

**THE END OF THE WORLD: CONFUSION IN *THE LEFTOVERS***

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“Yet I am not silenced by the darkness, by the thick  
darkness that covers my face.”

—*Job 23:17*

The intensity and other qualities of the grief felt by the Legacies, those who lost a family member in the Departure, is affected by their ignorance of the cause of their loved ones' disappearance. In some, this ignorance prevents them from moving on from their grief, worsening it by prolonging it. In others, that lack of closure may allow for hope to enter their lives, lessening their sadness by offering the possibility of a return or reunion of some other sort. Still others may not know exactly how, or even whether, to grieve since the Departure is unprecedented; our collective past experiences provide few models for dealing with sudden, inexplicable disappearances of loved ones.<sup>1</sup> There are some who believe they know why the departures occurred, so ignorance is not a feature of their grief. Others believe that they at least know what explanations for the departures are wrong. Matt (Christopher Eccleston), for example, works hard to convince others that they, the Departed, were not taken away in the Rapture, the Christian prophecy that someday the “saved” will be taken from this earth and brought to their eternal home, leaving the sinners behind. He does this by sharing the lurid—for him, “sinful”—details from the lives of the local Departed.<sup>2</sup> Matt does have a positive, alternative view, although initially a vague one. He believes the Sudden Departure was a test (S1E3). The Guilty Remnant, on the other hand, believe that every explanation is wrong. Most people, though, seem to acknowledge their ignorance but remain willing to accept any plausible explanation. What they may accept as plausible, as we will see, can be affected by their experience of the Sudden Departure.

The Legacies suffered the most loss and, understandably, the worst emotional trauma. But emotional injuries are not confined to them; while the severity may decrease the further that someone is emotionally from a departed, most everyone, simply out of sympathy or compassion, will suffer to some degree. There is another type of injury that can afflict everyone, even the people of Jarden<sup>3</sup>; it does not depend on one's emotional proximity to a departed. It is an

epistemic injury. It is not their ignorance of the cause of the Sudden Departure. There are many things we are ignorant about, including about life's most fundamental questions. "Why are we here?" is probably a more perplexing question than "where did all those people go?" Some even embrace their ignorance about such matters, or at least are not bothered by it, like the narrator in the main title song from the second season: "But no one knows for certain and so it's all the same to me /I think I'll just let the mystery be."<sup>4</sup> The epistemic injury inflicted by the Sudden Departure is that it has made it more difficult to understand and make sense of the world. In other words, it has produced *confusion*.

Confusion is the state of being aware that one's beliefs are disorganized, for example, because some of them incompatible with each other. There is another sense of confusion which involves mistaking one object or concept for another, which may afflict someone even if they are not aware for it. For example, someone would be confused in this sense if they mistake their suitcase for someone else's or if in a lecture they attribute a theory to the wrong philosopher, either out of ignorance or because of a slip of the tongue. Awareness of these confusions would dispel them. I am interested in the type of confusion that persists even though one is aware of it.<sup>5</sup> I am especially interested in how it compels the sufferer to relieve the confusion by making modifications to what they believe and how they acquire new beliefs. So, when I speak of confusion in what follows, it is to this sort that I refer.

I will be confused if I am reading a philosophy book and the author makes a claim that appears to contradict one that I believe they previously stated in the book. I will be confused if I see someone walking towards me from across campus that I thought had died last year. Any extensive modifications to one's beliefs or methods for acquiring new ones can be avoided if the person could be persuaded that the conflict is only apparent. For example, it could be demonstrated to me that the two claims in the philosopher's books are actually compatible, or that I misread the text and mistakenly attributed one of the claims to the author. In the case of the dead person seemingly coming to life, I could realize when they are closer that they only resemble the deceased, or I could learn from them that they never died after all; I had been misinformed. If remedies like these are not available, ones that dispel the incompatibility, then more drastic ones are necessary. If the philosopher actually contradicted themselves, then trust in them will diminish. In the other case, even if it was only a case of mistaken identity, I may become more circumspect in making visual identifications under similar conditions. However, if the person had actually died, but they are now walking around campus, then an even more radical modification would be necessary.

