


**NEW THEOLOGY**  
**A UNIVERSAL THEOLOGY**

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## Introduction

Today, we know the universe is billions of years old, not thousands. We know bacteria and viruses cause disease, not sin and demons. We know there are (literally!) more stars in the universe than grains of sand on all Earth's beaches.<sup>1</sup> Scientists believe there are roughly as many planets as stars.<sup>2</sup>

Imagine on some distant planet, beings who look like rabbits worship the Great Rabbit who created everything. Or imagine spider-like beings who worship the Great Mother Spider who spun out the web of the universe. Old Theology would call such “Gods” false Gods. Or, more charitably, it might call them personifications<sup>3</sup> of the one, true God.

New Theology regards the Gods of planet Earth as personifications of the one true God: the ultimate ground of existence, the foundation of reality.

Science’s inquiry into reality has yielded spectacular results: vaccines, cell phones, space telescopes, and planetary probes all testify to the accuracy of scientific knowledge, to the accuracy of the scientific world view. But science lacks a theology and a God. New Theology aspires to be a theology compatible and harmonious with science.

Science’s “way of knowing” uses reason and experiment in its investigation of reality. (A way of knowing, also called an epistemological method, is a way of deciding what is and is not true.) Science’s beliefs are tentative and open to revision and improvement—as when Einstein’s theory of gravity supplanted Newton’s. Similarly, New Theology rejects dogma; its beliefs are tentative, open to revision and improvement.

Old Theology usually employs the epistemological method of faith in the sayings and writings of some alleged prophet or God-man. Many such “sacred” writings exist, but all of them cannot be true because they contradict each other. For instance, Jesus is God, says the New Testament; Jesus is only a prophet, says the Quran. Old Theology’s way of knowing is unreliable and leads to contradictory “truths.” Different religions differ and different denominations of the same religion differ, even about supremely important questions such as how to be saved. Ask an Italian, Iranian, or Hindu theologian what happens after death and you’ll get different answers.

Science’s epistemological method leads to convergence: asked to predict the reaction of two chemicals, an Italian, Iranian, or Hindu chemist will give the same answer. Science examines the nature of a reality, which is the same throughout the universe. Thus, we would expect different intelligent species to discover the same equations of thermodynamics or electromagnetism, just as the ratio of a circle’s circumference to its diameter, i.e.,  $\pi$ , is discoverable by anyone anywhere in the universe.

New Theology also seeks to base its beliefs on universal reality, to arrive at beliefs independent of culture or any scripture.

The word of God is the creation we behold: And it is in this word, which no human invention can counterfeit or alter, that God speaketh universally to man.<sup>4</sup>

New Theology aspires to be a *universal* theology.<sup>5</sup>

Let’s begin.

### Old Theology: God

Old Theology is often based on a “person God.” The Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam regard God as a person, as do some Hindu sects.<sup>6</sup> Christianity has Jesus, who became an actual human person. Judaism and Islam have Yahweh and Allah, who have the attributes of a person, e.g., who have desires, who decree laws, who reward and punish.

Person Gods are often said to transcend the universe, to exist beyond it. For instance, in Christianity we have the opening of The Lord's Prayer, “Our Father Who Art in Heaven.” This describes a God who is a person, a Father, who lives in heaven, a place outside our universe. Later in the Lord's Prayer, there is, “Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven,” which suggests a gulf between where we live and where God is.

There have been many person Gods in the past. Today, some are still regarded as real existent realities. Others are not.

### New Theology: God

Entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity. — William of Ockham

New Theology,<sup>7</sup> a rarer type of theology, regards God as immanent and impersonal. Immanent means inhering in the universe, not to be confused with “imminent” which means soon. Impersonal means not a person. Being a person involves separateness because the essence of personhood is the ability to say “this is me and that is not me.” But if God is immanent throughout the universe, then God cannot be a person.<sup>8</sup>

New Theology is a monist theology where “monism” says that only one supreme being exists and on the ultimate level, that being is *all* that exists.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, monism speaks of “the One” as opposed to “the Many”, i.e., the universe. How the One becomes the Many is a perennial philosophical question, which we return to later.

What is impersonal is not necessarily cold and inhuman. For example, some people say God is love. Love is immanent: it exists in this universe. We feel love here, where we are. So, it's in the universe. But love itself is not a person. Love occurs *between* people, but love itself is not a person. So, we may picture an impersonal God as something like the radiance of the sun, as having warmth and light, and light, and maybe even love and some sort of consciousness. That's closer to the God we want to describe than a cold, impersonal force.

New Theology regards Gods who are persons as personifications of the One. Such Gods<sup>10</sup> exist, as we do, as an image, a creation, an action of the One. To use a phrase from Old Theology, we are creatures, created beings; New Theology adds, so is a God who is a person. Indeed, our monist theology leaves us no choice; for at the ultimate level only One exists.

Immanent, impersonal Gods occur in existing religions. In Christianity, some theologians describe the three Persons of the Trinity as “grounded”, as flowing out of, a common impersonal foundation called the “Godhead.”<sup>11</sup> And Quakerism<sup>12</sup> has the suggestion of an immanent God (“Walk cheerfully over the Earth answering to that of God in everyone”). In the Chinese religion of Taoism, the “Tao” is the central idea; the Tao is “the absolute principle underlying the universe,” according to the Oxford Languages dictionary.

#### Old Theology: The Universe

Old Theology pictures the universe as a creation of God, separate and distinct from God. As a carpenter creates a table, God has created the universe. Matter is “dumb.” Far above matter is God, with various entities in between (e.g., matter, living matter, then matter with consciousness, with intelligence, with a soul, angels, God).

This world view is one a child can understand. In fact, it’s what a child spontaneously creates. A child realizes that hitting a wooden chair doesn’t “hurt” the chair, because wood is “dumb.” Yes, you may break wood; but you don’t “hurt its feelings.” After wood comes inanimate things like dolls, which appear to have consciousness and personality. Then there are cats and dogs, which really do have consciousness and personality. Then the child’s peers; then the parents. Then, perhaps, clergy. And last, above all, God—where God is a person who sits “up there,” in heaven, outside the universe. (Different peoples at different times and places imagine different person Gods. Thus, we have the hundreds of person Gods worshipped on Earth at one time or another.)

In the child’s hierarchy, matter is as far away from God as possible.

#### New Theology: The Universe

How may we describe the relation of the universe to an immanent, impersonal God? Two analogies come to mind.

One, imagine light projected onto a movie screen. The light is one, but because of the way it moves on the screen, because of the different colors it shows, we see images of people, places, and things. In some similar sense, the people, places, and things of the world are images of God. In New Theology, we are literally an image of God, in which we live and move and have our being.

The movie analogy portrays an immanent God as the basis of physical objects. But a truly monist view must portray God as the basis of all: physical, emotional, and thought, space and time.<sup>13</sup> So, we turn to another analogy.

In a dream, we create the people, their emotions and thoughts, and the universe in which they live. The figures in a dream are disguised versions of ourself. Similarly, imagine the universe as

existing in the mind of God, just as figures do in our dream. (This dream analogy suggests the idea that our impersonal and immanent God is, in some sense, conscious.)

New Theology's view of the universe resembles science's view: both have the idea of one reality underlying the universe, forming the universe's foundation. Moreover, science has found that matter is not "dumb" but almost infinitely complex and subtle. Quantum Field theory—the science that searches deepest into the heart of matter—has discovered a dance of energy with "virtual" particles popping in and out of existence at any moment. We look into the heart of matter and find something which, as far as we know, cannot be created or destroyed. If, in fact, the foundation of matter cannot be created or destroyed, we easily reach the conclusion that matter is a manifestation of something which is eternal.

Once we see the universe as a manifestation of an ultimate ground of existence, it's natural to wonder about the details of their relationship. It's an old question, often answered in terms of emanation, where all creation derives from, emanates from, one common source, one common principle. Derived from the Latin *emanare* which means "to flow out" or "to pour out of," emanationism says all things derived from a first principle. In contrast to creationism, which views the "stuff" of the universe as dumb and static, emanationism views the universe as dynamic, as being continually created before our eyes, like a fountain creates a stream of water dynamically, at every moment. In this view, the relation between the universe and its ultimate ground is similar to the relation between sunlight and the sun.

Here is a sketch of a possible New Theology emanation system: ultimate ground of existence → quarks → protons, neutrons, electrons → molecules → matter → living matter → mind (intelligent living matter) → society and culture.

The light and dream analogies touch on the idea of ultimate ground of existence, but what do we mean by "ultimate ground of existence"? To answer that question, we must begin with component objects.

#### Component Objects and the Ontologically Basic

Consider the English word ARE. Its components are the letters A, R, and E. Consider diamonds and graphite; each consists of carbon atoms arranged differently. Thus, we are led to the concept of the component object.

Physical objects are component objects. A table is a component object consisting of a wooden top and legs. Wood is a component object consisting of molecules which consist of atoms which consist of subatomic particles which consist of quarks which consist of . . . ? Water— apparently pure and simple and possessing no components—has components: an oxygen atom and two hydrogen atoms arranged H-O-H.

For a component object to exist, its components must maintain the proper relation relative to each other. ARE and EAR have exactly the same components signify a different word depending

on how the components are arranged. Similarly, if H-O-H were rearranged to H-H-O (and if such a chemical compound could exist), it would not be water. The existence of a component object depends on its components *and* the component's arrangement relative to each other. Component objects have relative existence.

It appears that physical objects are component objects with relative existence. Is there anything which is not a component object? Is there anything which is not a mixture of distinct components? The question leads us to the concept of "that which lies at the bottom," which has no components. Notice if something has no components, it cannot have relative existence. It has, therefore, some type of absolute existence.

Ontology refers to what exists. Therefore, the "ontologically basic" is what is basic, foundational, a first principle. It's "that which lies at the bottom."

We might say a book consists of paragraphs, which consist of sentences, which consists of words. Words consist of letters of the alphabet. The letters themselves are ontologically basic to the book.<sup>14</sup>

Or imagine a wooden table. The existence of the table is "grounded" in the wood. The table cannot exist if the wood doesn't exist, but disassemble the table and the wood continues to exist. The wood is the table's "ground of existence." Similarly, the wood's ground of existence is its various wood molecules, which are themselves composed of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, etc. The atoms are grounded in subatomic particles, which are grounded and quarks. Imagine continuing the process until we reach "bottom." That bottom is ontologically basic; it's the table's ultimate ground of existence. But the table is not ontologically basic because the table consists of parts (top and four legs) which may themselves consists of parts (wood).

"Ontologically basic", "ultimate ground of existence", and the "One" all point to the same concept. Here are several other terms.

- 1) The All and the One: Because the One, the ultimate ground of existence, is foundational for all that exists, the term "The All and the One" applies.
- 2) The Real (capitalized): The permanent and unchanging. In contrast, "real" (lower-case), means the world of our experience, a world undoubtedly real in the usual sense but also transitory and ever changing.<sup>15</sup> The world's unchanging basis deserves capitalization; it deserves the title the Real. We may express the same concept more intuitively by replacing "Real" with "Permanent" and "real" with "transitory, impermanent."<sup>16</sup> Our body, emotions, thoughts, and the world we experience are impermanent, subject to change, whether in a second or a million years. The ontologically basic, the Uncreated Light, is unchanging and permanent. Many religious teachings recommend lessening attachment to the impermanent and drawing closer to the permanent, to God.
- 3) Isness, or pure isness: Image an item, say a candle. We notice the candle's properties, e.g., its color, its feel, its weight. But we may imagine looking so deeply into the candle that we experience the naked fact of its existence, its "Isness". The Isness of the candle

differs not at all from the Isness of any other object. Therefore, Isness is the One; it's the foundational existence of anything.

- 4) Suchness: commonly a Buddhist term, similar to Isness.

The One, the Real, and the other concepts agree with the movie analogy and are implicitly contained in it.

### The Nub

Nub, noun, the crux or central point of a matter

A basic premise of this article is that the ultimate ground of existence is God; some people may find the idea counterintuitive, even absurd. We can parse the idea into three component ideas:

- 1) *The concept of ultimate ground of existence is a valid concept; it is not internally inconsistent (e.g., square circle or married bachelor).* This appears to be true.
- 2) *Ultimate ground of existence refers to something which exists in reality.* In the history of science, we find concepts once embraced but later discovered to refer to nothing real. Examples include luminiferous ether, the medium of light propagation, and heat's caloric fluid. In this article, we accept that "ultimate ground of existence" refers to something real. The idea seems valid and agrees with common sense. It seems we must reach a bottom. But we admit 2) may be invalid, just as the idea that the Earth rests upon some support is invalid but would have seemed valid and commonsensical a few centuries ago. If and when it is shown that no ultimate ground of existence, in fact, exists, New Theology will have to be abandoned or seriously revised.
- 3) *It makes sense to regard the ultimate ground of existence as God.* A Christian who converts Islam ceases to regard Jesus as God. A Muslim converting to Christianity, begins to regard Jesus as God. How we imagine, relate to, and worship God is our choice. True, in some societies, publicly abandoning the prevailing religion may cost dearly, the cost being social ostracism and, in extreme cases, torture and death. Yet ultimately, we choose the God(s), if any, we regard as real. A common definition of God is "the creator of the universe." The word "creator" may bring to mind a person who builds a table or chair but who is separate and distinct from the table or chair. But there is another type of creation, where the ocean creates the waves or the light on a movie screen creates the images. If we take "creator" in this sense, it applies to the ultimate ground of existence. Nonetheless, we admit that the equation ultimate ground of existence equals God may seem wrong, even absurd.<sup>17</sup> The undecided reader may wish to read the rest of this article before deciding.

For the remainder of this article, we take "the ultimate ground of existence is God" as axiomatic. We explore some consequences; consequences which, ideally, follow logically.



### Component Objects as Actions

The term “component object” focuses on the “thing.” If we focus on the *act* of the components keeping the proper relation to each other, we may view a component object as a process, an action. Thus, the *act* of A, R, and E maintaining the proper relation to each other allows the word ARE to continue existing. The act of table top and its four legs maintaining the proper relation allows the table to continue existing. The act of curling your fingers and thumb together creates a fist; open your hand and the fist ceases to exist.

Or consider Oxford University, the oldest university in the English-speaking world, founded as early as 1,096. Over the centuries, buildings, professors, students, and staff have come and gone. The name “Oxford University” remained constant over the centuries. But the name corresponds to nothing that also has remained constant over the centuries.

