

*Universal  
Theology*



# *Universal Theology*

*A New Theology*

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## Preface

For a long time, we have been accustomed to the compartmentalization of religion and science as if they were two quite different and basically unrelated ways of seeing the world. I do not believe that this state of doublethink can last. It must eventually be replaced by a view of the world which is neither religious nor scientific but simply our view of the world. More exactly, it must become a view of the world in which the reports of science and religion are as concordant as those of the eyes and the ears.<sup>1</sup>

Once, cosmology, linguistics, and astronomy were in the domain of Christianity. Genesis explained the creation of the universe. Different languages originated at the Tower of Babel. Martin Luther condemned Copernicus<sup>2</sup> for claiming the Earth revolves around the Sun because the Bible clearly states God caused the *sun* to stand still for Joshua. Today, cosmology, linguistics, and astronomy are in the domain of science.

The fundamental difference between science and religion is not their domains<sup>3</sup>. Rather, it is their epistemological methods. Religion derives authority from sacred personages and holy scriptures, which define sacred truths that cannot be contradicted. Science derives its authority from evidence and explanatory theories, which are tentative, subject to correction, revision and improvement.

Might science address questions of ethics, morals, and ultimate values? It may be difficult to see how it could. But if it did, we might hope for progress similar to the progress science

has made in cosmology, linguistics, and astronomy. How this might be done is our theme.

The following makes no pretense of eternal truth, delivered by a God-inspired prophet. Rather, it is presented in the spirit of science and thus should be read as the thoughts and opinions of one person, the writer. The material is presented tentatively, subject to correction, revision and improvement. Errors and misconceptions there may be, but if science's epistemological method is followed, they will eventually be corrected, if not by the author, then by those who take up the task of applying science's epistemological method to questions of ethics, morals, and ultimate values.

### Introduction

Does someone or something exist which deserves to be called "God"? If so, is God better described as a person, or as an entity that is not a person? Historically, a multitude of Gods who are persons have been worshipped. Today, a few are still worshipped, but most are seen as fictional. There have also been descriptions of God as an entity which is not a person— as ultimate reality, absolute reality, or ultimate ground of existence.

We'll define God as ultimate ground of existence. Science, particularly subatomic physics, already investigates the ultimate ground of the physical universe. Our approach is a theological and philosophical investigation, intended to be compatible with science's approach. Like science, we accept no dogma, no sacred scriptures, or pronouncements from on high. Like science, our conclusions are open to revision and improvement. Like science, we aim for a minimal theoretical structure that supports a maximum of logical consequences

that agree with observation. We present an internally consistent theoretical structure that is parsimonious (it has but one fundamental entity) and has explanatory power.

Our goal, then, is to describe a new theology, a universal theology compatible with science. As far as possible, we wish to derive our theology from a small set of assumptions, axioms, if you wish. We'll contrast our universal theology, which for brevity we call "new theology," with what we call "old theology."

### Old Theology and New Theology

To begin, what do we mean by "new theology" and "old theology"? The two differ fundamentally in their "way of knowing," their epistemological method, where a way of knowing is a way of deciding what is and is not true. We'll see other differences as we proceed.

Old Theology's way of knowing is usually based on "sacred" writings. Thus, its way of knowing is ultimately based on someone that faith says is God, a God-man, a prophet, or an exceptionally wise and insightful person. Many "sacred" writings exist. They cannot all 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 Theologies are sectarian and insular.

Old Theology's way of knowing is unreliable and leads to contradictory "truths." That is, Old Theologies disagree. Ask an Italian, Iranian, or Hindu theologian what happens after death and you get different answers. Different denominations of the same religion differ, even about such supremely important questions such as how to be saved.

Old theology's way of knowing lead to divergence; 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. Scientific fields need no adjective. We speak of physics, chemistry, and biology; not Catholic physics, Islamic chemistry, and Hindu biology.

Science does not accept purported "revelations." Its way of knowing uses reason and experiment in its investigations of reality. Science demands evidence for assertions. Sometimes new evidence overturns old beliefs. Science's beliefs are tentative and open to revision and improvement when new evidence is uncovered—as when Einstein's theory of gravity succeeded Newton's.

