richter's composition.

Sam's mother is just a secondary character of *The Leftovers*. She will appear only a handful of times in the rest of the series. She does not even have a name. Nevertheless her story, in its simplicity, is paradigmatic of the main philosophical issue that the series raises, namely, the issue of causality. For sure, the suffering of this woman would not have been less had her son been kidnapped by a pedophile or by a Martian. Arguably, her suffering would have been even more heartbreaking. Yet, there is something peculiar as for what she feels in this case. Her suffering for having lost her son is accompanied by the thought of the absolute lack of cause of the son's disappearance. It is not that she ignores who kidnapped her son or why the kidnapper did so, as it may happen when a child disappears and is never found. Rather, she ignores what kind of event caused her son to disappear. Indeed, she is tempted to think that her son vanished without any cause. In this sense, the story of Sam's mother symbolizes all the other stories that *The Leftovers* tells, exemplarily showing what makes this series unique. While narratives usually exploit, strengthen, and emphasize the causal connections between events that can also be found in real life,⁸ *The Leftovers* builds its narrative around the lack of a crucial causal link.

3. WHERE WERE YOU?

The second time we see Sam's mother is towards the end of *The Leftovers*' pilot, which takes place three years after the mysterious event portrayed in the prologue. The October 14th memorial is just finished, and Kevin Garvey is drinking alone in a pub. The television is airing a program in which a woman contends that only science is entitled to seek an explanation of the October 14th event, arguing with a man who appeals to the Bible. Although the woman and the man are arguing vigorously, they implicitly agree that those events should have a cause; they are just disagreeing about the nature of the cause. For the man, the cause is God's will; for the woman, some still unknown physical event. In this discussion, the man and the woman prefigure the philosophical disagreement, which will be introduced in the next episode, between two leading characters of the series, namely, the scientifically minded fraud investigator Nora Durst (Carrie Coon), and her older brother Reverend Matt Jamison (Christopher Eccleston).

Being annoyed by the discussion in the television program, Kevin asks the barman to shut down the volume and makes a comment suggesting a stance different from both the scientific one and the religious one: "Ours is not to reason why". Kevin is not concerned with the kind of causes we should

seek. Rather, he reckons that we should give up seeking causes whatever their kind. At that point, a woman who is also drinking alone addresses him. They start conversating and she asks him “When it happened, where were you?”. He answers with a lie (“I was in my house, cleaning out a gutter”) which a flashback showing him making love with an unknown woman aptly debunks for us. Then, Kevin asks her the same question. Her answer—portrayed by a close-up shot and emphasized by the reappearance of Richter’s “The Departure” piano suite in the soundtrack—brings us back to the prologue: “I was in a parking lot... at the laundromat”.

Kevin seems to guess Sam’s mother mourning and tries to comfort her saying: “Hey... we’re still here”, and she replies: “We sure are”. The cement of the universe has not completely broken apart. The basic principles of persistence and causation are still in force, as demonstrated by the very existence of Sam’s mother and Kevin, and by their interaction. Yet, there is a point in the spatiotemporal universe where the cement broke apart, namely October 14th, 2011. Both Sam’s mother and Kevin, despite their being still here, are facing the psychological consequences of that causal break. The impact of the event on the existence of the survivors is emphasized by the sudden appearance of Dean (Michael Gaston), the mysterious dog killer who might be a figment of Kevin’s wounded mind. Kevin follows Dean exiting the pub while the image of Sam’s mother blurs in the background, and “The Departure” suite fades in the soundtrack signaling the end of this brief accidental encounter between two key characters of the series: Kevin, its hero, and Sam’s mother, the first character in its chronological order.

4. FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

In the first season of *The Leftovers*, the October 14th event is portrayed by means of flashbacks not only in the pilot’s prologue but also in two other episodes. These are the third episode, in which the Departure is shown in the context of Reverend Matt Jamison’s dream, and the ninth episode, which is a flashback all the way through. Sam’s mother appears in both these episodes.