So, Oxford University is more accurately imagined not as a thing, but as a process, an activity, an action. A whirlpool is the action of water going down a drain. When the action ceases, the whirlpool ceases to exist, although the components (the water molecules) may still exist. Similarly, Oxford University is an educational process whose components are of students, staff, buildings, etc. But if the staff and students all became real estate agents and used the buildings as offices, the components would continue existing but Oxford University would cease to exist.

Do components objects, do acts, possess a deep identity? If we plug the drain and then tomorrow unplug it, is it the *same* whirlpool?<sup>18</sup> Or is the identity of acts and component objects provisional, temporary? We will return to such questions when we discuss the deep self.

Notice how actions suggest an actor, an idea which is implicitly contained in the dream analogy.

### Old Theology: Experiencing God

A carpenter creates a table, then turns to some other project. If God did the same with the universe, it would be impossible today for a human being to experience God. Old Theology says that is not the case. It says that, from on high, God has kept an interest in his/her creation. It says that God has communicated to certain special people—Yahweh to Moses, Jesus to his disciples, Allah to Mohammed, to name a few. The special people inspired sacred writings. Often, there is a clergy or priesthood that “properly interprets” sacred scriptures. Believers then experience God indirectly through the intermediaries of ritual, scripture, and dogma.

Some Old Theology religions have the idea of a person directly experiencing God; Christians who “have a personal relationship with Jesus” are one example. Quakers who experience “that of God in everyone” are another. Might their experience be an unrecognized encounter with the ultimate ground of existence? We’ll return to this question when we discuss gratuitous attribution.

### New Theology: Experiencing God

If God is ultimate ground of existence, then God and the universe are entwined, are intimately related. We would cease to exist the moment God stopped creating us. A fountain creates the spray of water dynamically, at every moment. If the flow ceases, the spray ceases to exist. The fountain analogy and the movie light analogy both depict God dynamically keeping us existence every moment. God resides in us immanently, at our deepest level. We cannot continue to exist separate from God. Therefore, direct experience of God is our birthright; it's potentially available to everyone.

How might someone describe a direct experience of an immanent, impersonal God? Saint Augustine used the term "Light Unchangeable".

. . . I entered even into my inward self . . . and beheld with the eye of my soul . . . above my mind, the Light Unchangeable. Not this ordinary light, which all flesh may look upon, nor as it were a greater of the same kind . . . It made me; and . . . I was made by It. He that knows the Truth, knows what that Light is; and he that knows It, knows eternity. . . . Thou art my God . . .<sup>19</sup>

Pascal used FIRE. On a folded parchment sown into a jacket pocket near his heart, Blaise Pascal, the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and mathematician, wrote:

From about ten-thirty in the evening to about half an hour after midnight,

FIRE.

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,

Not of the philosophers and savants.

Certitude, certitude; feeling, joy, peace.<sup>20</sup>

Pascal experiences "FIRE," a fire that gives him certitude, joy, and peace. He identifies that fire with a God of his religion, Yahweh, also known as God the Father. Pascal leaves no doubt his experience is more than an experience of mere thought ("Not of philosophers and savants") but rather an intense experience of a manifest reality.

Eastern Orthodox Christianity identifies "Uncreated Light" with the divine light that shined at the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor. "Uncreated" in that there was never a time when the "Light" did not exist. There was never a time it came into existence. Therefore, it is uncreated. "Light" in that it's a dynamic, energetic phenomena. Taken as metaphor light suggests heightened consciousness, grace, wisdom, peace, etc.

The Orthodox monk Symeon "The New Theologian" has much to say about Uncreated Light.

- Our mind is pure and simple, so when it is stripped of every alien thought, it enters the pure, simple, Divine light . . . God is light—the highest light.<sup>21</sup>
- It illuminates us, this light that never sets, without change, unalterable, never eclipsed; it speaks, it acts, it lives and vivifies, it transforms into light those whom it illumines. God is light, and those whom he deems worthy of seeing him see him as light; . . . Those who have not seen this light have not seen God, for God is light.<sup>22</sup>

- God is light, a light infinite and incomprehensible . . . one single light . . . simple, non-composite, timeless, eternal . . . The light is life. The light is immortality. The light is the source of life. . . . the door of the kingdom of heaven. The light is the very kingdom itself. . .<sup>23</sup>
- If a man who possesses within him the light of the Holy Spirit is unable to bear its radiance, he falls prostrate on the ground and cries out in great fear and terror, as one who sees and experiences something beyond nature, above words or reason. He is then like a man whose entrails have been set on fire and, unable to bear the scorching flame, he is utterly devastated by it . . .<sup>24</sup>

We should not suppose that experience of God is open only to the saint. In fact, it is possible an experience came first and eventually led to sainthood. Here is an account of a Jungian psychiatrist who was raised Protestant. As a college English major, she had read about mysticism but found it “. . . all very far away and long ago and not to be taken seriously except as an object of literary study.” In the spring of 1945, when she was 42 years old, for five days,

[t]here was light everywhere. . . . [T]he world was flooded with light, the supernal light that so many of the mystics describe . . . [T]he experience was so overwhelmingly good that I couldn't mistrust it. . . . [G]lory blazing all around me. . . . I realized that some of the medieval poems I had been so innocently handling were written to invoke just such an experience as I had had. (That stuff is still alive, I tell you.)<sup>25</sup>

In 1985 at age 82, she wrote her experience was “. . . so far from anything that I had thought in the realm of the possible, that it has taken me the rest of my life to come to terms with it.”

We might ask, “Do the One, the Real, and other concepts correspond to an objective reality?” The experiences of the mystics suggest an answer: “Yes, indeed. And the experience is potentially available to you.”

Someone might ask, “How can we directly experience an ultimate ground, something below the level of molecule, atom and quark? How can that be possible?” We might answer,<sup>26</sup> “How can direct experience of what we are at the deepest level *not* be possible? How can the image be unable to experience the light? How can the wave be unable to experience the ocean?”<sup>27</sup> The answer is that we are accustomed to experience of image and wave. Experience of God is possible when we focus on the deepest aspect of image and wave, when we focus on our deepest self (negative way) or on the deepest foundation of the external world (affirmative way). More on those terms later.

Direct experience of God is our birthright.

#### Gratuitous Attribution

Symeon identifies Divine light with the Holy Spirit (“possesses within him the light of the Holy Spirit”). Pascal identifies FIRE as a manifestation of God the Father (“God of Abraham, God of

Isaac, God of Jacob”). Someone might describe experience of Uncreated Light as experience of Jesus, Krishna, or some other Person God. Can we argue that a purported experience of any Person God is, in reality, experience of Uncreated Light?

We can. Moreover, this solves a problem. Find a few people who claim a personal relationship with Jesus. Ask them some controversial questions, such as “Does Jesus allow or forbid taking oaths, capital punishment, or war? You’ll get contradictory answers.

But Jesus cannot simultaneously be for and against something. So, what should we conclude? One answer is that their personal relationship is imaginary. Another answer is that we admit the validity of the experience, but deny the interpretation. Pascal and Symeon attribute their experience to different persons of the Christian Trinity. But with what justification? Does experience of FIRE, certitude, joy and peace identify any person God? Or did Pascal and Symeon experience something they intuited of God, and gratuitously identify that God with one of the Trinity? If we accept gratuitous attribution, then we accept the reality of the experience, but do not accept the interpretation.

A final point: notice how “Light” avoids gratuitously attributing a concrete experience to Jesus, God the Father, Allah, Krishna, Buddhism’s Clear Light of the Void, or Ultimate Ground of Existence. In this article, we attribute Light to Ultimate Ground of Existence, but even if our attribution is incorrect, the experience would remain.

#### Old Theology: Way of Knowing

In Old Theology, revelation is complete, final, done. God’s Word has been revealed. Clergy and believers are left only to “properly understand” what scripture says and follow it. Some exceptions to this are denominations which accept the idea of continuing revelation, denominations such as the Quakers<sup>28</sup>, the Latter-Day Saints, and some Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian sects. But a continuing revelation must generally conform to scripture and not contradict accepted dogma.

The philosophic field of epistemology studies valid ways of obtaining genuine knowledge. Epistemological methods—that is, “ways (methods) of knowing”—differ.

Old Theology’s way of knowing—its way of deciding what is true—accepts the authority of scripture and/or of clergy as a legitimate way of determining truth. Something is true, ultimately, because some prophet or person God—Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Krishna, etc.—said so. “God said it; I believe it; and that settles it for me.” Of course, “God said it” means scripture said it: the Bible, the Quran, the Book of Mormon, etc. More accurately, “God said it” refers to clergy’s interpretation of scripture.

Old Theology’s epistemological method is like that of the child in that truth is what someone—some prophet, seer, pope—said or wrote. The child accepts what the parent says. The child has little else to support their beliefs. If two children argue but don’t agree, then they arrive at

“Well, my momma says this.” “But my momma says that.” Now make the question: Is Jesus the Son of God? To find the answer, replace “momma” with “scripture.”

If I follow a religion or scripture that says one thing and you follow a religion whose scripture says the opposite, there is no way to decide which one of us is right and which one of us is wrong. It’s a matter of faith. But faith can, and has, been used to justify untrue propositions.

Scriptures, supposedly dictated by God, contradict each other. In Christianity, Jesus Is God; in Islam, Jesus is a prophet, but certainly not God. Says the Quran: “He begets not, and neither is He begotten.”

#### [New Theology: Way of Knowing](#)

Continuing revelation religions admit that someone could uncover a new insight into God and creation. But Old Theology religions don’t allow new insights to overturn old, to overturn dogma. Their epistemological method doesn’t allow it because God (it is said) inspired scripture. Thus, no continuing revelation will ever overturn the belief that Jesus is God, or that Mohammed is the Seal of the Prophets.

In contrast, science’s way of knowing values truth above accepted beliefs. Einstein’s theory of relativity could dethrone Newtonian physics only because Newton wasn’t declared a prophet and his writings holy scripture. Science’s way of knowing is more mature than Old Theology’s way of knowing. Would not an obvious next step in the evolution of religion be to adopt an epistemological method that incorporates, as far as possible, science’s epistemological method? But what would a religion that employs, as far as possible, science’s epistemological method, science’s way of knowing, be like?

#### [Old Theology: Divergence/Convergence](#)

Old Theology’s way of knowing promotes divergence of religions. For example, in 1054 the Christian Church split into Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox. Luther and the Protestant Reformation brought more denominations. Yet all use the same scripture (plus or minus the deuterocanonical books).

Yet, they diverge; they do not agree. The Roman Catholic Church for centuries taught “There is no salvation outside the Church.”<sup>29</sup> As St. Thomas Aquinas wrote: “[F]or there is no entering into salvation outside the Church, just as in the time of the deluge there was none outside the Ark.”<sup>30</sup> Some Baptists say Catholics and Mormons need to be saved. Some Christians believe baptism by immersion is essential to salvation. Ask a Christian how to be saved and you may get different, contradictory answers depending on whom you ask. And, of course, Christianity and Islam have divergent views on salvation.

Religions diverge. Old Theology religions have not converged to a single truth.

Today, distinct Christian denominations number in the hundreds. The number of the world's contradictory religious sects is much higher. It could not be otherwise. Scriptures differ, interpretations differ, and so religions diverge. Ask someone in Italy, Iran, and India what happens after death and you get three different answers. In Christianity, ask how to be saved and you get contradictory answers. But if God is a reality, shouldn't religions converge? The universe is an objective reality and science has converged to a worldview that mirrors that reality. Ask a physicist, chemist, or biologist in Italy, Iran, and India a question and you get the same answer. Science proves every day that its understanding of the universe is correct. Whenever we use a cell phone or a computer, whenever we use a GPS satellite, or a thousand other devices, we see that science works. Science knows of what it speaks.

So, what should we conclude? If God does not exist, if the Gods of Old Theology are inventions, then we should expect contradictory religions and denominations. But if God is an objective reality, then why haven't religions converged? If we assume there is one universal reality, we would expect different people of different times in different countries to have insights which converge. Shouldn't religions "done right" converge? But they don't. Might the reason be their faulty "way of knowing," their childlike epistemological method?

#### [New Theology: Divergence/Convergence](#)

By the 1900s, Newton's mechanics had given Western Europe unrivaled worldly power. The Congo was the Belgian Congo. There was French Indonesia. It was said the Sun never sets on the British Empire—and that was literally true because the sun was always shining on some part of the Empire: on India, on Australia, on Canada, or on Britain itself. Yet when Einstein said that Newtonian mechanics was faulty, was wrong, scientists didn't condemn him as a heretic and burn him at the stake. After experiments proved Einstein correct, science accepted his theories. Science has a superior epistemological method, a method that doesn't rely on mere authority, on mere say-so. As a result, science has a superior grasp on truth. Science arrives at universal truth. Religions evidently do not. Thus, at least some beliefs of religions must be fantasy-based.

Religions have not converged. Yet, it might be said that religions have achieved a weak type of convergence on a "common core." In 1945, Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)—regarded as one of the foremost intellectuals of his time—wrote *The Perennial Philosophy*.<sup>31</sup> In the introduction to another book, he gives a concise description of the perennial philosophy.

More than twenty-five centuries have passed since that which has been called the Perennial Philosophy was first committed to writing; and in the course of those centuries it has found expression. . . In Vedanta and Hebrew Prophecy, in the Tao Teh King and the Platonic dialogues, in the Gospel according to St. John and Mahayana theology, in Plotinus and the Areopagite, among the Persian Sufis and the Christian mystics of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance—the Perennial Philosophy has spoken almost all the languages of Asia and Europe and has made use of the terminology and traditions of every one of the higher religions. But under all this confusion of tongues and myths, of local histories and particularist doctrines, there remains a Highest Common Factor,

which is the Perennial Philosophy in what may be called its chemically pure state.<sup>32</sup>

But what Huxley describes is not actual convergence; a better description is that different religions and philosophies are like different ores. The ores differ in composition, but all contain a grain of gold. Or pure truth is like pure water, but religion is like water colored with local pigments. So, we imagine mystics and seers experience the same Uncreated Light but describe their experience in a way conditioned by their culture. A Christian monk might describe an experience as of Jesus and describe feelings of love, of personal unworthiness, of sinfulness, and the need for redemption. An ancient Greek woman might attribute the experience to the Goddess Athena, and color it with themes taken from Greek culture.