This last situation resembles the Sudden Departure in *The Leftovers*. For their entire lives, its characters have been taught, like us, that things do not just disappear without explanation. Experience has confirmed that. We may lose things, but most of the time they eventually turn up. Things have turned up so often that we do not attribute the permanent loss of those other things to anything other than our own ineptness at finding them. Our beliefs and experiences have not allowed for the possibility of things, including people, suddenly vanishing. Yet, that happened at the same moment to 2% of the world's population on the now memorialized date of October 14th. It happened in front of the eyes—literally, in many cases—of those who remained: Nora (Carrie Coon) turns away from her family at the breakfast table for a moment and when she turns back, they're gone. A woman's baby suddenly stops crying in the back seat, and when she turns to check on him, he is not there anymore. A young boy's father disappears as he's pushing his shopping cart to their car. Kevin (Justin Theroux) is having sex with a woman who disappears from underneath him. Laurie (Amy Brenneman) and the nurse watch the image on the sonogram disappear. At that moment, they all believed *both* that people cannot suddenly disappear *and* that people did disappear in that way. Those beliefs are obviously incompatible with each other. They also implicate a wide range of beliefs. Our belief that people cannot suddenly vanish is connected to beliefs about physics, the permanency of objects, the nature of reality, the reality of the supernatural, and so on. It is a *massive* confusion, in a couple, distinct senses: it affects many of our beliefs and it afflicts everyone.<sup>6</sup> As Peter O'Leary puts it in his review of the series, the characters suffer from a "communal confusion."<sup>7</sup> Our usual confusions are more restricted, to ourselves and our personal experiences. Yet, studying such a large-scale confusion may enhance our understanding of the smaller confusions to which we are susceptible, which I hope to do in what follows, as well as illuminate *The Leftovers* series. There is precedent for this approach in Plato. Socrates convinced his interlocutors that it would be easier to study justice in something as large as a city and doing so would help us better understand it in our much smaller souls, the ultimate concern of *Republic*.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, it may be easier to understand small confusions by first studying massive ones.

Confusion has been little studied by philosophers.<sup>9</sup> However, its remedy, *understanding*, has been enjoying increasing attention over the last couple of decades.<sup>10</sup> Understanding, like knowledge, is a cognitive achievement in that it involves some intellectual effort to acquire, but it involves much more than knowing. To know is to believe a true proposition.<sup>11</sup> To understand, as Catherine Elgin explains, is to relate to more than a single proposition, but to a "suitably unified, integrated, coherent body of information."<sup>12</sup> The body of information relevant to the Sudden Departure is not coherent; following that event it contains propositions that are not compatible

with each other. The characters in *The Leftovers* frequently express their lack of understanding. After the woman's baby disappears in the series' opening moments, she shouts to those around her in the parking lot: "Where is he?! He was right in there! I don't understand!" In Season Two, John (Kevin Carroll) is cleaning the wound he caused in Kevin from the gunshot that should have killed him:

JOHN: I don't understand what's happening.

KEVIN: Me neither (S2E10)

During her death scene in Season One, Patti (Ann Dowd) repeatedly insists to Kevin that he understands, despite his protests that he doesn't:

GARVEY: I don't understand you.

PATTI: You understand. (S1E8)<sup>13</sup>

She disregards his denials and insists: "I want you to say you understand" (S1E8).

It is not clear, at least to me, what she wants Kevin to understand, but Patti cannot just insist on it. Acquiring understanding requires effort. As Duncan Pritchard explains: "One gains understanding by undertaking an obstacle-overcoming effort to piece together the relevant pieces of information."<sup>14</sup> The obstacles that prevent Kevin from understanding are especially demanding and involute, but any effort at understanding requires much more than simply knowing something. One can acquire knowledge simply by being told it. Patti cannot simply tell Kevin something to get him to understand. Learning something new might be an important part of acquiring understanding, but only in so far as it fills a gap in the connections between other beliefs. Merely knowing those discrete items of information is also not enough to achieve understanding. Rather, you must grasp, as Jonathan Kvanvig says, the "explanatory, logical, probabilistic, and other kinds of relations" between them.<sup>15</sup> So, understanding is revealed by what one is able to do with that information, for example, drawing inferences, identifying salient connections, making predictions, applying the information in appropriate circumstances, and so on. To do these things, of course, requires a body of information capable of being utilized in that way, that is, a coherent, stable body of information. To demonstrate knowledge, on the other hand, involves simply agreeing with a true proposition.<sup>16</sup>