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. And to the superiority of science's way of knowing.

Science examines the nature of a reality, which is the same throughout the universe. Thus, we expect different intelligent species to discover the same equations of thermodynamics or electromagnetism. The ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter, the mathematical constant  $\pi$ , 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>

Like science, New Theology rejects dogma. Its beliefs are tentative, open to revision and improvement.

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

### 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 in that they have desires, decree laws, reward and punish.

A person is an individual, a part of the universe, not the entire universe. If God is a person, then God must be a mere part of the universe—unless God entirely transcends the universe. Old Theology commonly has person Gods who transcend the universe, who exist beyond it. In Christianity, for instance, we have the opening of The Lord's Prayer, “Our Father Who Art in Heaven” which portrays a God who is a person, a Father, who lives in heaven, a place outside our universe.

Moreover, if God exists outside the universe, then perhaps the universe is a creation of God. As an artist creates a painting, God may have created this universe. The universe is not God, but merely a creation of God. Thus, we get a separation between God and the universe. Later in the 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. Others are not.

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>7</sup> Scientists believe there are roughly as many planets as stars.<sup>8</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 a "Gods" false God. New Theology calls such a God a personification<sup>9</sup> of the one, true God.

Person Gods worshipped on Earth at one time or another number in the hundreds, if not the thousands. A short list includes Anuket, Astarte, Atlas, Dyeus, Freyja, Gaia, Isis, Ixcacao, Izanagi, Kali, Kichigonai, Lakshmi, Mat, Zemlya, Olorun, Pangu, Quetzalcoatl, Ra, Tengri, Thor, Toci, Venus, Viracocha, Xi, Wangmu, and Zeus. Hardly anyone would deny that at least some of those Gods are human-created personifications. New Theology regards all person Gods as personifications, be they human-created, rabbit-created, or spider-created.

### New Theology: God

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

New Theology,<sup>10</sup> a less common type of theology, regards God as immanent and impersonal.<sup>11</sup> Immanent means inhering in the universe, not to be confused with "imminent" which

means soon. Impersonal means not a person (as does transpersonal). 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>12</sup>

New Theology is a monist theology where monism<sup>13</sup> says that only one supreme entity exists and, on the ultimate level, that entity is *all* that exists.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, monism speaks of “the One” as opposed to “the Many”, i.e., the universe. (How the One<sup>15</sup> becomes the Many is a perennial philosophical question we discuss 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 maybe even love and some sort of awareness. That's closer to the God we want to describe than a cold, impersonal force.

New Theology regards person Gods as personifications of the One. If such Gods<sup>16</sup> exist, they are, like us, an image, a creation, an action of the One. To use a phrase from Old Theology, we are creatures; we are created beings. New Theology says any person God is also a created being. Indeed, our monist theology leaves us no choice; for at the ultimate level only One exists.

Immanent, impersonal Gods occur in existing religions. In Taoism, the “Tao” is the central idea. Tao is “the absolute principle underlying the universe,” according to the Oxford

Languages dictionary. And Zen Buddhism “. . . does not go along with the Judaic-Christian belief in a personal Savior or a God—outside the universe—who has created the cosmos and man. Zen views the universe as one indissoluble substance, one total whole, of which man is a part.”<sup>17</sup>

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>18</sup> A monk of the cloistered Catholic Carthusian order writes: “God is subsistent being itself. The word ‘being’ applies strictly only to God . . . For all other things, ourselves included, compared to that pure and perfect Substance, are not even shadows.”<sup>19</sup> And Quakers<sup>20</sup> have the suggestion of an immanent God (“Walk cheerfully over the Earth answering to that of God in everyone”).

### 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.” God is far above matter, and there are various entities in between (e.g., matter, living matter, then matter with awareness, with intelligence, with a soul, then angels and 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 awareness and personality. Then there are cats and dogs, which really do have awareness and personality. Then the child’s peers; then the parents. Then, if religious, clergy.