Huxley describes the perennial philosophy as follows.

At the core of the Perennial Philosophy we find four fundamental doctrines.

First: the phenomenal world of matter and of individualized consciousness—the world of things and animals and men and even gods—is the manifestation of a Divine Ground within which all partial realities have their being, and apart from which they would be nonexistent.

Second: human beings are capable not merely of knowing about the Divine Ground by inference; they can also realize its existence by a direct intuition, superior to discursive reasoning. This immediate knowledge unites the knower with that which is known.

Third: man possesses a double nature, a phenomenal ego and an eternal Self, which is the inner man, the spirit, the spark of divinity within the soul. It is possible for a man, if he so desires, to identify himself with the spirit and therefore with the Divine Ground which is of the same or like nature with the spirit.

These doctrines go to ontology, to what exists, to “is.”

Regarding the first doctrine, religions differ in scripture, dogma, historical claims, creation myths, and more. Many religions do not regard the phenomenal world as a manifestation of a Divine Ground. But, per Huxley, all religions have people who leave conceptual dogma behind and rise to direct experience of the Real, the Ultimate Ground of Existence. Huxley’s claim is that those who directly experienced Reality often perceive it as “a Divine Ground within which all partial realities have their being, and apart from which they would be nonexistent.”

The second and third doctrines speak to the possibility of direct experience of the Divine Ground such as Augustine, Pascal, and Symeon experienced.

Huxley’s fourth doctrine is:

Fourth: man’s life on earth has only one end and purpose: to identify himself with his eternal Self and so to come to unitive knowledge of the Divine Ground.

The fourth doctrine goes not to “is” but to “ought.” But “oughts” are a matter of choice. A person chooses their own life’s end and purpose. Finding God, knowledge of the Divine Ground, is but one of many possible purposes.

Huxley says we gain knowledge of the Divine Ground in contemplation.

. . . It is only in the act of contemplation, when words and even personality are transcended, that the pure state of the Perennial Philosophy can actually be known. The records left by those who have known it in this way make it abundantly clear that all of them, whether Hindu, Buddhist, Hebrew, Taoist, Christian or Mohammedan, were attempting to describe the same essentially indescribable Fact.

Contemplation can bring us face to face with reality at its deepest level. Like Pascal’s experience of FIRE and Symeon’s experience of light, the contemplative goes beyond theological reasoning and scriptural inference to experience something outside themselves, a universal reality, which paradoxically is at the same time their deepest self. We are part of reality, so it seems fitting that we go within, to *our* deepest level, to contact reality at *its* deepest level. Because the experience goes beyond words, we might expect descriptions to be inadequate, even paradoxical.

#### Old Theology: Clergy

Scripture puts power in the hands of the few, the recognized interpreters of scripture, who, in some religions, must be members of a religious institution (such as the Catholic Church). Clergy claim the authority to say what scripture “really means.” Using various techniques,<sup>33</sup> they can justify almost any interpretation. In Christianity, for example, Jesus in Matthew 5:33-37 clearly says to not take oaths. But this means, we are told, that taking an oath is allowable. At a very young age, clergy teach children that the serpent of Genesis is actually Satan. Children are taught to accept what clergy say the Bible says, rather than what they see with their own eyes.

Believers who think they are following “The Word of God” are, in fact, often following clergy or priest.<sup>34</sup>

#### New Theology: Clergy

New Theology denies the ultimate ontological reality of person Gods; it sees them as either personifications or as “creatures” grounded in the one ultimate ground. Denying Gods who are persons implicitly denies they authored or inspired scripture. New Theology accepts no writings as scripture, as beyond question and revision. Indeed, it could not do otherwise if it is to employ science’s way of knowing.

So, upon what might a New Theology clergy base their authority, if not on scripture? Would there even be a clergy?



No, but this is a strength, not a weakness. Many fields are meritocracies. Those fields have no official clergy, but they do have individuals generally acknowledged as leaders. The status of these individuals rests upon their accomplishments. Einstein was a clerk in a patent office. He achieved preeminence in physics by penetrating deeper into reality than anyone before him. No one claimed Mozart was fathered by music. No one ordained Mozart into some music clergy. Mozart's reputation rests upon his work. Similarly, the famous mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan was born the son of a shop clerk in India. He achieved prominence when he sent some theorems he'd discovered to a famous English mathematician. Ramanujan's status in mathematics rests entirely upon the genius of his work. Even sports teams are meritocracies. The players on professional teams are simply the best at what they do.

Contrast this to the Middle Ages, when someone could purchase the office of bishop or cardinal, or today when personal saintliness is often not a requirement for advancement in a religious hierarchy.

Because God is immanent in everyone, anyone is potential clergy, potential minister. Traditional Quakers have no pastor or minister; Quakers minister to one another. During Meeting for Worship (i.e., Sunday service), they sit quietly and look inside until (ideally) the spirit of God moves someone to speak. The highest position in a Quaker "Meeting" (i.e., church) is administrative; members rotate filling the role of "meeting clerk," much like college professors rotate being Department Chair. The source of Quaker continuing revelation is the people.

Conceivably, New Theology might have "freelance" clergy. To learn music, we go to a music teacher who has demonstrated musical ability. Schools of music exist, but anyone is free to offer lessons. In Protestant Christianity, the situation is similar except clergy claim to follow the Bible.

#### Old Theology: Government

In Old Theology, God is heaven's monarch, heaven's ultimate authority who must be obeyed. Governments which mirror that arrangement have a king or authoritarian one-party rule. Such governments and Old Theology have long been close friends. State receives God's blessing and a stable, obedient populace; State gives respect and privileges to religion (favorable laws,<sup>35</sup> tax exemption, even public funds in some countries).

For instance, Medieval Europe placed the persons of the Trinity as ultimate authority. Below the Trinity were angels, then the saints in heaven. On Earth, the pope claimed the title Vicar of Christ, indicating he represented Jesus on Earth and possessed Christ's authority. Below pope, cardinal, and bishop was the king. Clergy presided over the king's coronation, symbolizing that the king's authority descended from God through clergy to the king. Below the king are the lords and princes who share in the king's authority, and the military who protect the king's rule. Somewhere further down the hierarchy, we find the common people.

That God gives authority to the king naturally implies a “Divine Right of Kings” which itself implies the king enjoys an authority which no earthly person or group can challenge. Taken to the extreme, we have theocratic government where government leaders are clergy who claim divine guidance.<sup>36</sup> Typically, civil law reflects religious dogma. Church and State are intimately connected.

Because authority and power flow downward from God through clerics to the king, the will and thoughts of the people aren't particularly relevant. Kings are free to declare war for the flimsiest of reasons, or give no reason, and the people must obey. Without question.

Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die.  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.<sup>37</sup>

Such governments exist today. And sometimes citizens of non-theocratic nations accept the weakest of reasons for going to war. The mere fact a leader says war is necessary is taken as sufficient justification.

The friendship of Church and State proves the usefulness of each to the other. But the multiplicity of past and present Church/State alliances makes it easy to doubt that any such religion is objectively true. When the primary (though often unacknowledged) goal is political stability and cohesion, truth comes second. Sometimes, a wealthy elite arises who use religion to justify wealth and privilege, at the expense of the common person.

#### [New Theology: Government](#)

That God is immanent, that God resides in each person, supports the idea of democratic government. Thus, New Theology offers support for an egalitarian society where all people are essentially equal and enjoy equal rights.<sup>38</sup> In such a society, presidents and prime Ministers replace the king. Civil servants replace nobles and lords. The authority of civil officials derives not from “on high” but from the people.<sup>39</sup> Civil officials typically serve limited terms and derive their authority from the consent of the people. The people express their will through voting, where, God being equally present in everyone, there is “one person, one vote.” Ideally, civil servants serve the interests of the public; less ideally, they put their own enrichment before the public good.

But could a New Theology religion offer the same support of political stability and cohesion as do Old Theology religions, the same rubber-stamp approval of war?<sup>40</sup> Probably not. Free people don't always agree. In a democracy, majority rules. Quakers go one step further. In trying to decide some question, they seek not merely majority assent but unity, consensus. The author has witnessed occasions where someone could not unite with a decision but “stood aside” for the sake of unity.

Democracy can be a disjointed, contentious, discouraging process,<sup>41</sup> which is not surprising because democracy requires a more mature personality. In a monarchy or authoritarian one-party rule society, the people's role resembles that of a child: obey and respect authority. A democracy asks people to determine their own fate; the immature and glib, who fall prey to con artists and glib, simplistic answers are an ever-present threat to the health of a democracy. Therefore, democracies value education.

"That of God in everyone" motivates freedom of religion, which motivates Church/State separation, because government cannot justly favor one religion over another. This leaves people to choose a religion, or choose no religion. Many people choose what "works," what helps them live their lives. A few will dedicate themselves to finding truth, regardless of the consequences. For such people, Huxley's fourth doctrine applies: "Man's life on earth has only one end and purpose: to identify himself with his eternal Self and so to come to unitive knowledge of the Divine Ground."

[We Might Wonder](#) We might wonder if New Theology is only for "the few."? Is it only for the would-be saint and mystic? Not only—it's for would-be saints and mystics, yes. But it's also for non-religious people devoted to truth: for example, the scientist, researcher, philosopher, either by vocation or avocation.

#### Old Theology: Society

Old Theology supports an earthly hierarchical society that reflects heaven's supposed hierarchy.<sup>42</sup> Standing below the king are the nobles, regarded as superior to the common people. Nobles dominate the common people. Among common people, men often dominate women, with the support of scripture.<sup>43</sup> One race or ethnic group may dominate others.<sup>44</sup> (Scholars debate if scripture "really" gives support or not.)

In such societies, deviation from accepted dogma can be dangerous, even fatal. Historical cases are many of men or women who suffered torture and death for the "crimes" of heresy or apostasy. (Note here the connection between church and state; to disrespect God is a crime against the State.) But if violence of the worst kind is justified against citizens, then it's also justified against "barbaric," "savage," "evil" foreigners, as, for example, in the destruction of the Cathars.<sup>45</sup>

How should someone behave whose goal is to fit in with society, to make their way in the world? They should not criticize dogma if they prefer to keep living. They should accept what the Church or the State say, not question or criticize.

If Church and State declare contradictory dogmas, a citizen will have to choose, to accept one and reject the other, an unpleasant situation. To avoid that quandary, the populace often support the interweaving of God and Country, so the two are never in conflict. The people can safely follow the party line.

Old Theology religions often provide an account of creation (for example, the seven-day creation and Adam and Eve stories) and an account of our ultimate fate for the person (heaven or hell) or the ultimate fate of the universe (Christianity's Second Coming of Jesus). The believer may live comfortably in this life and expect a wonderful, eternal afterlife, as long as they obey God (substitute "clergy" for "God") and Country. Thus, citizens submit to people who claim the authority of a personal God and the God's sacred writings.<sup>46</sup> The validity of the claim is beyond empirical testing and therefore can only rest upon faith. Often, clergy indoctrinate children as young as five or six to prevent outbreaks of rational questioning and critical reason.

The creation/ultimate-fate stories, the close connection of God and Country, passively accepting what to think and how to behave, all provide the believer with a small, snug, secure world, a cocoon—a shield against an unimaginably vast universe. We may wonder if it is also a shield against truth itself.

#### New Theology: Society

The idea of an impersonal, immanent God has consequences for society. First, if God is immanent then we may find God in our deepest self. We do not need the special messages of clergy or Holy Scripture. Of course, we may find truth in some writing. And we may accept the help of people who are further along, more experienced at going inward and finding God. Just as we may employ a music teacher, we may accept a spiritual advisor, if only temporarily. (In the Christian tradition, monks and nuns sometimes had a father confessor who functioned as a spiritual teacher.)

The "crimes" of heresy or apostasy do not exist in a New Theology religion. Theologically, such a religion can regard other religions as valid and useful. Conceivably, this might manifest at the national level, where we recognize the right of other nations to exist.

Also, if God is within each one of us, then we are all, in our most fundamental aspect, equal. So, speech should be free, for an immanent God may speak through the mouth of anyone. And hearers, who also possess God within, may freely discern the value and truth of what they hear. Because it rejects the ultimate ontological reality of person Gods and purported scriptures, and because it aspires to employ science's way of knowing, New Theology may appeal to society's highly educated, to the skeptical, the rational, the intelligent. Such individuals might thrive in such a society. Outspoken, intelligent free-thinkers may criticize government or religion if the facts demand. In contrast, believers in Old Theology religions often voice as little criticism of government or religion as did serfs of old.

By accepting the conclusions of science, New Theology presents us with facts, facts that can stretch our understanding and broaden our world view. Such facts include that my person is just one of billions on Earth; that I live on one tiny speck in an unimaginably vast universe—where the number of known stars literally outnumber all the grains of sand on all the beaches of Earth; that my lifespan is like one or two heartbeats in the lifespan of a star. All these facts challenge me to look beyond my all-too-finite existence to something beyond.

### Old Theology: Morality

The idea of heaven and hell supports a “carrot and stick” approach to morality. The carrot is the eternal happiness that God grants to those who please Him/Her. The stick is the threat of God’s punishment, in this life and/or the next. Morality is said to be objective, based on God’s will, not subjective, not merely the majority’s judgement. Just as a metal is objectively either gold or lead, actions are said to be objectively good or evil.

The idea of objectively valid morals raises a problem: if they exist then how could a good, loving God fail to communicate them clearly, i.e., fail to communicate clearly what is and is not objectively moral? In medieval Europe, it was thought objectively moral to burn women to death for witchcraft.<sup>47</sup> Much of the Christian world believed for centuries that slavery was objectively moral.<sup>48</sup> If these practices are objectively immoral, then why didn’t God make that obvious? Serious moral questions exist today for which scripture has no answer or ambiguous answers, and for which religious leaders have contradictory answers.

Also, if an objective morality exists, how could we come to know it? Clerics would reply, “Through scripture.” But clergy use various techniques to make scripture say what they wish it to say. The opinion of the public, or of some dominant class, determine what is moral and what is not. Old Theology moral systems are, in fact, subjective morality systems.