In the third episode, “Two Boats and a Helicopter” (S1E3), Sam’s mother is portrayed from the perspective of Matt, who is reliving his experience of the October 14th event in dream. Matt reveals himself to be the man driving the car that was hit by another car whose driver disappeared. He was with his wife who has been badly injured in the accident. Matt exits the car to ask for help and sees Sam’s mother desperately calling her son in the laundromat parking. We first see the woman in a long shot from Matt’s perspective, but then a reverse shot shows her in a close-up just like that in the pilot’s prologue, crying “Sam! Sam! Sam!”, while Matt remains on the background. Even in the context of Matt’s dream, Sam’s mother gains centrality as if her story were the epicenter of the October 14th catastrophe.

The ninth episode, “The Garveys at Their Best” (S1E9), replicates the temporal structure of the series’ pilot through a flashback. This episode, just like the pilot, has a first part set on October 13th,

and a second part on October 14th. However, the events portrayed in “The Garveys at Their Best” are set three years earlier, when the Departure which we have glimpsed in the pilot’s prologue and in Matt’s dream occurred. The last part of this episode intertwines the vicissitudes of Kevin with those of his wife Laurie (Amy Brenneman), his daughter Jill (Margaret Qualley), his stepson Tom (Chris Zylka), and his future partner Nora. They all survive the catastrophe, witnessing the disappearance of somebody else. Nora witnesses the disappearance of her husband, son and daughter who were having breakfast with her. Jill and Tom witness the disappearance of a schoolmate who was playing with them. Kevin witnesses the disappearance of the unknown woman with whom he was having sex in a motel room, while Laurie sees her unborn child disappearing from the ultrasound screen. All these scenes are connected by Richter’s music, which operates in two phases. First, the obsessive iteration of string chords creates an atmosphere of inquietude and imminent danger. Then, just after a short silence corresponding to the instant of the disappearance, the piano suite “The Departure” brings us back to the sense of absolute mystery of the pilot’s prologue. Just as in the latter, the event of disappearance remains off-screen. We do not directly see people disappearing, but only become aware of their disappearance through the reactions of the survivors. It is as if the Departure challenged the possibility of both causal explanation and visual representation.

In “The Garveys at Their Best”, Sam’s mother shows up shortly before the catastrophe. She is driving to the laundromat, and at a traffic light her car draws up alongside the car of Laurie, who is driving to the doctor office for the ultrasound. Sam’s mother is talking on the phone while her baby is crying, just as in the pilot’s prologue. Laurie looks at her through the car window, and Sam’s mother looks at her in turn disconsolately, spreading his arms as if to invoke God’s help. This brief, accidental encounter introduces the issue of wish as an imaginary causal factor. At least at an unconscious level, Sam’s mother might wish the disappearance of his son who is exasperating her with his continuous crying. Likewise, Laurie might wish the disappearance of the child she carries in her womb because of the crisis of her marriage with Kevin, who in turn might wish the disappearance of the unknown woman to avoid being committed in an affair which might further complicate his marriage with Laurie.

Here is how a guilt complex may arise. The disappearance of Sam might lead his mother to feel guilty for having somehow wished this, as if her wish caused Sam to disappear. Likewise, the disappearance of the unborn child might lead Laurie to feel guilty for having wished this, and even Kevin might feel guilty for the disappearance of his unknown lover. Such a guilt complex is especially evident in the case of Nora, who is clearly annoyed by the behavior of her husband and sons just before they disappear, as if they vanished *because* she wished this. A similar pattern of explanation can be applied to the elderly parents of Charles Patterson, a man with Down Syndrome who also departed on October 14th: they might have unconsciously wished this, being exhausted from taking care of him.

Putting all these clues together, the spectator of *The Leftovers* might be tempted to interpret the disappearance as a sort of divine punishment which makes come true the most unspeakable wishes that the series' characters might have. Although this pattern of explanation seems to be disproved by other cases (such as Jill and Tom's schoolmate whose disappearance is unrelated to their feelings towards him),⁹ it helps us to understand the guilt complex that, in the development of the story, will somehow affect characters such as Sam's mother and Nora—and especially Laurie, who will end up joining the Guilty Remnant sect. What this guilt complex shows is not that the disappearance of the sons is the effect of the mothers' wishes, but rather that human intentional action is our paradigm of causation, so as that we are naturally, if irrationally, prone to cast our mental states as causes of events, especially those events such as the Departure that lack other observable causes.