Another important difference between understanding and knowledge is that there may be more than one way to understand the same set of facts. As Linda Zagzebski says: "More than one alternative theory may give understanding of the same subject matter" and each "may be equally good, equally accurate."<sup>17</sup> She would likely agree with Catherine Elgin that in order to provide understanding, the theories still must "answer to the facts."<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, a theory that is not "equally good" as the others in this respect—that lacks "a suitable tether"<sup>19</sup> to the facts, to use

Elgin's image—may still relieve a person's sense, or feeling, of confusion. Such understanding may turn out to be “illusory”<sup>20</sup>, as Zagzebski puts it, but that realization may be deferred. The long-term ability of a theory to relieve confusion depends on its resilience in the face of the facts. It would be difficult to retain belief in a theory in the face of blatant contradiction. But some theories, like those that posit divine intervention as the cause of the Sudden Departure, may better avoid being tested for such contradictions than a theory that relied more on empirical data, like that collected by the surveys that Nora administers on behalf of the Department of Sudden Departure. I am not going to decide here whether we should label as “understanding” every theory that is capable of relieving confusion or restrict that term to only those theories and explanations that further satisfy some epistemic criteria. I will simply call them all “understandings,” though it may be an “honorific” sense in some cases.<sup>21</sup>

Most of the central characters in *The Leftovers* have not settled on a satisfying explanation of the Sudden Departure and are still struggling with their confusion. They include Kevin and his children, Nora, and the mayor of Mapleton (Amanda Warren), who suggests re-naming Remembrance Day to “We Don't Know What the Fuck Happened Day” (S1E1). Their struggles with understanding the Sudden Departure are an important part of the drama of the series. As Tom Perrotta, one of the series' creators and the author of the novel upon which it is based, puts it, the series is “a really rich metaphor for thinking about the way that we react to (...) incomprehensible events, horrible events, things that we can't completely understand.”<sup>22</sup> But there are others who have more successfully handled their confusion. I have classified their approaches into three types. There are those who have acquired an understanding of the Sudden Departure (or at least made sense of it enough to abate their confusion). I will discuss two different ways that understanding has been achieved; these are two of the three types. The third type includes those who do not understand the Sudden Departure but have despaired of ever understanding it and simply accepted their confusion. I examine this group first.

The most notable representative of the third type is the Guilty Remnant. They are reviled by almost everyone who is not a member, but they grasp something that everyone does to some degree, or with which they are at least contending, even if they are not able or willing to articulate it in the same way. As Laurie explains it to the prospective publishers of her book about her experiences with the Guilty Remnant: “They believe the world ended” (S2E3). For everyone, the massive confusion caused by the Sudden Departure has brought an end to the world. Thomas Kuhn, in discussing the effects of a change in scientific paradigm brought about by an anomaly, says “when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them.”<sup>23</sup> The anomaly of the Sudden Departure has made the world incomprehensible. Whatever is not comprehensible is not

conceivable. As in Job's lament, it is as if a darkness has covered the world and made it disappear along with the Departed.<sup>24</sup>

Consider how anomalous that anomaly actually was. The Departed just vanished. They did not dissolve or fade away. They left no corpses behind, as in a plague or other type of disaster. They even took their clothes with them. As Nora puts it: "They are just gone" (S3E4). They left with no sound. There was no warning or prediction. They haven't returned and there is no widely accepted explanation for their disappearance. The mayor at Remembrance Day seems to be speaking for most people when she says: "We still wonder where they went and why" (S1E1). The way they left precludes the normal explanations for things going missing. So, it demands a reconfiguration of a great deal of what everyone, not just scientists, believe and out of that, a new world will emerge. Failing that, the ability to believe anything is threatened.