There’s a danger inherent with believing morals are absolute and unquestionable, and come from God, that is people may accept as moral something their heart says is wrong. Some truly atrocious “morals” have been practiced for centuries.<sup>49</sup> For example, recall the torture and death by fire for centuries in medieval Europe of harmless old mothers and grandmothers. How could some who witnessed old grandmothers burning to death not have felt in their heart it was immoral? Only, I think, by believing they were obeying an objectively moral command by a God whom we may not question.

### New Theology: Morality

Refusing to regard a writing as scripture, as inspired by some person God, demands a New Theology religion look to the evidence to decide moral values. Looking at the evidence means looking at the universe as it is. But the philosopher David Hume famously said we cannot derive an “ought” an “is.” A map of reality doesn’t tell you how to behave in that reality,<sup>50</sup> just as a travel map doesn’t tell you where to go. But we can derive an “ought” if we add a goal to an “is.” A travel map along with the goal of reaching a distant city quickly may dictate which highway to travel or which other means (air, sea, etc.) to use.

But what goal? The term “eudaimonia”<sup>51</sup> is Aristotle’s answer. Often rendered as “human flourishing” it also has the sense of wellbeing and happiness. Of course, different people will have different views of what constitutes human flourishing. But without the belief in morals “handed down from on high,” their discussions would likely be evidence-based—and, likely, never lead to burning old women to death.

Judging the morality of acts by their effects, their consequences, is called a consequentialist morality by philosophers. In a word, the ends justify the means. Deontology is an alternative type of moral system where the morality of an act is measured against some standard, often a scripture but, for Kant, pure reason. In Kant's system, telling the truth is always morally correct (i.e., a categorical imperative) while lying is always immoral, even to save someone's life.

New Theology, if it is to follow an epistemological system similar to science's, should treat consequences as data, as the result of experiments. Thus, it appears New Theology should accept a consequentialist moral system, such as one where the morality of acts is judged by consequences, by their effects on human flourishing. Because it does not accept any writings as Holy Writ, it can not accept a deontological system of morality.

#### Old Theology: Sexuality

Some Old Theology religions have restrictive teachings about sexuality. In extreme cases, sexuality is only between a man and a woman, ideally used only for procreation; contraception is forbidden as are many extramarital sexual activities. Such an attitude naturally follows from the belief that God is a person who can see all. It would embarrass most people to engage in sexual activity in the presence of a parent or child or friend. How much more might the embarrassment be in the sight of God? Thus, a teaching naturally follows that says: we must do "this" to have children, but we certainly won't do "that" or "that" or definitely not "that." He'll see us if we do!

Yet, the strict sexuality of such religions would have human couples behave like the lower animals. The female cat or dog, for instance, is interested in sex only when conception is possible. This view seems beneath the dignity of humanity.

#### New Theology: Sexuality

New Theology has a more liberal attitude towards sexuality and towards acts which harm no one. And far from procreation being the central purpose of sexuality, it's secondary. Primary is the love shared between two people; the intimate closeness, the regard for each other.

Of course, some people allow themselves to be dominated by sexuality and commit evil, even criminal, acts. New Theology condemns such activity. But it also rejects the other extreme: the restrictive teachings of some Old Theology religions.

However, the person following the negative way, of leaving the surface world and diving deep, may want to avoid sexual activity because such activity is on the surface of the ocean, although it may touch us deeply. Such a person may choose to follow a restricted sex life.

### Old Theology: Past, Present, Future

Often, Old Theology religion looks to past times of great significance: for instance, the times when God communicated with prophets, appeared to seers, or even when God himself walked the Earth. The Future, too, has high significance because it's often thought to hold eternal bliss or eternal torture, or a better reincarnation. The present may seem significant or not. If someone is still trying to be saved, to go to heaven when they die, then the present may be of supreme importance because the present is where we attain salvation. On the other hand, if someone is confident that they're already saved, or confident they'll have a favorable reincarnation, then the present may seem like a tedious waiting period.

Belief in a person God in heaven reinforces the idea that the universe and God are separate. A natural corollary is that an intimate connection with God is something that may occur in the future, in the next life, but we should not expect such a connection in this life. And some clergy claim possession of the "keys to the kingdom of heaven,"<sup>52</sup> again supporting the idea that ideal existence awaits in the future in the kingdom of heaven, and is not realizable now. Therefore, many believers follow their religion, feel confident in a favorable afterlife, but don't expect to achieve any intimacy with God in this life.

Yet, in the Christian context, we have Jesus saying "The kingdom of God is within you."<sup>53</sup> implying there is something more to be sought in the here and now. Some people seek in this life an intimate relationship with God. These are the few, who devote their lives to helping the poor and the diseased, or those who withdraw to the cave or a cloistered monastic order. Often, they do so out of devotion to some God who is a person. Can New Theology explain similar behavior? Can it motivate it?

### New Theology: Past, Present, Future

New theology gives supremacy to the present. We experience the past and the future only in our mind, only in our thoughts. The experience of the present goes beyond our mind and thoughts. The present—the "here and now"—is what Old Theology might call "God-given" and New Theology would describe as, at root, an experience of God. The present is reality. God, the Uncreated Light, creates us in this very moment—in the here and now—just as the fountain creates the spray.

Of course, the universe may surprise us. Perhaps the past exists in some form, outside of space and time. For instance, when we watch a movie, we see one frame then another, but all past frames exist on the device. We may revisit any frame we wish. But if the past might exist, might not the future, too? If the future does already exist, wouldn't that mean the future is predetermined, that there is no free will?

Speculation aside, for us reality lies in the present, a present within in a universe billions of years old, of unimaginable size, of almost infinite complexity. But we know this reality mostly on the surface, just as in a movie we see the images but ignore the light. We live on the surface of an ocean. In the ocean's depths lies our ultimate ground, what we call God. Some people



want to discern God on the surface, see the ocean in the waves. Others want to dive below, dive closer to God. The first follow the positive way; the second, the negative way.

The positive way stays on the surface. It accepts the universe as it appears, but tries to look below appearances to the Uncreated Light, tries to see appearances “sub specie aeternitatis.”<sup>54</sup> The seeker who follows the positive way seeks to see God in everyday experience. Or seeks to see everyday experience in God. From this comes the desire to serve God by serving creation, serving that of God in everyone. For instance, we have those who devote their lives to helping the poor and the diseased.

The person who follows the negative way tries to dive deep. They withdraw from the world and try to find God with themselves. They live in the cloister, the desert,<sup>55</sup> the cave.

The positive way is more suited to people active in the world: the student, the employee, the homeowner, the parent, the extrovert, the doer. The negative way is more suited to the person who can withdraw from the world: the introvert, the thinker, the monk, the retired person.

The ways are not mutually exclusive; both may be practiced by leading active life and withdrawing regularly to practice meditative exercises.

Of course, many have followed the positive or negative way out of devotion to some person God. We don't claim New Theology motivated their behavior. Rather, we point out how New Theology could motivate similar behavior.

### Old Theology: The Ego

“Ego, noun, The self, especially as distinct from the world and other selves.”  
—Merriam-Webster dictionary

As a child begins to identify with their name, they begin to see themselves as a separate person, an ego: “My name is Pete, and I am 8 years old. I am a different person from mom, dad, and any other person.” As Pete ages, his ego—his self-image—changes. Pete is an elementary school student. Later, he's employed, a spouse and a parent. Eventually, Pete leaves the workforce and retires. The ego, it seems, is a collection of temporary selves, selves that come and go: student then employee then retired. (Is there anything in us that is unchanging, that remains the same throughout our life? We'll return to this question when we discuss the deep self.)

Pete soon learns he is vulnerable. He sometimes feels pain. He reads about people who suffer terrible disease. He learns people die and that someday he will experience the same. Such thoughts might alter Pete's self-image: “My name is Pete. While I'm alive, I am subject to pain and disease. Eventually, I will die.” Such a self-image might lead to anxiety and depression. So, Pete may seek the comforting protection of a more powerful person, a person God.



Religions answer Pete's need various ways. With Christianity, a carrot and stick technique is used to answer Pete's need for reassurance, for a stronger, more resilient ego. Christianity addresses the two poles of Pete's emotional nature: fear/terror (stick) and the desire for bliss (carrot). It teaches that Pete was born with original sin and (in some versions of Christianity) is a filthy sinner and totally depraved. Pete deserves eternal punishment (Fear/Terror). Such teachings would increase Pete's anxiety and depression to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree, making him desperate for a solution.

But wait! says Christianity. God has a special regard for you. In fact, He loves you. He died for you. And you will enjoy eternal joy with God in heaven (Bliss). You he will live forever in a paradise called Heaven (as long as you accept and follow Christianity's teachings). Some believers go a step further and claim a special relationship with the creator of the universe,<sup>56</sup> for instance, a personal relationship with Jesus. Taken to the extreme, we might imagine someone longing to rule his/her own planet as a God.<sup>57</sup>

Old Theology religions reinforce the ego, helping it feel secure, safe, protected. Dogmas of eternal life or reincarnation reduce the fear of death. On the other hand, several Old Theology teachings encourage a lessened concern with ego; they encourage a concern with the wellbeing of others and even, at times, ascetic self-denial.

For instance, an ego concerned only with itself, with its own satisfaction might think highly of itself (Pride) and be envious (Envy) of people who seem more fortunate, and may want things (Greed, Gluttony) and people (Lust) to satisfy its own needs, and might feel hostile (Wrath) toward people who frustrate or block satisfaction of need. Christianity condemns these actions as the "Seven Deadly Sins" of pride, envy, greed, gluttony, lust, wrath, sloth. (But what of sloth? Perhaps sloth is a lack of concern for other people?)

Moreover, the natural inclination of an ego is to defend itself. But Jesus advises to "Turn the other cheek" and "Forgive seven times seventy," suggesting a lessened attachment. And believers routinely run soup kitchens,<sup>58</sup> thrift stores, as well as hospitals and schools, all dedicated to helping other people.

And there's the self-denial and asceticism of the monk or yogi, who withdraws from society to "find God." The monk or nun in a cloistered order; the yogi in a cave; the monks of Mount Athos; the Desert Fathers, to name a few—cultivate humility and practice asceticism, fasting and prayer to become less ego-centered and more God-centered.

From the viewpoint of Old Theology, the behavior of monks and ascetics may be difficult to explain. Why should someone spend their life doing so much more than the average believer when the result is the same: heaven? Why would love of God lead a person to abandon a comfortable life and even society for the monastery or the cave?

### New Theology: The Ego

Pete's ego includes temporary, ever-changing selves (student then employee then retired), selves which are not ontologically basic. Even our most intimate selves—our body, emotions, and thoughts—are ever-changing. New Theology regards the ego as our current collection of temporary, ever-changing selves. But it also says that at the deepest level, we are expressions of the ultimate ground of existence; we are literally an image of God—as is everything else we experience.

Such a view can persuade someone to follow the affirmative way or the negative way.

The affirmative way: Consider the person who sees the entire world as a manifestation of a single, ultimate ground, i.e., God. That person has followed the path of the affirmative way to its end. The division between self and other people, self and the external world, has been overcome. Such a person can love others as they love themselves because they see no fundamental difference between themselves and others. They can devote their lives to helping others because they hardly see a distinction between helping others and helping themselves.

People on the path, who want to reach the end of the affirmative way—who want to experience directly the presence of God in other people and the world at large—may practice the same self-denying behavior, hoping it helps them advance on the path. Thus, the self-sacrificing person who helps others. Thus, the person who has a concern with social justice and ecological well-being. Thus, New Theology motivates the affirmative way.

The negative way: God is the basis of my existence. The ego is like a wave on an ocean of infinite light. Thus, the desire to withdraw from the surface self, from the ego, in order to dive deep. The person withdraws from the external world, other people; that person in deep meditation may become unattached to their temporal selves of body, emotion, thought. So, New Theology easily explains the behavior of the monk and ascetic as leaving the ocean's surface and diving deep.

So, a lessened concern with ego<sup>59</sup>—whether it's practicing "Turn the other cheek" and "Forgive seven times seventy," running soup kitchens, thrift stores, hospitals and schools of the affirmative way, or it's practicing the self-denial of the ascetic or the withdrawal of the monk or yogi of the negative way—all follow naturally in New Theology.

Of course, we don't claim New Theology motivated those who practice the affirmative or the negative way. Their religion may have motivated them, or they may have had other reasons. They may have discovered empirically, or accepted on faith, that certain practices lead to a more intimate experience of God.

### Old Theology: After Life

What happens to me after death? Does I survive in some form or another? We'll discuss four answers.

**First Answer:** Once created, I am eternal. I possess an eternal soul that survives the death of the body. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism teach the soul exists for all eternity, ultimately in either heaven or hell.<sup>60</sup> The soul is separate and distinct from God; it is ontologically basic. God creates the soul but once created, it exists for all eternity.

This answer raises some problems.

The first problem is that heaven or hell seem inappropriate for the great majority of people, who live moderately good lives (but don't dedicate themselves to helping the poor or to ceaselessly praying to God) and moderately bad lives (sometimes dishonest or selfish or unkind).

The second problem concerns the nature of the self. Over a lifetime, a person will have many selves, e.g., the infant, the student; the employee; the spouse, the parent, the grandparent. Given that temporary selves come and go, we may ask: Which of our many temporary selves persist into the afterlife? Which selves go to heaven (or hell)?

Consider, for example, Saint Augustine who was sexually active in his youth, fathering a son with a woman he never married. He famously prayed: "God, give me chastity and continency, only not yet." Later, he repented and became a saint. Did Augustine's erotic, lecherous self go to heaven along with his saintly self?

Or consider Zoe, a sweet old woman who passed at 90. Imagine Zoe had a characteristic fault, say, envy. If Zoe goes to heaven, does her envious self go there, too?

Another problem: once in heaven can I change and grow? Can I gain and lose temporary selves? Suppose Ann, Zoe's granddaughter, looks forward to meeting Zoe in heaven. Ann remembers Zoe as she was at 90. But suppose in heaven Zoe prefers her 19-year-old body to her 90-year-old body. And suppose Zoe's envious self no longer exists. And suppose Zoe had a lifelong wish to understand Einstein's general theory of relativity. Being in heaven, she can easily fulfill that wish. When Ann finally meets Zoe in heaven, does she meet the person she expected to meet? Or a disappointingly different person?

Further, in heaven, Zoe can learn anything she wishes and—within limits—become anything she wishes. Within limits. After untold billions and trillions of years, do the limits chafe? Might Zoe eventually desire the ultimate: to become God? The legend of Satan's rebellion in heaven seems to answer "Yes." The story suggests eternal existence as a separate person may ultimately become unsatisfying.