<b>The Child's Hierarchy</b>
• God (infinitely superior in knowledge, power and goodness)
• adults (superior in knowledge and power, for example, parents)
• children (peers in knowledge and power, for example, other children)
• animals (inferior in knowledge and power)
• dumb matter with personality (for example, dolls and other)
• dumb, inanimate matter (walls and floors)

And last, above all, God—where God is a person who sits “up there,” in heaven, outside the universe. In the child’s hierarchy, matter is as far away as possible from God.

### New Theology: The Universe

How may we describe the relation of the universe to an immanent, impersonal God?<sup>21</sup> 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>22</sup> So, we turn to another analogy.

In a dream, we create the people, along with their emotions and thoughts, and also the universe in which they live. A person in a dream is a disguised version of our self.<sup>23</sup> We can 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.)

Both analogies portray one reality underlying the universe. Science also has the idea of one reality underlying the universe: physics has found that as we go deeper, towards center, we go towards unity. An oak chair and oak table are distinct objects, but at the deeper level, they are both oak. At a deeper level, a chair and a cat are both a collection of subatomic particles. Physical objects on Earth are composed of about ten thousand different chemical compounds, which, in turn, are composed of about a hundred elements. Looking deeper, science finds the seventeen particles of the Standard Model, and hopes someday to discover some Grand Unified Theory, a single theory of everything.

Top level	table	automobile
Top level-1	top and legs	engine and transmissions
Top level-2	wood, metal	metal, plastic, glass
Top level-3	atoms and molecules	atoms and molecules
Top level-4	protons, neutrons, electrons	protons, neutrons, electrons
Top level-5	quarks	quarks
...		
0 <sup>th</sup> level	?	?

Science's world view tends toward monism. Moreover, science has found that humble matter is not dumb but almost infinitely subtle and complex. 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.

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.

### The Nub

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

Our basic premise is that the universe's fundamental entity is God. Some people may find that idea counterintuitive, even absurd. Let's parse the idea into its three parts and examine each.

- 1) *The concept of fundamental entity is a valid concept; it is not internally inconsistent like the idea of a square circle or a married bachelor.* This appears to be true.
- 2) *“Fundamental entity” 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 the medium of light propagation as the luminiferous ether, and heat as a caloric fluid. We accept (tentatively) that “fundamental entity” refers to something real. The idea seems valid and

agrees with common sense. It seems we must reach a bottom. But we admit the idea may be untrue; just as a few centuries ago, it would have seemed true and commonsensical that the Earth rests upon some support. If and when it is shown that no fundamental entity, in fact, exists, New Theology will have to be abandoned or seriously revised.

- 3) *It makes sense to regard the fundamental entity as God.* A Christian who converts Islam ceases to regard Jesus as God. A Muslim converting to Christianity, begins to regard Jesus as God. We choose how to imagine, relate to, and worship God. 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; a person 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 fundamental entity.

Nonetheless, we admit that “the fundamental entity of the universe is God” may seem wrong, even absurd.<sup>24</sup> Were we expounding a type of Old Theology, we’d make the assertion dogma and demand belief, demand faith that it’s true. How should New Theology proceed? We will accept the assertion as a working hypothesis and explore its explanatory power. If it lacks explanatory power, we can regard it as an unsupported metaphysical assertion. But if it can explain much, then the question of if it’s true merits consideration.

In the following, we take “the fundamental entity of the universe is God” as our working hypothesis and explore its logical consequences. There are many.

### From the One to the Many

It is clear that created substances depend on God, who conserves them and indeed who produces them continuously by a kind of emanation, just as we produce our thoughts.

— Leibniz<sup>25</sup>

God alone is real, the Eternal Substance; all else is unreal, that is, impermanent.