In a scientific revolution, an anomaly produces a new paradigm, a new way of understanding a field of scientific investigation. In elaborating on how this produces a new world, Kuhn describes adopting a new paradigm as like "being transported to another planet"<sup>25</sup>: "Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before."<sup>26</sup> Yet, the Guilty Remnant have not accepted a new paradigm. They do not recover from the anomaly of the Sudden Departure with a new world. They are like the hypothetical scientist Kuhn describes who abandons science and whom he analogizes to a carpenter who cannot complete a project successfully and blames their tools.<sup>27</sup> They have become sceptics. They have abandoned any efforts to make sense of the world. As one Guilty Remnant leader puts it: "Explanations are useless" (S2E9). They exhibit the effects of skeptical arguments that David Hume describes in his *Treatise of Human Nature*: "The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion as even more probable or likely than any other."<sup>28</sup> But they are more than sceptics; they are nihilists. Another comparison—as well as an important contrast—is with Albert Camus. Both accept the world's absurdity, but unlike Camus, the Guilty Remnant have no redeeming message to offer.<sup>29</sup> Instead, they have the pamphlet we see in Season One. The outside reads: "Everything that Matters About You is Inside" (S1E4). The inside of the pamphlet is blank. This is a very different message than those we find in Camus' essays on Tipasa, among the best statements of his positive philosophy: "I love this life with abandon and wish to speak of it boldly: it makes me proud of my human condition;"<sup>30</sup> "There is no shame in being happy;"<sup>31</sup> and "In the depths of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer."<sup>32</sup> Neither skepticism nor despair was Camus'

solution to the absurdity of existence. Camus' prescription was rebellion against absurdity, not submission. Even though there might be an element of rebellion in the praxis of the Guilty Remnant, its goal is the very *unexistentialist* one of making everyone feel as bad as them.

There are other characters in *The Leftovers* who succeed in recovering their understanding (though it may be of a different world). One group does this by means of a heightened credulity, an extreme contrast with the skepticism of the Guilty Remnant. While the Sudden Departure has made it difficult for members of the Guilty Remnant, and others, to believe anything, for these people it has made it easy to believe anything. The variety of beliefs are displayed in the camp outside of Jarden, as well as among the visitors who make it inside. They can also be glimpsed in the crowd outside the conference Nora attends in Season One. These people have arrived at a variety of understandings of the Sudden Departure, and the ease with which they accept them, despite their apparent implausibility, is a consequence of the Sudden Departure itself. Garvey, Sr. (Scott Glenn) explains this well. When the plausibility of his ideas are questioned by his son, Kevin, Garvey, Sr. replies that the “laws of fucking nature seem a bit upside down of late” (S2E2). If people can disappear without explanation, then it seems anything is possible. Bagels could disappear, as Kevin suspects when he loses his in the toaster at the police station. Grief can be relieved by hugging Holy Wayne and, later, Tom Garvey (Chris Zylka). A man who lives in a trailer illuminated by exposed bulbs can poison you and then bring you back to life.<sup>33</sup> Sitting in a vat in a trailer truck can send you to the place to which your loved ones disappeared. The Sudden Departure has eliminated many of the reasons for thinking such things impossible. For some of them, accepting them as real also relieves the emotional trauma caused by the Sudden Departure, which make them that much easier to accept.

Laurie understands this well. She gives Kevin a lengthy explanation of it when trying to convince him that his mind is inventing Patti and that he should not believe that she is really with him:

LAURIE: Can I tell you about belief, Kevin? When the mind is in emotional distress, it will grasp at any construct that makes it feel better. After the 14<sup>th</sup> the whole world needed to feel better. We were all in emotional distress. So that made all of us susceptible to false belief, to be taken advantage of. (S2E7)

She experienced the manipulation that emotional need and increased credulity can make one susceptible to. She tells the publishers that the person who recruited her into the Guilty Remnant took advantage of this: “She knew I was afraid and confused and alone” (S2E3). She used it on others when she told them that her son could take their pain away by hugging them: “Because their brains would sooner embrace magic than deal with feelings of fear and abandonment and

guilt” (S2E7). She believes that Kevin is doing the same to himself; allowing himself to believe something only because of the emotional relief it delivers. The Sudden Departure has made it easier for Kevin and others to do so, because it has made it easier to believe in anything.