It seems there are logical problems with the idea of an eternal soul.<sup>61</sup>

The concept of temporary selves leads to another concept: the deep, permanent self. We have selves that are temporary, contingent, selves that come and go (e.g., Augustine's erotic self). Is

there any permanent core self, a “deep self” which gains and loses our temporary selves? If so, the deep self is truly us: we don’t *have* a deep self, we *are* a deep self. The deep self is our “I”. We say “my body”, “my emotions”, “my mind” as if body, emotions, and mind are possessions.<sup>62</sup> But who or what is the possessor that has a body, emotions, and a mind? The deep self, if it exists.

**Second Answer:** After death the deep self eventually reincarnates, on Earth or elsewhere. Further, it carries some of its tendencies.<sup>63</sup> But the deep self is not eternal; it ultimately merges back with the One, from whence it came, as a river merges with the ocean.

This idea occurs in Hinduism where, in one version, the *jivatma* is the individual soul which reincarnates but “after a long process of development and experience again returns to the unity of the Ātmā,”<sup>64</sup> i.e., the One.

**Third Answer:** No deep self exists. Yet, reincarnation is possible.

The third answer is that the deep self is illusory; it does not, in fact, exist. There is nothing underlying the temporary selves that come and go.<sup>65</sup> We are at any time merely a bundle of our current temporary selves. This idea occurs in Buddhism’s *Anatta*<sup>66</sup> doctrine (non-self doctrine) which says I consist only of the “five aggregates: matter, sensation or feeling, perception, thoughts, and consciousness. At death, the five aggregates cease to function or disperse (as the atoms of our body return to the biosphere) and I simply cease to exist.

Yet Buddhism accepts that reincarnation is possible. Reincarnation of what? A difficult question. One answer is that, as in Hinduism, some residue of our temporary selves somehow forms the personality of a newborn. Just as one candle lights another, passing on its flame, somehow our tendencies pass on to another being, a being which also lacks a deep self.

**Fourth answer:** at death we simply cease to exist; I do not possess a deep self. When I die, I simply end. Some people find this answer terrifying. Everything we were just ceases to exist? The good we do is not rewarded? The evil we do is not punished? Where is justice?<sup>67</sup>

### The Deep Self

We asked, “What happens after death? Do I survive in some form or another?” The answer depends upon the nature of “me” and “I”, upon the nature of our deep self—if we have one.

Some entities lack a deep self; they are a mere bundle. For example, a sports team lacks a deep self. The name of a sport team may remain constant over the decades but the name refers to an ever-changing bundle: a collection of athletes, managers, and stadiums. The name refers to nothing in the physical world which is constant. The sports team lacks a deep self.

Or again consider Oxford University. The name “Oxford University” remained constant over the centuries, even though its buildings, professors, students, and staff have come and gone. But

“Oxford University” corresponds to nothing that has remained constant over the centuries. Oxford University is an action, a whirlpool, with components constantly flowing in and out.

So, the answer to the afterlife question depends on who or what I am. A common response to the question “Who am I?” is to list various temporary identities, various temporary selves. I am a student; I am an employee. But when I leave school, I cease to be a student. When I retire, I am no longer an employee. Some selves are temporary; they come and they go.

Yet, my name (“Arthur”) has remained constant since my birth. “Arthur” refers to my current collection of selves: Arthur is a parent, Arthur is a spouse, Arthur is retired. Yet there was a time when I was not a parent, spouse, or retired. Does “Arthur” also refer to anything in me which was present from the first and is present now?

#### Know thyself – Socrates

If my name refers merely to a collection of ever-changing selves, then I have no deep self. In this case, “Arthur” is like the name of a sports team. The name indicates nothing permanent but rather a collection of ever-changing entities (players, managers, staff, etc.) On the other hand, if “Arthur” refers to something which has remained constant, then it seems it must refer to my temporary selves *and* my deep self, if I have one.

#### Experiencing the Deep Self

Old theology religions often demand faith; for example, a Christian must have faith that they have a soul. But if we accept the empirical spirit of science, we cannot rely on faith. To answer the question of “Do I have a deep self?” with a faith-based “Yes” is not sufficient. Rather, we must ask, can we experience our deep self in the here and now?

We may ask the same question of the soul. Many religions identify the soul as our permanent, enduring self. But is the soul something I can experience in the here and now? If not, then why should I care about the fate of my eternal soul? If I cannot experience my soul, then at this very moment it might be in heaven, hell, or sitting atop the Eiffel Tower, but I wouldn’t know it. So, why should I care?

But certainly, believers expect to be conscious of their after-death state: they hope to be conscious of bliss (heaven) and not agony (hell). So, we can conclude many people implicitly believe that consciousness is the soul, or at least, a function of the soul. Indeed, consciousness was present when I was born, at every life event, and is here now. So, it seems identifying consciousness with the deep self makes sense.

Does it?

Let’s imagine a human being as consisting of four parts: body, emotion, intellect, and consciousness. The four-part view is a time-honored view of a person. For instance, in Christianity the Four Evangelists are often symbolized as:

- an ox (body, Mark)
- a lion (emotion, Matthew)
- an eagle (intellect, John)
- a man or angel (soul, Luke).

India has the yoga of the body (Karma yoga), of emotion and devotion (Bhakti yoga), the path of knowledge (Jnana yoga), and of meditative consciousness (Raja yoga). The Roman Catholic Baltimore Catechism has.

Who made me? God made me. Why did God make me? God made me to know, love, and serve Him.

Notice the correspondence: know, intellect; love, emotion; serve, body. (Also, notice how “Who made me?” presupposes a person God.)

My body, emotions, and intellect change over the years. My body today differs greatly from my infant body. My emotions and thoughts may change even from moment to moment. Does “Arthur” refer to anything which was part of me at birth and is still part of me today? If not, then I am merely a miscellaneous collection of temporary selves. And when the temporary selves cease (as they do at death<sup>68</sup>), I simply cease to exist. Or do I possess a deep self? Or, rather, *am* I a deep self?

If we accept the four-part view, then it appears the only candidate for our deep self is our consciousness. Can we identify consciousness with the deep self?

An objection to identifying consciousness with the deep self is that consciousness is not a thing but an emergent process: consciousness is a process; it’s what the brain does. But processes (such as Oxford University and whirlpools) do not possess a deep self. The objection is sometimes expressed in terms of physicalism—the monist philosophy that everything is physical. If everything is physical, then consciousness can be nothing more than an emergent property of matter, nothing more than the result of brain activity.

Might science one day prove that consciousness is physical? A physicalist would answer “yes”<sup>69</sup> and might argue as follows. Neuroscience research is achieving a deep understanding of the relation between the brain and thoughts, emotions, and bodily movements.<sup>70</sup> Suppose one day it found a *perfect* understanding of the relation. Suppose it discovered a perfect correlation between brain states and body/emotions/thoughts; that they are merely two sides of the same coin. So, if a person thought “cheese sandwich” we’d be able to predict exactly what parts of the brain would light up. *And* if those same parts of the brain lit up, the person *must* be thinking “cheese sandwich” and nothing else. That would be strong, even conclusive, evidence that consciousness is physical.

Or would it? For instance, it could be argued that correlates do not explain consciousness itself. As an illustration, imagine a mousetrap of the old kind: a wooden board, a spring connected to a hammer, cheese bait that triggers the hammer. Imagine the mouse trap is conscious and experiences anticipation when triggered and peace after snaring a mouse. We can point out

physical correlates: the spring has more potential energy when triggered (anticipation) and less afterwards (peace). But spring potential energy in no way explains how a mouse trap could be conscious of feelings of anticipation and release.

Critics of a physicalist explanation of consciousness have much the same criticism. Finding physical correlates of consciousness (e.g., brain electrical and/or chemical activity) in no way explains consciousness.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, "The Hard Problem of Consciousness" is still unsolved.<sup>72</sup> Some philosophers claim consciousness may be a fundamental physical force besides the four already known: electromagnetic, strong nuclear force, weak nuclear force, and gravity.<sup>73</sup>

Until we fully understand consciousness, we cannot say with confidence it does not persist after death, in some form or another.<sup>74</sup> True, there is no way in current scientific understanding of how that could be so. But 150 years ago, there was no way time could run differently at different places, or that virtual particles could pop in and out of existence, like firefly lights on a summer's night.

So, we may reasonably admit the *possibility* that our deep self as consciousness persists after death, perhaps to reincarnate on Earth, perhaps to exist on some other plane (emotion plane, thought plane).<sup>75</sup> But, of course, we haven't proved it.

### Consciousness as the Deep Self

It seems reasonable to tentatively identify my deep self with my awareness, my consciousness. But a deep self must be unchanging. Is consciousness unchanging? I had a different body, different feelings, and different thoughts when I was five years old. Today I am older. Can we reasonably argue that the "I" which I was then is the same "I" which I am now?

We can if we identify "I" with consciousness. That is, if "I" equals the deep self, equals consciousness. For we may imagine consciousness is the unchanging light illuminating a room; the body, feelings and thoughts are the ever-changing furniture.<sup>76</sup> Or, to use another analogy imagine consciousness as a mirror, a mirror not touched or changed by what it reflects. Consciousness becomes aware of body, emotion, and thoughts but is not changed by them. (This suggests the idea of "pure consciousness", i.e., a blank mirror, a mirror empty of any bodily, emotional or thought content.)

The experience of consciousness as our real self sometimes arises in meditation; when the body, emotions and mind quiet, when only the "I" and consciousness remain. This state has been called "witness consciousness":

"The innermost silent awareness that gives us the feeling that existence is and continues, even in the absence of thoughts, sensations, emotions, etc. This kind of pure awareness, free from any object, . . . is the impartial observer of thoughts, emotions, sensations, the body, actions, etc."<sup>77</sup>

So, we have another analogy: ego as the ever-changing image and consciousness as the permanent witness. The ego is a creature of the ocean's surface while consciousness is the ocean itself.

Taking the idea of consciousness as our real self to the extreme leads some mystics to refer to themselves (i.e., to their collection of temporal selves) in the third person,<sup>78</sup> as when Sam means himself when he says "Yesterday Sam was walking . . ." The practice may seem strange, but it takes the idea to a logical conclusion.

But is consciousness really permanent? During deep sleep doesn't consciousness cease to exist? If it's not permanent, then it comes and it goes. So, it would be wrong to call consciousness my unchanging and enduring self.

We may answer that if consciousness were entirely absent in deep sleep, a sensation such as a loud noise or pinprick could not waken us. (Our senses would register the sensation but there would be nothing to respond. The phone is ringing but there is no one to answer it.) So, perhaps during deep sleep the mind and memory don't function, but consciousness still shines, like a star in a dark void. In other words, perhaps my consciousness always exists but when mind and memory aren't functioning, it can leave no record of its existence.

### New Theology: After Life

We've discussed four answers to the questions: What happens to me after death? Do I survive in some form or another? What can New Theology say about those answers?

- First Answer: Once created, I am eternal. I possess an eternal soul that survives the death of the body.

New Theology cannot support the idea of an eternal person, separate from all other persons, including person Gods. For New Theology's monist system does not accept the existence of a soul eternally separate from God.<sup>79</sup> It does not accept any entity that is ultimately separate and distinct from the One. New Theology accept only one ontologically basic entity; it rejects even the independent existence of person God.

But some sort of afterlife survival remains an open question. The second and third answer both accept some sort of existence after death. For us, these answers are plausible. Given the Hard Problem of Consciousness, it is conceivable we enjoy some sort of existence after death.

- Second Answer: After death the deep self eventually reincarnates, on Earth or elsewhere.
- Third Answer: No deep self exists; the deep self is illusory. Yet, reincarnation is possible.



Both answers assume the persistence of temporary selves and/or tendencies from one life to another. But they differ in their view of consciousness individualizing me from everyone else.

My temporary selves individuate me from everyone else. For example, no one but I am the spouse of my wife and the father of my son. Those two temporary selves individuate me from every other person. But temporary selves come and go. So, we may ask: does consciousness, also individuate me from everyone else? If not, it's not "my" deep self but merely a generic entity like water or the electron.

To illustrate the question: suppose we have two bottles of water, one with red dye, one with blue. The water is the deep self. Color represents the mind/emotion/thought complex. The color differentiates one bottle from the other. But the colors are temporary. Does a deep self also differentiate one bottle from the other? In one sense, yes because the water in one bottle occupies a distinct part of space than the other. In another sense, no because pure water is just water. Just as one electron or proton doesn't differ from another, the pure water in bottle one differs not at all from the pure water in bottle two. So, there is nothing unchanging in bottle one that differentiates it from bottle two.

The second answer seems to accept that the two bottles are different. The third answer rejects consciousness as deep self. (In fact, Buddhists specifically list consciousness as one of the "Five Aggregates" which disperse upon death.)

To use another illustration, imagine a gold cup is melted and recast into a saucer. Answer two identifies gold as the deep self of cup and saucer and says the gold has reincarnated as a saucer. Answer three says that the cup's gold is generic and in no way gives the cup an identity different from any other gold object. Therefore, gold does not individuate the cup and therefore is not a deep self. The cup does not reincarnate as a saucer, but the two have some sort of connection.

- Fourth answer: at death we simply cease to exist; I do not possess a deep self.

It is evident that the body ceases to exist after death. Some people believe that our emotional and mental identities as well as our consciousness ceases to exist, too. It's easy to believe consciousness ceases to exist because it seems to during deep sleep. So, the fourth answer may be the most commonsensical of the four.

Some people find the fourth answer threatening and frightening. A fear of death is understandable. But, ideally, along with the fear would be a basic trust, a trust that fundamentally everything will be alright, even if you can't imagine how.

*The God's Script*<sup>80</sup> by Jorge Luis Borges tells the story of Tzinacán, an Aztec priest imprisoned by the Spaniards. After decades in prison, Tzinacán has a vision and believes by reciting certain words of power, he can destroy his stone prison, evict the Spaniards, reconstruct his nation, and become immortal. But he knows he never shall: "Whoever has seen the universe, whoever

has beheld the fiery designs of the universe, cannot think in terms of one man, or that man's trivial fortunes or misfortunes, though he be that very man."