5. AFTER THE FACT

The last two episodes featuring Sam's mother portray her long after the departure of her son. In "The Prodigal Son Returns" (S1E10), the last episode of Season One, Kevin meets again Sam's mother after their encounter at the pub. This time the context is the uprising of Mapleton citizens against the Guilty Remnant's members, who have put life-size replicas of the departed in the houses of their families. Sam's mother is holding a gun and chasing two sect members who cross the street just when Kevin's car is coming. Kevin brakes sharply and gets off the car, shouting "Drop the gun!" to Sam's mother who is pointing the gun at him. They look into each other's eyes but neither of them seems to be aware that they met before at the pub. They look at each other as if they were complete strangers. He asks her "What's your name?" but she does not answer. Rather, she shouts "fuck you" to him and runs away, going back to chasing the Guilty Remnant's members. This is her last appearance in the story timeline. Just like in the pilot and in "The Garveys at Their Best", her appearance preludes to the climax of the episode, underlined as usual by Richter's "The Departure" piano suite. Her desperation seems to be the key to understanding everyone's desperation in face of a catastrophe without a cause.

While "The Prodigal Son Returns" portrays the last appearance of Sam's mother in the temporal order of the fictional events, her last appearance in the serial order of the narrative that tells those events occurs in "Certified", the sixth episode of Season Three. This episode exhibits interesting analogies with both the series pilot and "The Garveys at Their Best". These three episodes have the same temporal structure, which involves a first part set on October 13th and a second part on October 14th. Still, the events of "The Garveys at Their Best" coincide with the Departure, whilst the events of the pilot occur three years after it, and those of "Certified" seven years after it.

Just like the pilot, "Certified" has a prologue featuring Sam's mother as the protagonist. Yet the pilot's prologue, as discussed above, portrays her at the very moment at which Sam vanishes. "Certified"'s prologue, instead, shows her two years after the Departure, when she is recounting the disappearance of her son to her psychotherapist, whom we discover to be Laurie, the woman she

accidentally met at the traffic light the day of the Departure. This establishes a perfect symmetry between Laurie and Kevin as for their relationship to Sam's mother. Both Kevin and Laurie meet Sam's mother twice, without recognizing her and being recognized by her the second time.

"Certified"'s prologue begins with a long monologue of Sam's mother which supplements the story we already know of the departure of her son with a before and an after. The camera portrays her with a slow backward movement as if it were mimicking in space the temporal flow of her narrative. She tells her four miscarriages and then, five years later, Sam's birth as a sort of miracle: "And then it just... happened. I was pregnant. And he was... perfect. His name is Sam". Then comes the departure: "Six months later, I walk into the laundromat, and I strap him into his car seat. And he was crying, so I didn't kiss him". The moment of Sam's departure in his mother's narrative is emphasized by the first editing cut of the scene, which leads to a reverse shot of Laurie listening to her patient. Sam's mother continues her speech, revealing us what happened after the scene we saw in the pilot's prologue: "And then he was gone. So, I sit in the parking lot and wait all day, because he could come back, right?". Laurie remains silent while Sam's mother keeps asking questions to her and—in the alternation of shots and reverse shots—the camera get closer and closer to her impassive face. Finally, Laurie just says "I don't know".

Once again, Sam's story seems to be the epicenter of the catastrophe: the point at which the search for causes is the most urgent and desperate but irremediably ends up in failure. After Sam's mother leaves, Laurie takes a bunch of pills to kill herself but then changes her mind, joining the Guilty Remnant instead. The song "1-800 Suicide" by Gravediggaz in the title sequence further stresses the theme of the renunciation of life as a response to the absolute meaninglessness of a universe whose causal cement broke apart. This theme will be fully developed in the finale of the episode, which is set five years later in Australia and portrays Laurie in the face of the decision to abandon her life in the Ocean.