*The Leftovers* portrays another approach to understanding that is not the result of excessive credulity. Instead of relieving confusion by relaxing epistemic standards, it achieves understanding by adopting new standards or—since it may not involve the self-conscious application of standards—a new way of looking at things. It may deliver emotional relief, which may motivate its adoption, but it cannot be additionally explained as resulting from the gullibility of the adopters.

The choice between different ways of looking at things is effectively portrayed in the Third Season. Matt, John, and Michael (Jovan Adepo) believe that Kevin is the savior. They travel together to Australia so they can bring him back to Jarden in order to fulfill a prophecy. Laurie forces her way onto their flight. She does not share their view of Kevin. She believes that it is as much confabulation as Kevin’s hallucinations of Patti, although its etiology may be different. It would be unfair to describe Matt, John, and Michael as overly credulous. John began, at least, as highly skeptical of the claims made about Jarden’s magical powers. Michael is very intelligent and, like Matt, very deliberate in forming beliefs, evidenced in the latter by his rejection of the Rapture explanation for the Sudden Departure. Their documentation of Kevin in their book is further evidence of their careful approach to belief acceptance. Still, Laurie is not convinced by them.

At their version of the Last Supper, Garvey, Sr., who believes in the book about Kevin, tries to assign everyone at the table a name from Jesus’ apostles. He thinks “Doubting Thomas” is the obvious choice for Laurie, after the apostle who needed to touch Jesus’ wounds in order to believe he was really his resurrected savior. She disagrees. “I’m Judas,” she says: “Doubting is easy because doubting costs you nothing. . . [Judas] was sure he believed in something and acted on it” (S3E6).<sup>34</sup> Her reluctance to characterize herself as a doubter—and instead someone who believes—brings to mind some remarks by Ludwig Wittgenstein about religious disagreement, and I think can be illuminated by them.

Their disagreement over whether or not Kevin is the savior resembles the one that Wittgenstein discusses in his “Lectures on Religious Belief” between him and someone who believes in the Last Judgement. Wittgenstein says of such disagreements: “These controversies look quite different from normal controversies.”<sup>35</sup> He insists that they cannot be resolved in the same way. They cannot even be discussed in the same way as, say, a disagreement over the identity of an airplane flying overhead. The person who identifies it as a German plane and the

one who is not sure are “fairly near” relative to the disputants in a religious disagreement.<sup>36</sup> Even though Wittgenstein does not believe in the Last Judgement, he says of someone who does: “I can’t contradict that person.”<sup>37</sup> Anything he describes as what he does *not* believe would not be what the religious person believes: “the religious person never believes what I describe.”<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Laurie is not doubting or contradicting Garvey, Sr. and the rest of them. Instead, they are looking at things differently, applying “different pictures,” or engaging in “entirely different ways of thinking.”<sup>39</sup> One way to make this point is to say that they do not believe differently about the same things; they believe in different things.

In his earlier “Lecture on Ethics,” Wittgenstein discusses the idea of a miracle. He opposes what he calls the relative understanding of miracles, that is, as “a fact [that] has not yet been explained by science.”<sup>40</sup> We should add a surprising or unexpected fact; one that would never be predicted by science. Instead of thinking of miracles by reference to scientific belief, Wittgenstein insists they must be understood in an absolute sense, which involves looking at the fact in a different way than a scientist would, for example, the scientist in the first episode who we hear declare when speaking about the Sudden Departure: “Miracles do not exist” (S1E1). For Wittgenstein, those who see it as miracle are seeing it differently than, and in a way incommensurable with<sup>41</sup>, the way a scientist sees it: “The truth is that the scientific way of looking at a fact is not the way to look at it as a miracle.”<sup>42</sup> We cannot say, from within one way of looking at things, that another is the result of faulty reasoning (“Reasons look entirely different from normal reasons”<sup>43</sup>) or excessive credulity. The explanations for why a way of looking was adopted vary; they may be cultural or personally idiosyncratic, such as because it promised a remedy for confusion.