We live in an unimaginably vast, unimaginably ancient universe. Yet, our concerns often revolve about ourselves. Ego issues dominate the first three answers. "I want to go to heaven. I want to be reincarnated. I. I. I." Ego concerns are understandable; they have survival value. But the person who can rise above ego; the person who finds it sufficient that something unimaginably vast and ancient created them, even if only for a short time; the person who can say to the Real, "You exist. And that's enough for me. What does it matter if this finite, flawed human being lives for eternity or is snuffed out like a candle?"—that person has a faith and a love for God far, far above those who practice religion out of fear of hell or hope for heaven or a better reincarnation.

On a more humorist note, we have the words of Mark Twain: "I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it."

To sum up, an axiom of New Theology's monism is that only the All and the One, the Ultimate Ground of Existence, is ontologically basic. The individual is not ontologically basic. This implies that the human individual is like a figure on a movie screen and would cease to exist but for the action of the light; that the individual is the wave, not the ocean. This view admits two possibilities. First, that upon death the individual simply dissolves, ceases to be. This is often the view of the atheist.<sup>81</sup> The second is that upon death the individual continues to exist in one form or another, perhaps reincarnating eventually.<sup>82</sup>

Although our fate immediately after death is unknown<sup>83</sup>, in a monist system the ultimate fate of the individual can be nothing other than merging with the ultimate ground of all.

You are not the body. You are not the mind.  
You are something different, lying far behind.

#### Old Theology: Prayer, Meditation

In Old Theology, an ontologically basic human person prays to a person God. We may identify various types of prayers: petitionary, intercessory, thanksgiving, adoration, contemplative.

In petitionary prayer, the individual asks for themselves: God, help me in this difficult time; God, help me find a job. Intercessory prayer asks for another: God, let my child do well in school; help my son or daughter find a good job; let that hurricane bypass the island. Intercessory prayer is less self-seeking than petitionary prayer. But in both the relation of the person praying to God resembles, to use a metaphor from India, the relation of the farmer (person) to his cow (God): he values the cow for its milk.

What is the value of such prayer? Is it, at least, better than nothing? Doesn't it give the person an idea of God, even if it's a flawed idea? Yes. But doesn't it also encourage the belief that

prayer can impact the world in a “supernatural” way? If it cannot, then doesn’t such prayer encourage delusion, superstition?

Can prayer impact the world in a supernatural way? Studies have failed to find the fingerprint of the supernatural<sup>84</sup> in natural events<sup>85</sup> (Of course, there is no shortage of anecdotal accounts which claim supernatural events). Yet, petitionary and intercessory prayer have value in that the attitude “Thy will be done” can help a person lower stress, accept what is, and regard it as coming from God.

In the prayer of thanksgiving, the person focuses less on self and more on God. God, thank you for all you’ve done. In the prayer of adoration, the self is forgotten even more; the focus is on God. The prayer may be verbal: “God, you are great. You are wonderful. Your glory pervades the universe.” Or the mind may quiet so it experiences intimate feelings beyond words, in silent communion with the separate person God.

The highest form of prayer is contemplative prayer, where self is lost in direct experience of God.

#### [New Theology: Prayer, Meditation](#)

New Theology gives little support for prayer petitions; it does not accept “that the laws of the universe be annulled in behalf of a single petitioner, confessedly unworthy.”<sup>86</sup> Moreover, the affirmative way and the negative way both involve reducing our attachment with our passing, temporary selves.

However, it does support the idea of trying to get closer to the Light, which is one description of what is called meditation in the East and contemplation in Christianity.

#### [A Meditation Exercise](#)

I sit in a quiet room, eyes closed. I examine my sensations, labeling them as from body, emotion, or mind. Body: “I feel my feet on the floor.” Emotion: “I feel calm.” Mind: “What should I have for dinner?”

I reflect the sensations are temporary, passing. They appear and disappear, sometimes in an instant. I perceive the passing sensations easily enough; they are the substance of my life. From waking till sleep, I experience a continual stream of sensations, a stream that changes every moment.

Question: do I experience anything that is not transitory? Do I experience some something in myself which is permanent?<sup>87</sup> Can I step out of the stream of transitory sensations, even if for only a moment?

The experience at first may be subtle. If something is part of every experience, it may be difficult to notice. We usually are not aware of permanent; we usually give all our attention to the stream. And what we experience may be difficult to describe. No matter. The experience itself is primary; the description is secondary.

Now, imagine my experience deepens. My breathing slows; each breath seems full, satisfying, complete. I experience a profound peace. (Does this resemble the experience of the fetus in the womb?)

The experience brings me into the present. For I can experience the permanent only in the present; for me, past and future are memory and thought, part of the ever-changing stream.

The experience can be wonderfully refreshing, a moment of peace until my duties and desires pull me back into my stream of temporary sensations. I'm like someone who has spent the day navigating a turbulent sea, finally reaching *terra firma*, finally standing on solid ground. After a day of constantly changing experience, I find a state which is not changing, which is steady and permanent. Perhaps, I begin each day looking forward to the exercise, when perception of the permanent eclipses perception of the temporal.

Now, let's imagine someone wishes to practice the exercise as much as possible, who aims for perpetual consciousness of the permanent, in so far as possible. They might withdraw to a cave, monastery, or convent. Or maybe they are elderly and retired, free to practice as much as they wish.

The more such a person achieves their aim—i.e., the more they become continually conscious of the permanent—the more the permanent fills their consciousness, and the less they are a distinctive, separate person. In the extreme, Adam and Beth cease being Adam and Beth. They possess the same continual consciousness of the permanent, the unborn (“unborn” because was never created or born; it's eternal), the undecaying, the undying. They become indistinguishable. It's as if the dawning of the larger self naturally drives out the smaller selves, as the rising of the sun naturally drives out shadows.

[Buddha] described his Enlightenment: . . . Being liable to birth because of self, to age and sorrow and death, I sought the unborn and undecaying and undying. I attained this in the last watch of the night and won the stainless, the freedom from bondage, Nirvana.<sup>88</sup>

Some mystics (i.e., people who achieved the aim) describe their consciousness as consciousness of light, where “light” means something other than the light we see with our eyes. We may, perhaps, draw an analogy where the light is energy that cannot be created or destroyed; we may imagine it as a sparkling, dancing light that's, in some sense, alive. Eternal, conscious Light.

Towards center is towards God

### One with God

How may we describe a person who has continual consciousness of the ultimate ground of existence? How may we describe a person who lives simultaneously in two worlds: the exterior world of people, places, and things; and an interior world of consciousness of the permanent? Paradoxically. Under one view, Adam and Beth's consciousness is so filled with God that they almost ceased to exist as separate individuals. Their separate identities are in the background; their habitual foreground state of consciousness is filled with God.<sup>89</sup> Under a second view, Adam and Beth have become God.

The man who understands the second view properly, who understands "that God is essentially in every creature,"<sup>90</sup> might say ". . . that he was *not the* God, but he was God, because God was in him and in every creature in the world . . ."<sup>91</sup> But the second view that a person has become one with God is exceeding dangerous when misunderstood. Someone who still views God as a supreme person who can do no wrong might begin to view themselves in the same way. As Rufus Jones notes in his *Studies in Mystical Religion*:

These doctrines—that the universe is a Divine Emanation, that God is being incarnated in man, that each person may rise to a substantial union with God, that external law is abolished and ceremonial practices outdated, that the final revelation of God is being made through man himself—these doctrines are loaded with dangerous possibilities as soon as they receive popular interpretation.<sup>92</sup>

And Evelyn Underhill in her classic *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* writes:

. . . the mistakes . . . in to which men have been led by a feeble, a deformed, or an arrogant mystical sense . . . is countless; their wildness almost inconceivable to those who have not been forced to study them.<sup>93</sup>

The basic error seems to lie in one of two points of view: ego-centric and God-centered. The phrase "I have become God" is ego-enhancing, for what could be more gratifying than becoming God? But God is the deep self; an inflating ego is not moving towards God. So, the phrase "I have become God" may be said to be untrue, or, better, unsound. The other phrase, "God has become me," is God-centered in that the ego is eclipsed, is taken over by God. Of course, some people will find both phrases objectionable, even blasphemous.

We should also mention that because the state of habitual consciousness of the permanent is easily described (as, I trust, the preceding paragraphs show), it may be faked. If being accepted as such a person is in any way profitable, it shouldn't surprise if charlatans arise.

However, even if we credit (rightly or wrongly) some person with habitual consciousness of the permanent, ultimately it is *our own experience* which matters, not our (possibly wrong) belief about some other person.

### Entheogens

Entheogen is a neologism to designate psychoactive substances employed in culturally sanctioned visionary experiences in ritual or religious contexts.<sup>94</sup>

In the 1960s psychedelics were often associated with “sex, and drugs, and rock and roll.” At the same time, serious theologians, academics, and writers were interested in the (alleged) mystical effects.

“Set and setting” were known to influence a psychedelic experience, sometimes drastically. (“Set” being mind-set, expectations, mood; “Setting” being the external environment, e.g., forest or nightclub.) Aldous Huxley’s had the right mind-set. His interest in theology and mysticism predated by nine years his use of a psychedelic, as his 1945 “The Perennial Philosophy” demonstrates. At the home of a friend in 1954, Huxley took mescaline (one of three 1960s psychedelics: mescaline, psilocybin, LSD). He describes the experience in “The Doors of Perception.”<sup>95</sup> We list some points of agreement between his experiences and topics we’ve previously discussed; topics we’ve previously mentioned are in the square brackets.

[Isness]

- “Is it agreeable? Someone asked. “Neither agreeable nor disagreeable,” I answer. “It just is.” . . . “Is-ness. The Being of Platonic philosophy . . .” p. 17

[Meeting God]

- The Beatific Vision, Sat Chit Ananda, Being-Awareness-Bliss—for the first time I understood . . . precisely and completely what those prodigious syllables referred to. p. 18

[Seeing the light that underlies the movie]

- . . . the books . . . glowed with a living light . . . p. 20
- . . . the burning brightness of unmitigated Reality . . . p. 56

[Consciousness not identified with ego and temporal selves]

- For persons are selves and . . . I was now a Not-self, simultaneously perceiving and being the Not-self of the things around me. p. 35
- It was odd, of course, to feel that “I” was not the same as these arms and legs “out there” . . . It was odd; but one soon got used to it. p. 52

[Society]

- But meanwhile my question remained unanswered. How was this cleansed perception to be reconciled with a proper concern with human relations, with the necessary chores and duties, to say nothing of charity and practical compassion? The age-old debate between the actives and the contemplatives was being renewed . . . with unprecedented poignancy. p. 40-41

[Symeon: “If a man who possesses . . . the light of the Holy Spirit is unable to bear its radiance”]

- Confronted by a chair which looked like the Last Judgement . . . I found myself all at once on the brink of panic. This, I suddenly felt, was going too far. Too far, even though the going was into intenser beauty, deeper significance. The fear . . . was of being overwhelmed, of disintegrating under a pressure of a reality greater than a

mind . . . could possibly bear. . . In theological language, this fear is due to the incompatibility between man's egotism and the divine purity . . . p. 55

In the 1960s, "leading scholar of religious studies"<sup>96</sup> Huston Smith,<sup>97</sup> underwent an experiment similar to what Huxley describes in his "Doors of Perception." Smith wrote:

"I was experiencing the metaphysical theory known as emanationism, in which, beginning with the clear, unbroken Light of the Void, that light then fractures into multiple forms and declines in intensity as it devolves through descending levels of reality."<sup>98</sup>

(We may read the quote as referring to the procession of the Many from the One.)

Decades before Huxley and Smith, William James had experiences under the influence of nitrous oxide, experiences he labeled "mystical." James was "American philosopher, historian, and psychologist. . . considered to be a leading thinker of the late 19th century, one of the most influential philosophers of the United States, and the "Father of American psychology."<sup>99</sup>

In his famous 1902 *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,<sup>100</sup> James describes characteristics of his experiences

- Ineffability – beyond the power of human language to describe. Language describes transitory *things* in space-time, *emotions*, or eternal *thoughts* like  $2+2=4$ . So, it should not surprise that language fails to capture mystical experience. In fact, we may even describe experience of color as ineffable because it gives us knowledge beyond what language and thought can give us.<sup>101</sup>
- Noetic – universal truths revealed that not available via any other means. Follows from ineffability: experience gives knowledge beyond what language can give.
- Passivity – a feeling of being grasped and held by a superior power. Perhaps "submission to a superior power" would have been a better choice than "passivity"?
- Transient – the mystical experience is a temporary experience. (Temporary for James; some mystics claim such closeness to God that the experience is permanent.)

Experience of Uncreated Light is experience of our very essence, of our ultimate ground of existence, of something that paradoxically may be said to possess all thoughts (like white light through a prism) and/or no thought, i.e., is beyond thought.

How may we evaluate such experiences? We'll describe two extremes and then discuss a middle ground.

- 1) Similar experiences prove entheogens give genuine knowledge and insight into the true nature of things, into reality as it is.
- 2) Entheogen use leads to experiences which are further from reality, not closer. Like a circus hall of mirrors, drugs distort reality.

We can criticize both positions. As to 1), people undergoing delirium tremens (withdrawal from alcohol) often hallucinate snakes. Their common experiences don't prove the reality of their

illusory snakes. As to 2), many people feel the world is not as it should be. There is war and famine and hatred and other things that tarnish the world's image and, in an extreme case, could lead to humanity's self-extinction. If there is any hope that some device or substance could enhance human flourishing, can we afford not to investigate?

In "Mysticism: Sacred and Profane,"<sup>102</sup> British scholar R. C. Zaehner presents a position somewhere between 1) and 2). He described three types of mystical experience:

- Nature Mysticism: mystical experience of the natural world. (We may regard this as positive way mysticism where an individual intuits the divine ground of the natural world.)
- Monist Mysticism: mystical experience of an impersonal absolute. (We may regard this as negative way mysticism where an individual intuits the divine ground of self.)
- Theistic Mysticism: mystical experience of a living person God

Zaehner admitted entheogens might induce mystical experiences of the first two types but not of what he regarded as the supreme type, mystical experience of a living person God.