6. A TALE OF TWO UNIVERSES

Just like "Certified" leads Laurie's story to fulfillment, the next episode, "The Most Powerful Man in the World" (S3E7), concludes Kevin's narrative trajectory with a last puzzling exploration of the realm of the undead. Likewise, the first part of the series' finale, "The Book of Nora" (S3E8), concludes Nora's trajectory, portraying her entry into a teletransportation machine designed by a team of scientists with the aim of enabling people to join those vanished on October 14th, 2011. The last part of "The Book of Nora", on the other hand, shows what happens long after these events.

Nora lives in the Australian outback. Kevin comes from the United States and manages to find her. He pretends having forgotten their love story, hoping that this might favor a new beginning, but after a while the pretense breaks apart and he tells her the true story of his life after their separation. Then, Nora also tells him the story of her life after their separation, in a long monologue whose

staging echoes that of Sam's mother monologue in the prologue of "Certified", with Kevin in the listener's role that was played by Laurie in that episode. Just like the monologue of Sam's mother in "Certified" brought us back to the origin of the causal lacuna that affects *The Leftovers* all the way through, the monologue of Nora provides us with a way of filling this lacuna.

According to Nora, the teletransportation machine succeeded, thereby revealing that the departed, just like the bagels in the toaster, were not vanished: they just were elsewhere. Their disappearance, from this perspective, finally seems to have a cause: on October 14th, 2011, the universe split in two, generating a Universe-1 inhabited by the leftovers and a Universe-2 inhabited by the departed. These two universes have different timelines which are initially superposed and then diverge at the Departure, forming a sort of Y figure.

Philosophers have investigated in depth the possibility of such a Y-splitting as for both the identity of artifacts and personal identity, addressing the classic case of the Ship of Theseus and its extension from artifacts to persons.¹⁰ *The Leftovers* extends Y-splitting to universes, instantiating a sort of multiple-universe narrative an important precedent of which can be found in Fred Hoyle's 1966 science-fiction novel *October the First is Too Late*.¹¹

Nora tells Kevin that the scientists who helped her had found a way of connecting the two split universes in other points beside the Departure, thereby enabling people to travel from Universe-1 to Universe-2. In the latter, Nora found her family and discovered that her husband has a new partner, and that her children, who have become teenagers in the meanwhile, seem to be happy with their stepmother. Nora felt like a ghost and decided to go back to Universe-1 with the help of a scientist who traveled from Universe-1 to Universe-2 and built a teletransportation machine also in the latter.

Nora's tale offers us a causal explanation of the Departure. People disappeared *because* the universe split in two. According to this tale, scientists have succeeded in creating connections between the two universes, and this suggests that the splitting of the universe is a fact of nature that can be investigated and understood with the methodology of the natural sciences.

In all the three seasons of *The Leftovers*, the search for causal explanations has hesitated between the natural and the supernatural. According to Tzvetan Todorov, such a hesitation is the core feature of the fantastic as a genre: "The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event".¹² Nora's tale aims to solve the hesitation by favoring the natural option. The departed did not vanished because of God's agency or some other supernatural cause; their disappearance, if Nora is right, was rather caused by a fact of nature, though an unpredictable and unprecedented one. However, the events that Nora describes remain off-screen, and this might be a source of skepticism as for the truth of her tale. Kevin finally replies "I believe you" to her, but we are not committed to believe her in turn.¹³

7. LET THE MYSTERY BE

The Todorovian hesitation between the natural and the supernatural that characterizes *The Leftovers* all the way through is echoed by the changes in the series' title sequence. In the first season, the title sequence suggests a causal explanation of the Departure in supernatural terms. A solemn musical theme by Richter accompanies the images of a sort of mannerist frescoed dome which depicts the Departure as if it were an ascension to heaven. At the beginning of this title sequence, the camera mainly focuses on the details of the fresco portraying the desperation of the leftovers. However, as the music progresses with a choir supplementing the cords, a complex camera movement shows the picture in its entirety, revealing the divine light which attracts the departed towards the top. The cause of the Departure, according to this picture, is divine intervention. The same iconography can be found in the memorial sculpture in Mapleton's beach which Laurie contemplates in the finale of "The Prodigal Son Returns". The sculpture portrays a leftover mother stretching her arms towards her son who is about to be sucked into the sky, as if God were taking him.