Laurie and the others represent different ways of understanding the Sudden Departure and associated phenomena (e.g., Kevin’s apparent re-births, his seeing Patti, etc.). These ways may not be equally successful in relieving confusion. The body of information to which Laurie’s understanding relates seems to ignore some facts; Matt’s seems to invent some. Either or both may fail when tested against experience, or because of some internal instability, producing their own confusions. But while at the dinner table, re-enacting the Last Supper of Jesus, they appear to be stable and providing their holders relief from confusion.<sup>44</sup>

Interestingly, the narrative seems to give us the option of believing in Laurie, Kevin’s “apostles,” or some other account. Kevin may be the savior or just ordinary, though equipped with an especially resilient constitution; Patti may have been in his head or real in some way; the sequences in which he is an assassin could have been playing only in his head or that world with the hotel does exist in some way. We are never quite sure what to believe. To that extent, the

confusion of the characters is induced in us. That may be part of the appeal of the series, and others like it. *The Leftovers* appears to play with that at times, giving us images and other story elements that, initially at least, are meant to confuse us. For example, as Season Two opens, we glimpse a woman in Jarden mowing the lawn in her wedding dress. We anticipate having such things explained, but revel in their mystery in the meantime. It may be because they are enchanting; they portray a world that is more interesting than our ordinary one. Despite the reasons for our interest, we sometimes welcome confusion, at least in fictions or when it does not debilitate our capacity for believing.

The ways the characters deal with confusion are reproduced in us when watching *The Leftovers*. They are also the ways we deal with ordinary confusions. We can respond to them like the Guilty Remnant. For example, a subject we are studying may severely confuse us. It could be a new language, a branch of physics, or Hegel. We may despair of ever understanding it and give up. We could even blame the subject, like Kuhn's scientist who blames his tools. A common reaction to Hegel is to attribute the confusion to him, by saying of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* something like, "This doesn't make any sense," while throwing it across the room. The confusion induced by studying a new, recondite subject may also increase our credulity about the subject. We may initially be incredulous over some new information, for example, some idiosyncratic grammar, the surprising behavior of subatomic particles, the strange physiology of an obscure species, the unfamiliar customs of a distant culture, and so on. Once we are convinced that these phenomena are genuine, we will become more receptive to new, equally strange, aspects of the new subject matter. The third approach to understanding also shows up when learning a new subject. If we are having difficulty, a teacher might encourage us to look at a problem in a new or different way, typically by suggesting an analogy.<sup>45</sup> Someone may attempt all of these responses before settling on one.

Besides these ways of responding to the confusion caused by the Sudden Departure, there remains the possibility of reconciling that anomaly with our prior beliefs. That was one way of relieving my confusion over reading an apparent contradiction in a philosophy book; after it was demonstrated to me that the two claims are actually compatible, the confusion disappeared. This may be what the scientists who send Nora to the other world have succeeded in doing. It is what the other scientists in the series are attempting. They haven't thrown down their tools yet. They are trying to fit the Sudden Departure into their scientific beliefs. Many of the other characters have run out of patience. They need to be able to believe again by acquiring a new understanding or, if that's not available to them, to finally give up on trying to believe anything.