What can we say of theistic mysticism? In New Theology, Gods who are persons are creatures, are personifications of the Uncreated Light. If they exist, then as created entities they possess the same type of existence as the natural world and our separate personalities. For we admit the reality of the external world and of ourselves. But with what justification (aside from parochial religious faith) can we say Jesus or his father Yahweh are real, if we deny the reality of other person Gods? Humanity has worshiped Thor and Zeus and Quetzalcoatl and a thousand other Gods. What we admit is possible for the Christian must we not also say is possible in an ancient Viking's mystical experience of Thor, the Norse God of thunder? Indeed, must we not say the same of an intelligent rabbit-like being's experience of The Great Furry Rabbit, or an intelligent spider-like being's experience of The Great Mother Spider who spun off the universe?

If some types of mystical experience are indeed purer, more authentic, even more "sacred" than others, then experience of ultimate ground of existence must rank higher than some personification.

Might entheogens have a place in a New Theology religion? The question is complicated. In the 1960s, psychedelic usage spread to the public. People took psychedelics in quiet, auspicious places, but also in music concerts and nightclubs. The experiences were not always good. Some people dropped out of society, lived on the fringes, in low-rent apartments, and devoted themselves to drugs of any kind and a search for the ultimate pleasure(s). Others were more idealistic; a few had what they described as an experience of God. By the end of the 1960s, many countries had outlawed psychedelics.

So, it is not the case that the use of a psychedelic, even taken as an entheogen, guarantees a mystical experience. Set and setting play a large role, too. As does what Huxley called "gratuitous grace." He writes:



I am not so foolish as to equate what happens under the influence of mescaline . . . with the realization of the end and ultimate purpose of human life: Enlightenment, the Beatific Vision. All I am suggesting is that the mescaline experience is what Catholic theologians call “a gratuitous grace,” not necessary to salvation but potentially helpful and to be accepted thankfully . . . p. 73

Entheogens *may* aid a deeper communion with Uncreated Light, but nothing is guaranteed. Further, chasing experience for its own sake, however elevated the experience, is best avoided. Rather, the highest goal is to integrate the experience with daily life, to live in this world and simultaneously in a still, eternally quiet place.

Previous sections attempted to deduce consequences of our axiom that “the ultimate ground of existence is God.” The use of entheogens, however, does not follow logically from that axiom. But entheogens seem to reveal something which is compatible with our view of God. Whether that something is reality or phantasy remains to be determined.

Would psychedelics used as entheogens be predominately beneficial to humanity? Or are they too dangerous, too liable to harm humanity in the long run? This author has neither the experience, knowledge, nor wisdom to answer that question. But research in psychedelics is slowly reviving (as a web search of “psychedelic research today” demonstrates). One day, perhaps, we’ll have a scientifically sound answer.

### The Wall

Imagine a young person eagerly and optimistically searching for truth. Imagine they eventually reflect as follows. Life is uncertain and, at times, painful. Fatal diseases sometimes take lives, even the lives of babies. During World War II (1940-1945), the prime occupation of many nations was building devices to kill people. During that war, about 70 million people—70,000,000 people—lost their lives: others were injured, physically or mentally. Today, war and the threat of war remain. Weapons exist that can destroy all human life on Earth. As it did with the dinosaurs, the universe may one day wipe all humanity from the face of the Earth.

On the personal level, I am an infinitesimal speck of matter in an unimaginably vast universe, existing for less than a microsecond<sup>103</sup> compared to the lifetime of a star. If I lack a deep self or my deep self doesn’t survive death, then my existence seems as ephemeral as a water fountain’s spray, as meaningless as a soap bubble.

We picture these thoughts as forming a “wall”, a barrier that impedes the continued search for truth. The wall may seem intimidating, even terrifying. So, some people leave their search for truth at the wall and simply live their lives day to day.

Other people retreat and adopt an Old Theology religious faith, perhaps the faith of their childhood, where God has a special love for us, where God protects us and never lays a burden on us which is too hard to bear, where God-inspired writings tell us how to live; where Church

and State cooperate to create (as we described above), “a small, snug, secure world, a cocoon—a shield against an unimaginably vast universe.”

But existing religions disagree and use an inferior way of knowing that often leads to untruth; such religions serve State but not necessarily truth.

A continued search for truth may require going beyond the wall as New Theology attempts to do. New Theology accepts science’s view of the universe and aims to uncover truth, but truth may or may not provide us with a comfortable worldview or the strength to cope with life.

Have many individuals stood where we stand now? Did their search for truth lead them to thoughts that seemed true but uncomfortable and subversive of the dominant worldview, subversive even of the very idea of their own existence? Did they see these thoughts as forming a wall, a barrier? Did they then turn back and retreat into the comfort of some Old Theology religion, a religion that puts faith above reason?<sup>104</sup> For if the light of reason uncovers disturbing truths, one solution is to turn off that light. Seen thus, miracle stories, obvious scriptural contradictions, and farfetched dogmas that defy reason are not bugs but features. At weekly meetings, refugees from reason gather and reaffirm their reason-denying beliefs.

Old Theology religions value faith in special people (prophets, incarnations, God’s special representatives on Earth), faith in special writings, and faith in miracles, some of which we know today did not occur.<sup>105</sup> New Theology values a different type of faith: faith in the facts, faith in the truth no matter how unattractive truth may be. Its faith says “We are not born *into* a fallen, evil universe but are born *out of* a majestic, vast universe. The ultimate ground of existence is our father and mother. God is our father and mother. Therefore, whatever is, is sacred even if we can’t see how.” It’s a faith that everything will turn out right in the end. A faith that a verse in the Old Testament expresses in terms of a person God: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”<sup>106</sup>

### Conclusion

Egypt built its Great Pyramid about 2560 BCE, roughly 4,580 years ago. Assuming we don’t destroy ourselves, where will we be 4,580 years from now? Will we have terraformed and colonized Mars? Will we have entered the universe at large via some sort of “warp drive”? If we do, it will be thanks to new scientific discoveries and engineering technology.

Will religions’ basis still be books, some whose authors believed in demons and a flat Earth? Once, knowledge came from authority (tradition, scripture, soothsaying, and prophecy). Later, we found a new way of discovering truth: science’s way, the way of evidence and reason. Is it inevitable some new religion will eventually employ something similar to science’s superior way of knowing?

And if we learn how to sail the galaxy, might not the rabbit God and spider God become more than a mere thought experiment? Don’t we deserve a theological worldview that is truly

universal? Any species can examine the world and discover the same scientific facts, e.g., about chemical and nuclear reactions, about the scale and age of the universe. If God is an existing reality, shouldn't all intelligent species be able to converge to compatible theological views?

But how does all that relate to our article? Although the article may in places be vague or superficial, the author believes it sketches a picture—a blurred, fragmentary picture, perhaps—of the Shape of Things to Come. A universal theology for the future.

### Afterword

For millennia, the Elements of Euclid has stood as a model of geometric reasoning, as well as a model of reasoning itself. From a few clearly stated definitions and premises, Euclid derives geometrical facts. The facts were already known. But the Elements reveals the logical relations between the facts. To use a metaphor, the facts are like leaves lying on the ground in Autumn; the Elements show us the leaves in Summer, while they are on the tree; the tree's branches corresponding to the logical relations between the facts.

Two millennia after Euclid, Spinoza wrote his Ethics (full title: Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order). From a few definitions and premises, Spinoza derives numerous results. Unlike the Elements, however, Spinoza's book concerns God and God's relationship to the universe.

This article has compared and contrasted two views of God: the typical view of God as a person who dwells beyond the universe, and the less common view of God as impersonal and inhering in the very fabric of the universe. In its own small way, it may be read as a tribute to the Elements and the Ethics.

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<sup>1</sup> The total number of stars in the Universe is larger than all the grains of sand on all the beaches of planet Earth. Chapter VIII (Sagan)

<sup>2</sup> Scientists estimate that there are as many planets as stars in our galaxy . . . but those planets aren't evenly distributed. Some stars . . . are home to more than half a dozen planets, while others may have none. - <https://www.livescience.com/does-every-star-have-planets>

<sup>3</sup> We seem prone to personification, e.g. Father Time; the Grim Reaper; the arriving year as a baby, the departing year as an old man.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, Chapter IX

<sup>5</sup> New Theology seeks to describe a universal reality that all intelligent beings can appreciate. Ideally, New Theology would be perfectly universal, just as physics and chemistry seek truths valid throughout the universe, valid for any species. But this author can only draw on his own limited experience and knowledge of religion, mostly Christianity. The creation of a truly universal theology would require the contributions of many thinkers.

<sup>6</sup> Many Hindu denominations are centered on one or more gods or goddesses, such as Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, and Brahma. (Hindu denominations, 2021)

<sup>7</sup> New Theology contains elements that are ancient. Its virtue is combining the elements in a coherent logical whole.

<sup>8</sup> Now an individual person is one who distinguishes himself from the rest of the world. I am a person because I can say: "I am I and I am not you." Personality thus consists in the faculty of knowing oneself to be one individual among others. And thus, by its very nature, personality is (on one side of its being, at least) a finite thing. The very essence of my personal state lies in the fact that I am not the whole universe but a member thereof. p. 4 (Dionysius, 1940)

<sup>9</sup> Science has the same overarching goal: to reduce the multiplicity of the universe to a few (ideally one) basic principles. Thus, the multitude of physical objects are seen as a manifestation of 118 chemical elements, which when traced from molecule to atom to subatomic particles lead to the Standard Model's seventeen fundamental particles.

<sup>10</sup> Early Quakers refused to use the honorific "ye" and "you." Rather, they addressed all people with the same pronouns: "thee" and "thou." In the same spirit, we use the same noun "God" (capital) to refer to all person Gods.

<sup>11</sup> In Christianity, some theologians regard the three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—as different manifestations of an underlying essence, much like water underlies the three manifestations of steam, liquid water, and ice. "God and Godhead are as distinct as heaven and earth." says the medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhart (Schürmann, n.d.)

<sup>12</sup> Quakerism is properly called The Religious Society of Friends.

<sup>13</sup> We usually think of the physical and the mental as separate domains. But it's been suggested that on the deepest level they are one. For example, "The unexpected parallelism of ideas in psychology and physics suggests . . . a possible ultimate *one-ness* . . . a psychophysical one-ness of all life phenomena." (Jung, 1964) p. 309

<sup>14</sup> This is a materialist view of a book. An opposing view is that the book consists of a collection of thoughts. The same thoughts may be expressed in various ways, as when the book is digitized as a stream of zeros and ones, or when the book is translated into a different language. In this view, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* exists on the conceptual plane; it is instantiated materially in one language or another, stored in one digital format or another.

<sup>15</sup> But doesn't the movie analogy imply something which is changing and temporary? The images change but the light itself remains light. This touches on the thorny philosophical questions of "Being and Becoming" and "The Absolute and the Relative" as well as paradoxical assertions such as "The wave is changing; the ocean water isn't, but the ocean water is the wave."

<sup>16</sup> Hindu Vedanta philosophy provides yet another pair of labels: "real" and "unreal". "Brahman" is said to be real and the world is said to be unreal, illusion, "Maya". "Unreal" seems an unfortunate choice because for the average person, what could be more real than the world they experience every day? For such a person, calling that world "illusion" may seem nonsensical and disquieting.

<sup>17</sup> Of course, seeming wrong, even absurd, doesn't mean untrue. No doubt, it once seemed absurd that at this moment people and oceans hang upside down on the other side of the Earth. Einstein's claim that time can flow at a different rate for different observers seems absurd, yet true.

<sup>18</sup> "The Ship of Theseus" is a familiar philosophical thought experiment that examines if a component object that slowly changes all components is fundamentally the same object. Note: the human body is a component object that slowly changes all components.

<sup>19</sup> The Confessions of Saint Augustine, Bk. VII, Ch. X

<sup>20</sup> (Underhill, 1974) p. 189

<sup>21</sup> (Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart, 1951) p.132

<sup>22</sup> (Lossky, 1963) p. 121

<sup>23</sup> (Symeon, 1982) p. 138

<sup>24</sup> (Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart, 1951) p. 113

<sup>25</sup> (Foster, 1985) p. 33-44

<sup>26</sup> Our answer shifts the burden of proof, unfairly. If we make the claim "we can directly experience an ultimate ground" then we should provide proof. This paper is certainly not proof. But we hope it makes the claim seem possible, even true.

<sup>27</sup> We may give a similar answer to Immanuel Kant's argument that we can only experience appearances, never the thing-in-itself, never reality. "According to Kant, it is vital always to distinguish between the distinct realms of phenomena and noumena. Phenomena are the appearances, which constitute our experience; noumena are the (presumed) things themselves, which constitute reality. . . . Since the thing in itself (*Ding an sich*) would by definition be entirely independent of our experience of it, we are utterly ignorant of the noumenal realm. (<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/sanjacinto-philosophy/chapter/immanuel-kant-experience-and-reality/>)" But we ourselves ARE a thing-in-itself. Yes, we can certainly experience ourselves outwardly as phenomena, as in a mirror. But can it be true that we are unable to also experience ourselves inwardly as noumena, that we are unable to experience that which we, in fact, are?

<sup>28</sup> Quaker writer Rufus Jones: "If God ever spoke, He is still speaking. If He has ever been in mutual and reciprocal communication with the persons He has made, He is still a communicating God, as eager as ever to have listening and receptive souls. If there is something of His image and superscription in our inmost structure and being, we ought to expect a continuous revelation of His will and purpose through the ages . . . He is the Great I Am, not a Great He Was." (Jones R. , 1948)

<sup>29</sup> <https://catholicism.org/eens-fathers.html> lists some verses from fathers of the Church on this point

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, "Whether the Eucharist is necessary for salvation?"

<sup>31</sup> (Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, 1945)

<sup>32</sup> (*Bhagavad-Gita*, 1972) p. 11-12

<sup>33</sup> To properly understand the Bible, one must: 1) not read too superficially 2) not read too literally, 3) understand the overall context, 4) refer to the meaning of the original ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words, 5) understand the meaning of the words in their ancient linguistic/grammatical context, i.e., proper exegesis, 6) understand verses in their larger historical and literary context, i.e., proper hermeneutics, 7) be led by spirit not by mere words ("for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" 2 Corinthians 3:6)

<sup>34</sup> Following clergy instead of scripture is sometimes the better choice. For example, Yahweh, the OT God, says a cursing child must be put to death:

- Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death. Exodus 21:17
- For anyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother; his blood is upon him. Leviticus 20:9

Jesus, the NT God, who is one with his Father Yahweh, agrees.

- For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' Matthew 15:4
- For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' Mark 7:10

Happily, clergy tell believers that the words don't mean what the words clearly mean.

