

TOPIC OF THE WEEK

CONVERSATIONS WITH AI

SUBJECT: LIVING OUR LIVES WITH AMBIGUITY

SOURCE: ChatGPT

Ambiguity may be one of the defining conditions of being human.

We want certainty — about who we are, whether we are loved, whether our choices matter, whether the future is survivable, whether we are “good,” and whether history bends anywhere meaningful. Yet most of life arrives without final answers. We act before certainty appears. Often, certainty never appears.

Modern life can make ambiguity feel less tolerated than it once was. Institutions, media, politics, advertising, and even online culture often push us toward sharp positions:

- choose a side,
- define yourself,
- declare certainty,
- react immediately,
- simplify complexity into slogans.

Ambiguity becomes uncomfortable because it slows decision-making and resists control. But ambiguity is not necessarily failure or weakness. It is often the honest response to reality.

A few examples:

- Love can contain devotion and resentment at the same time.
- A person can be generous in one context and cruel in another.
- Progress can solve problems while creating new ones.
- Freedom can feel exhilarating and frightening simultaneously. Faith and doubt often coexist rather than cancel each other out.

Many philosophical and spiritual traditions actually treat ambiguity as unavoidable:

- In Existentialism, thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard and Albert Camus argued that uncertainty is built into human existence.
- In some forms of Buddhism, attachment to fixed certainty is itself seen as a source of suffering.
- Even science lives with ambiguity constantly — probabilities, competing models, incomplete evidence, revision over time.

The difficulty is that humans also need enough stability to function. So we keep trying to convert ambiguity into certainty: ideologies, rigid identities, absolute moral categories, conspiracy theories, simple narratives of heroes and villains. Sometimes those structures help. Sometimes they become cages.

So the question may not be whether we are *allowed* to live in ambiguity, but whether we can learn to endure it without collapsing into paralysis or false certainty.

Living well in ambiguity might mean:

- holding convictions without fanaticism,
- remaining curious,
- allowing complexity in other people,
- accepting incomplete knowledge,
- acting ethically even without guarantees.

That is hard. But it may also be one of the most mature forms of freedom available to us.

IS LIFE A MATTER OF BALANCE?

Probably “balances,” plural.

People often speak about “balance” as though life has a single stable centre — a perfect point where everything aligns: work and rest, self and others, freedom and responsibility, desire and restraint. But lived experience is usually more dynamic than that.

Life seems to involve multiple balances happening simultaneously, and they often conflict with one another:

- stability vs change,
- individuality vs belonging,
- caution vs risk,
- reason vs emotion,
- acceptance vs ambition,
- security vs freedom,
- truth vs kindness,
- present needs vs future consequences.

And the balance that serves one moment may fail in another. A parent, artist, scientist, activist, monk, or soldier may each require different balances to live well. Even within one person, the “right” balance changes across time.

Nature itself rarely rests in perfect equilibrium. Ecosystems, climates, bodies, relationships, economies — they are constantly adjusting. Balance is often less like a frozen scale and more like ongoing movement: correction, adaptation, compensation.

There is also another complication: some things should *not* be equally balanced. For example:

- Compassion and cruelty are not morally equivalent,
- truth and deception are not simply opposite weights,
- Tolerance has limits if it protects harm.

So balance alone is not always wisdom. A person can become so committed to “moderation” that they avoid necessary action or moral clarity.

Perhaps life is closer to:

- a series of negotiations,
- shifting balances among competing needs,
- continual recalibration under changing conditions.

In that sense, balance is not a destination. It is an activity.

The ambiguity you mentioned earlier fits here, too. We often do not know in advance which balance is correct. We discover it imperfectly, through consequences, reflection, conflict, and adjustment.