## CODA

An important theme of *The Leftovers*, perhaps the central one, is that love endures despite confusion. The ability to believe may be under stress, but the feelings people have for each other, and the actions that exhibit those feelings, persist. There are several examples of this, including the couple getting married in the final episode, but the foregrounded ones are provided by Kevin and Nora. He persists in his search for Nora until they are finally reunited, many years after she entered the scientists' machine. She refuses to announce her presence to her family in the other world out of fear of disrupting their happiness, denying her own happiness. By doing so, she finally passes the test of the scientists:

Two infant twins are born. One of them will grow up to cure cancer, but only if the other one dies now. You don't have to kill the baby yourself, but you do have to nod to make it happen. Do you nod? (S3E4)

Nora answers: "Of course I nod." She fails. They eventually let her enter the machine, but it is only after she enters the other world (where 98% of the population disappeared) that she demonstrates the virtue that they believed necessary for its use. It is the virtue the ancient Chinese philosopher Mengzi attributes to anyone similar in moral rectitude to Confucius: "...if any could obtain the world by performing one unrighteous deed, or killing one innocent person, he would not do it."<sup>46</sup> Nora refuses the world that she lost in the Sudden Departure—or at least the most important part of that world—her family. She does so because of her love for her family.<sup>47</sup>

Nora and Kevin contradict the Guilty Remnant's view, as Patti's double puts it, that "On October 14<sup>th</sup>, attachment and love became extinct" (S2E8). She argues that it revealed to us that anyone could be lost to us at any time, so that it is a "strength" to "have difficulty giving and accepting love." But Nora and Kevin demonstrate that we do not need to "transform" and, as Kevin sums it up, "destroy families."<sup>48</sup> To do so would be to surrender the only thing left from the world lost to the Sudden Departure. Nora, Kevin, and several of the other characters, demonstrate that while they might have lost their minds, to paraphrase the Pixies' song, they have retained something more important than understanding, love.

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<sup>1</sup> There are the cases of soldiers missing in action, abducted persons who have not returned home, and those missing for unknown reasons (but their families know that there is some explanation from a limited set of plausible ones, i.e., accident, abduction, or they have run away). While the families in these cases have a better understanding of their loved ones' disappearances than the Legacies, they likely experience

similar issues with respect to their grief. However, since these cases are relatively rare, their experiences are not widely known.

<sup>2</sup> The show's narrative in other ways steers us away from the Rapture as an explanation.

<sup>3</sup> The city from which no one departed and that became, for a while, a National Park called "Miracle."

<sup>4</sup> Iris DeMint, "Let the Mystery Be." Track 1 on *Infamous Angel*. Philo Records, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> One could be confused and not know it. This would be a case in which someone held disorganized, including incompatible, beliefs, but the consequences of that are only apparent to others, if anyone. That type of confusion can be caused by mental illness or just (sometimes willful) sloppy thinking.

<sup>6</sup> Excluding people who because of mental development are not capable of noticing anything amiss about the disappearances, e.g., infants.

<sup>7</sup> Peter O'Leary, "The Leftovers," *Religious Studies Review* 42, no. 1 (March 2015): 19.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, "Republic" (369a), trans. Paul Shorey in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 615.

<sup>9</sup> That other sort of confusion, which involves mistaking one thing for another, has been studied, for example, in the book by Joseph L. Camp, Jr., *Confusion: A Study in the Theory of Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> I previously surveyed some of this work on understanding in an essay that explored connections between understanding and documentary film in Keith Dromm, "Understanding (and) the Legacy of the Trace: Reflections after Carroll, Currie, and Plantinga," in *The Philosophy of Documentary Film*, ed. David LaRocca (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 413-430.

<sup>11</sup> At least according to traditional, internalist definitions of knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Elgin, "Understanding and the Facts," *Philosophical Studies* 132 (2007): 34.

<sup>13</sup> In his conversation with her in the hotel sequence from Season Two, her double also implies that he understands (S2E8).

<sup>14</sup> Duncan Pritchard, Alan Miller, and Adrian Haddock, *The Nature and Value of Knowledge: Three Investigations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82-83.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 192-193.

<sup>16</sup> It would also have to be the case that we could assume—if we did not know—that they came to their belief in the proposition through some reliable process (e.g., perception) or method of justification (e.g., a deductive argument). Typically, we would implicitly assume these things unless there was some reason to doubt the subject's credentials as a knower.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Zagzebski, "Recovering Understanding," in *Epistemic Values: Collected Papers in Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 69.