The title sequence of the second season, on the other hand, points in a different direction. There is no longer a fresco, the religious art *par excellence*, but rather a sequence of photographs, the art of the secularized age of technical reproducibility.¹⁴ The departed are no longer portrayed as ascending to heaven, but rather as holes in the pictures. The soundtrack is no longer a solemn piece of instrumental music but rather a pop song, namely, Iris DeMent's 1992 "Let the Mystery Be". The lines of the song seem to strengthen the interpretation of the Departure that the pictures suggest. The faith in the heavenly destiny of the departed leaves place to the mere ascertainment of their puzzling absence, which echoes the puzzling character of our existence in the physical universe: "Everybody's wonderin' what and where they all came from / Everybody's worryin' 'bout where / They're gonna go when the whole thing's done / But no one knows for certain and so it's all the same to me / I think I'll just let the mystery be".

In the third season, the same title sequence is preserved though in episodes from 2 to 6 Iris DeMent's song is replaced by other songs and, in episode 7, by Richter's musical theme of the season's one opening sequence. Yet, "Let the Mystery Be" comes back in the conclusive episode 8, having the last word, as it were. Even if Nora's causal explanation of the Departure was true, a mystery would remain just like the song says. In that case, however, the Departure mystery would no longer be heterogeneous with respect to our existence in the physical universe, or to the very existence of the physical universe. The Departure, if Nora was right, would reveal itself to be a puzzling event in the history of the universe in the same sense in which the Big Bang is puzzling. We can acknowledge that the universe started existing *because of* the Big Bang, but what is the cause of the Big Bang? Likewise, trusting Nora, we might acknowledge that the Departure occurred *because of* the splitting of the universe, but what is the cause of the splitting? Some mystery would remain, though perhaps of a kind we are more used to live with.

¹ David Hume, *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature*, reprinted with introd. J. M. Keynes and P. Sraffa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1740/1938), 35.

² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (London: Clarendon Press, 1739-1740/1975), 74.

³ Peter Fredrick Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1959); Peter Fredrick Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Methuen, 1966).

⁴ Strawson proposes his account of causation as an alternative to Hume's. However, the points of disagreement between them go beyond the scope of my paper. Peter Fredrick Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 117-118.

⁵ Wilfred Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man", in *Science, Perception and Reality* (New York: Humanities Press, 1963), 35-78; Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology* (New York: Knopf, 1971); Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics*, 124-125; Simon Evnine, *Making Objects and Events: A Hylomorphic Theory of Artifacts, Actions, and Organisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 202-206.

⁶ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 74.

⁷ John L. Mackie, *The Cement of the Universe: A Study of Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

⁸ Noël Carroll, "On the Narrative Connection", in *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 118-133.

⁹ However, in Tom Perrotta's 2011 novel *The Leftovers* of which the TV show is an adaptation, Jill and Tom are bored by their schoolmate who is going to disappear. Thanks to Susana Viegas for drawing my attention to that.

¹⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore*, ed. with intr. and notes (in French) K. Schuhmann (Paris: Vrin, 1655/1999); John Perry, "Can the Self Divide?," *Journal of Philosophy* 69, no.16 (1972): 463-488; David Lewis, "Survival and Identity," in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. A. Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 17-40; Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

¹¹ Fred Hoyle, *October the First is Too Late*. London: William Heinemann, Ltd, 1966); Robin Le Poidevin, *The Images of Time: An Essay on Temporal Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 170.

¹² Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973), 25.

¹³ As far as I am concerned, I believe Nora just as Kevin did. Yet, this is just my personal way of responding to *The Leftovers'* finale. I want to thank a referee for leading me to consider that Nora's tale might be yet another possible causal explanation offered by the narrative rather than the ultimate one.

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. B. Doherty and M. W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936/2008).