<sup>35</sup> Most states allow religious exemptions from child abuse and neglect laws (Sandstrom, 2016)

<sup>36</sup> Or as genuine gods themselves as were the ancient pharaohs of Egypt.

<sup>37</sup> "The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

<sup>38</sup> For example, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal . . ." (United States Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776)

<sup>39</sup> However, we might describe the situation as "Vox populi, vox Dei", i.e., Latin for "the voice of the people is the voice of God."

<sup>40</sup> About 1,600 years ago, Saint Augustine devised the doctrine of "just war," the type of war a Christian could fight. A diligent search of wars which any major Christian religion declared unjust, and forbade believers from fighting under pain of sin, uncovered exactly zero instances (except for an instance where the Pope himself was under attack). The interested reader is invited to do their own search.

<sup>41</sup> Although, as Winston Churchill famously said: "democracy is the worst form of government – except for all the others that have been tried."

<sup>42</sup> India's scripture The Bhagavad Gita has God Krishna saying he created the caste system. "'I created mankind in four classes, / different in their qualities and actions,'" (The Bhagavad Gita 53)

<sup>43</sup> Wives, obey your husbands as you obey the Lord. The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church people. The church is his body and he saved it. Wives should obey their husbands in everything, just as the church people obey Christ. - Ephesians 5:22-24

<sup>44</sup> "'The Curse of Ham': Slavery and the Old Testament" The Book of Genesis records an instance of Noah cursing his son Ham's descendants to be slaves. Although there is no biblical evidence that Ham was the "father" of African peoples, various Jewish, Christian and Islamic writers came to believe that he was, and their association helped to justify centuries of African enslavement. (Curse of Ham, 2003)

<sup>45</sup> One reference is <https://www.worldhistory.org/Cathars/>

<sup>46</sup> Either directly, as when they submit to religious leaders, or indirectly, as when they submit to the State because they believe the State has God's blessing.

<sup>47</sup> "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Exodus 22:18

<sup>48</sup> "[Slavery] was established by decree of Almighty God...it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation...it has existed in all ages, has been found among the people of the highest civilization, and in nations of the highest proficiency in the arts." Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, from a February 14, 1850 speech in the US Senate

<sup>49</sup> "With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil - that takes religion."— Steven Weinberg

<sup>50</sup> Of course, the map does give some indication of how to behave. "If you jump off this cliff, you will fall and die" says something about reality but also implies an action, an ought, i.e., don't jump off the cliff. But, strictly speaking, the "ought" assumes the goal of living another day.

<sup>51</sup> "In Greek philosophy, Eudaimonia means achieving the best conditions possible for a human being, in every sense—not only happiness, but also virtue, morality, and a meaningful life. It was the ultimate goal of philosophy: to become better people—to fulfill our unique potential as human beings." (Eudaimonia, n.d.)

<sup>52</sup> As, for instance, does the Catholic Church when it claims the following verses show Jesus gave the Church the keys. "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:19

<sup>53</sup> Luke 17:21

<sup>54</sup> *Sub specie aeternitatis* (Latin for "under the aspect of eternity") is, from Baruch Spinoza onwards, an honorific expression describing what is universally and eternally true, without any reference to or dependence upon the temporal portions of reality. In clearer English, *sub specie aeternitatis* roughly means "from the perspective of the eternal." - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub\\_specie\\_aeternitatis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub_specie_aeternitatis) retrieved 27 Sept. 2021

<sup>55</sup> Desert Fathers, early Christian hermits whose practice of asceticism in the Egyptian desert, beginning in the 3rd century, formed the basis of Christian monasticism. Following the example of Jesus' life of poverty, service, and self-denial, these early monks devoted themselves to vows of austerity, prayer, and work. Believers who chose to go into the desert as hermits were said to be answering the call of Christ . . . [in] Matthew 19:21." - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Desert-Fathers>

<sup>56</sup> "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." King James Bible, John 14:13

<sup>57</sup> It is sometimes claimed Mormons (i.e., members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) believe they will one day rule their own planet. The Church denies the idea is official doctrine. Refer (Mormons Frequently Asked Questions, n.d.) "Do Latter-day Saints believe they can become 'gods'?" and "Do Latter-day Saints believe that they will 'get their own planet'?"

<sup>58</sup> A soup kitchen, food kitchen, or meal center is a place where food is offered to the hungry, usually for free or sometimes at a below-market price (such as via coin donations upon visiting). Frequently located in lower-income neighborhoods, soup kitchens are often staffed by volunteer organizations, such as church or community groups. (Soup kitchen, n.d.)

<sup>59</sup> "Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less." C. S. Lewis

<sup>60</sup> The after-death destination of Limbo once existed in the Roman Catholic Church but has recently fallen out of favor.

<sup>61</sup> Existence in heaven raises other questions about selfhood. Consider the idea of an assembly of selves. Suppose Joe at six years old was happy and optimistic; a more mature person when he received his first romantic kiss; at twenty, a personal tragedy turned him pessimistic and dour; at forty, Joe was a sober, responsible family man; at death, a calm, retired introvert. Is Joe in heaven somehow a composite of all these selves? If Joe goes to hell, do all the selves suffer, even the happy, optimistic six-year older?

<sup>62</sup> We also say "my self" but the phrase is self-contradictory in that "my" suggests a possession. But the self is the possessor. That a possessor (i.e., the self) can possess itself as a possession seems absurd.

<sup>63</sup> Inherited tendencies imply very young children already possess a personality. Inherited abilities would explain prodigies such as Mozart, a prepubescent chess master, etc.

<sup>64</sup> Refer <https://www.chakras.net/yoga-principles/jivatma-atma-paramatma>

<sup>65</sup> The philosopher David Hume also believed that there is no self.

<sup>66</sup> (Annata, n.d.) "In Buddhism, the term *anattā* (Pali) or *anātman* (Sanskrit) refers to the doctrine of "non-self" – that no unchanging, permanent self or essence can be found in any phenomenon While often interpreted as a doctrine denying the existence of a self, *anatman* is more accurately described as a strategy to attain non-attachment by recognizing anything as impermanent, while staying silent on the ultimate existence of an unchanging essence. In contrast, Hinduism asserts the existence of *Atman* as pure consciousness or witness-consciousness, reifying consciousness as an eternal self.

<sup>67</sup> Observation: we often want justice for others but mercy for ourselves

<sup>68</sup> It might be argued that I always be my father's son. But unless I possess a deep identity, we can only say "When he existed, Arthur *was* the son of his father."

<sup>69</sup> "The identity theory of mind holds that states and processes of the mind are identical to states and processes of the brain." From The Mind/Brain Identity Theory article at the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, May 18, 2007 revision, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mind-identity/>

<sup>70</sup> For example, "Tracking Thoughts Moving Through the Brain" January 17, 2018, at <https://www.aau.edu/research-scholarship/featured-research-topics/tracking-thoughts-moving-through-brain>

<sup>71</sup> The classic paper "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" by philosopher Thomas Nagel makes this point.

<sup>72</sup> The hard problem of consciousness is the problem of explaining why any physical state is conscious rather than nonconscious. It is the problem of explaining why there is "something it is like" for a subject in conscious experience, why conscious mental states "light up" and directly appear to the subject. The usual methods of science involve explanation of functional, dynamical, and structural properties—explanation of what a thing does,



how it changes over time, and how it is put together. But even after we have explained the functional, dynamical, and structural properties of the conscious mind, we can still meaningfully ask: Why is it conscious? This suggests that an explanation of consciousness will have to go beyond the usual methods of science. Consciousness therefore presents a hard problem for science, or perhaps it marks the limits of what science can explain. Explaining why consciousness occurs at all can be contrasted with so-called “easy problems” of consciousness: the problems of explaining the function, dynamics, and structure of consciousness. These features can be explained using the usual methods of science. But that leaves the question of why there is something it is like for the subject when these functions, dynamics, and structures are present. This is the hard problem. (Weisberg, 2022)

<sup>73</sup> Search “is consciousness a new form” for relevant articles.

<sup>74</sup> Theoretical physicist and director of the Tufts University Institute of Cosmology, Alexander Vilenkin makes a similar point in during an interview. Refer YouTube “Alexander Vilenkin - Considering God's Existence?” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LloYFp6\\_07o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LloYFp6_07o), retrieved April 25, 2022

<sup>75</sup> This implies an ontology where emotions and thoughts exist independently of us. It's as if all possible thoughts exist now in the “mindscape.” So, when a child understands “2+2=4” they are seeing a pre-existing thought, just as when the child sees a tree, they see a pre-existing tree. Similarly, emotions exist in the “emotescape.” This ontology is compatible with mathematical Platonism, the idea that mathematics is discovered, not invented.

<sup>76</sup> So, “I” may sometimes mean consciousness alone and sometimes mean my ego. The ambiguity exists in everyday speech, too. I can say “I hurt” or I can say “My leg hurts.” The first sentence implies physical sensation is part of “I”, while the second implies leg and pain are something that the “I” reflects at the moment, but something separate from the “I.” Hopefully, context indicates if “I” refers only to deep self/consciousness or to the entire person, including temporary identities.

<sup>77</sup> (Witness, n.d.)

<sup>78</sup> Refer, for instance, Swami Rama Tirtha speaking of himself “Welcoming the sole service of God, **Rama** decided . . . .” (Tirtha, 1978) p. 5. Or the Christian mystic Henry Suso “—speaking as usual in the third person—of his own experience, ‘On a certain Whitsun Day a heavenly messenger appeared to **him** . . . .’” (Underhill, 1974) p. 218

<sup>79</sup> It may be objected that God can annihilate a person's soul. Nonetheless, while the person exists, their soul is separate and distinct from God, which New Theology monism does not allow.

<sup>80</sup> (Borges, 1964)

<sup>81</sup> New Theology accepts the idea of annihilation. Therefore, even the atheist might embrace New Theology thought by regarding the ultimate ground of existence as a genuine, existent reality but deny it the dignity of being called “God.”

<sup>82</sup> The Tibetan Book of the Dead describes the consciousness of the newly dead encountering the Incomprehensible Boundless Light. A few people are able to merge with the Light, losing their separate identity and avoiding reincarnation. Most people retreat from the intensity of supreme naked reality, and descend to lower levels of existence. As consciousness descends, it experiences “peaceful” and “wrathful” deities before finally incarnating in a physical body. The Tibetan Book of the Dead asks the disembodied consciousness to recognize the deities as its own projections, as not something external and foreign to itself. Refer (Evans-Wentz).

<sup>83</sup> “Although our fate immediately after death is unknown”—If consciousness constitutes our genuine, unchanging self, then the uncertainty arises because we don't fully understand how consciousness relates to the physical world. Some scientists believe consciousness is a purely physical phenomena: “consciousness is what the brain does.” Other scientists are not so certain. For more insight, search the internet for “The Hard Problem of Consciousness.”

<sup>84</sup> Besides, “supernatural” is a vacuous term: we don't know the full extent of the natural world and therefore cannot with confidence judge something supernatural. The god Thor was once thought the source of lightning and thunder. In the Bible we find “He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy, with great bolts of lightning he routed them.” (2 Samuel 22:15). We know today that lightning and thunder are purely natural phenomenon.

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/31/health/longawaited-medical-study-questions-the-power-of-prayer.html>

<sup>86</sup> “Pray, v. To ask that the laws of the universe be annulled on behalf of a single petitioner, confessedly unworthy.” — Ambrose Bierce, *The Unabridged Devil's Dictionary*

<sup>87</sup> We might have asked: Or is there any more to me? Is there anything permanent, enduring? But those are the wrong questions because they admit faith answers. For example, “Yes, you possess an immortal soul which . . . .” A faith answer is a thought, and that's not sufficient. A stream of passing sensations remains a stream, even if we add a thought. A faith answer is like a mere picture of food; the experience itself is the food.

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<sup>88</sup> (Parrinder, 1977) p. 26

<sup>89</sup> Thus, we find the Sufi mystic Al-Hallaj saying: "Thy Spirit is mingled in my spirit even as wine is mingled with pure water. When anything touches Thee, it touches me. Lo, in every case Thou are I!" (Nicholson, 1989) p. 151. And "I am the Absolute . . . the True Reality . . ." (Schimmel, 1975) p. 66. Sadly, Al-Hallaj was misunderstood as claiming identity with a person God, and executed.

<sup>90</sup> (Jones R. M., 1909) p. 467

<sup>91</sup> (Jones R. M., 1909) p. 475

<sup>92</sup> (Jones R. M., 1909) p. 188-189

<sup>93</sup> (Underhill, 1974) p. 149

<sup>94</sup> (Entheogens in Ancient Times, 2021)

<sup>95</sup> (Huxley, The Doors of Perception / Heaven and Hell, 1954)

<sup>96</sup> (Huston Smith, n.d.)

<sup>97</sup> " . . . widely regarded as one of the world's most influential figures in religious studies." (Huston Smith, n.d.)

<sup>98</sup> (Smith, 2000) p. 11

<sup>99</sup> William James (January 11, 1842 – August 26, 1910) was an American philosopher, historian, and psychologist. . . James is considered to be a leading thinker of the late nineteenth century, one of the most influential philosophers of the United States, and the "Father of American psychology" (William James, n.d.)

<sup>100</sup> (James, 1917)

<sup>101</sup> The contemporary philosophical thought experiment of "Mary's Room" also discusses what is ineffable.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge\\_argument](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_argument)

<sup>102</sup> (Mysticism: Sacred and Profane, 1957)

<sup>103</sup> Our sun's estimated life is  $1 \cdot 10^{10}$  years. Assuming a human life span of 100 years, our life span is  $1 \cdot 10^{-8}$  the life span of the sun.

<sup>104</sup> Richard Dawkins tells of a Harvard-trained geologist who couldn't reconcile science with the Bible and his fundamentalist upbringing, and so decided that "if all the evidence in the universe turns against creationism, I would be the first to admit it, but I would still be a creationist because that is what the Word of God seems to indicate. Here I must stand." (Dawkins, 2006) p. 321-3 But if God gave us reason, would his "Word" require abandoning its use? Would "God's Word" necessitate intellectual suicide?

<sup>105</sup> "Miracles" such as a six-day creation, a world-wide flood, a single Tower of Babel from which all languages derive, etc.

<sup>106</sup> King James Bible, Job 13:15