<sup>18</sup> Elgin, "Understanding and the Facts," 35. Yet, for Elgin, that does not mean that understanding must be factive; the theory or explanation that provides understanding may contain some falsehoods.

<sup>19</sup> Elgin, "Understanding and the Facts," 35.

<sup>20</sup> Zagzebski, "Recovering Understanding," 71.

<sup>21</sup> Elgin, "Understanding and the Facts," 37.

<sup>22</sup> Tom Perrotta, "After the Rapture, who are 'The Leftovers'?" interview with David Bianculli, *Fresh Air*, NPR, June 27, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/2014/06/27/326158610/after-the-rapture-who-are-the-leftovers?t=1634041551672>.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 111.

<sup>24</sup> Kevin, at Matt's prompting, reads from Job 23, verses 8-17, over Patti's grave (S1E10).

<sup>25</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 111.

<sup>26</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 111.

<sup>27</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 79.

<sup>28</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Bk I, Pt IV, Sec VII) (Oxford: Clarendon Press): 268-269.

<sup>29</sup> A comparison with philosophy's most famous nihilist, Arthur Schopenhauer, would not be apt. Unlike the Guilty Remnant, Schopenhauer thought the world was comprehensible; it just was not designed in a way that contributed to human happiness. Also, Schopenhauer offered art as a way to elevate us from our condition. The Guilty Remnant eschew any aesthetic redemption of life, as indicated by their white, unadorned clothing.

<sup>30</sup> Albert Camus, “Nuptials at Tipasa,” in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (New York: Vintage, 1970): 69.

<sup>31</sup> Camus, “Nuptials at Tipasa,” 70.

<sup>32</sup> “Camus, “Return to Tipasa,” in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, 169.

<sup>33</sup> Some on the internet, e.g., at [imdb.com \(https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2699128/trivia?ref=tt\\_trv\\_trv\)](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2699128/trivia?ref=tt_trv_trv); accessed May 21, 2021), have speculated that this is an allusion to the protagonist of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, who lives in a basement apartment whose ceiling and walls are covered with lightbulbs. If intentional, that would be an apt allusion, because Ellison’s protagonist is confused; his confusion leads him to make choices that are not sufficiently deliberated upon and it makes him susceptible to manipulation by others (like the people recruited into the Guilty Remnant). I expand on the topic of manipulation in the next paragraph.

<sup>34</sup> As Laurie does when she drugs their food with the dog’s pills and puts them all to sleep.

<sup>35</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Lectures on Religious Belief,” in *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 56.

<sup>36</sup> Wittgenstein, “Lectures on Religious Belief,” 53.

<sup>37</sup> Wittgenstein, “Lectures on Religious Belief,” 55.

<sup>38</sup> Wittgenstein, “Lectures on Religious Belief,” 55.

<sup>39</sup> Wittgenstein, “Lectures on Religious Belief,” 55.

<sup>40</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics,” in *Philosophical Occasions: 1912-1951*, eds. James Klage and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 46.

<sup>41</sup> We could follow Kuhn and call them different paradigms. We would then also say that the scientists’ view is in *crisis*, the period between the appearance of an anomaly and the adoption of a new paradigm (Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 68).

<sup>42</sup> Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics,” 43.

<sup>43</sup> Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics,” 56.

<sup>44</sup> After the prophecy goes unfulfilled, Garvey, Sr. asks his son: “Now what?” (S3E7). He needs a new understanding, or way of looking at things, at that point.

<sup>45</sup> This is a technique Wittgenstein frequently uses to resolve philosophical problems.

<sup>46</sup> Mengzi, *The Essential Mengzi (2A2.24)*, trans. Bryan W. Van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), 19.

<sup>47</sup> Another version of the series’ theme is that morality, to the extent that its basis is love, is resilient against epistemological failures like confusion or skepticism, and their normative consequences like nihilism. Its persistence despite the massive confusion caused by the Sudden Departure demonstrate this.

<sup>48</sup> This delights Patti’s double: “Write that down. That is fucking brilliant. Our polls say our message is confusing. You just nailed it.” (S2E8).