— Sri Ramakrishna<sup>26</sup>

Once we regard the universe as a manifestation of a single fundamental entity, it's natural to wonder exactly how the Many (i.e., the universe) derives from the One (i.e., the fundamental entity, the first principle). It's an old question, often answered in terms of emanation. Emanationism (derived from the Latin *emanare* which means "to flow out" or "to pour out of") says all things proceed from some common source, some first principle. For instance, in the system of the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus, all things derive from The One. The One emanates Intelligence, which in turn radiates Soul, from Soul arises Nature. In New Theology, all creation flows from, emanates from, one common source, one common principle, much as all sunlight streams out from the sun. A rough sketch of a possible New Theology emanation system would be fundamental entity → quarks → protons, neutrons, electrons → molecules → matter → living matter → intelligent living matter.

Creationism views the “stuff” of the universe as created *ex nihilo*, in the past, separate from the Creator. In contrast, New Theology’s views the “stuff” of the universe as an expression *in the here and now* of a non-person “creator” (i.e., the ultimate ground of existence); it regards the universe as dynamic, as being continually created before our eyes. Like a fountain creates a stream of water dynamically, at every moment, New Theology sees the universe being created and recreated dynamically, at every moment.

Emanationism describes the procession of the One down through various levels, to finally nature, the world of matter, the world in which we live. In some systems, each level is in some way inferior (less real, less pure, less holy) than the preceding level, which helps a theistic system explain how the world, which contains pain, suffering, evil, and death, proceeds from a timeless, pure, and perfect God. Emanationist systems are sometimes paired with an explanation of how we can return to our ultimate source. More on that later.

### From the Many to the One

Conversely, we can go from the many to the one. We can select a physical object and seek what underlies it: its foundation, its ground, its “ultimate ground of existence.”

Consider, for example, a simple wooden table. The existence of the table is “grounded” in the wood. The table cannot exist if the wood ceases to exist, but if the table ceases to exist as a table (i.e., we disassemble it) 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 the table’s fundamental entity; the bottom is the table’s ultimate ground of existence.

We call anything which has components a component entity.<sup>27</sup> Because the table has components (i.e., its parts: top and four legs), the table is a component entity. In general, physical objects are component entities. For example, a table is a component entity consisting of a wooden top and legs. Wood is a component entity 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. Diamonds and graphite appear different but each consists of carbon atoms arranged differently. Thus, diamonds and graphite are components entities consisting of the same component, i.e., carbon atoms, arranged differently.

A component entity need not be physical. Consider the English word ARE. Its components are the letters A, R, and E.

### The Ontologically Basic: Synonyms

Ontology refers to what exists. The ultimate ground of existence is “ontologically basic.” It’s foundational, the fundamental entity, ontologically primitive. It’s “that which lies at the bottom.” “Ultimate ground of existence” and “ontologically basic” point to the same concept. Here are other terms which point to the same reality.

- 1) The All and the One: Because the One, the ultimate ground of existence, is foundational for all that exists, the label “The All and the One” is appropriate.
- 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>28</sup> The world's unchanging basis deserves capitalization; it deserves the title the Real, or the Ultimately Real. We may express the same concept more intuitively by replacing "Real" with "Permanent" and "real" with "transitory, impermanent."<sup>29</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: Imagine 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.

In passing, note that the number zero can seem like nothing, empty. Yet, zero is the origin of the x-axis of high school algebra. In a vaguely similar way, the One is the origin of all, but trying to experience it can at times seem like grasping at emptiness. In Buddhism, *Śūnyatā*, often translated as emptiness, is a fundamental concept.

### Component Entities as Actions

A component entity is sometimes more fitting seen as an act rather than as a thing. For instance, the word “fist” is a noun. Yet, the *act* of curling fingers and thumb together creates the fist and the *act* of opening the hand destroys it; the fist ceases to exist. True, the fist’s components—the fingers and thumb—continue to exist, but the fist does not. Thus, the word “fist” is grammatically a noun (i.e., a thing), but in reality “fist” and “making a fist” indicate an action, a verb.

Viewing a table as a component entity is a static perspective where the table is regarded as a thing. We may also take a dynamic view of the table, as an act. An act of what? The act of the table top and legs continuing to maintain the right relation through time. If at some time, we remove the legs and place them on the tabletop, the table ceases to exist. True, the table’s *parts* continue to exist. But destroy the relation between the parts and you destroy the table, just as rearranging the characters of ARE to EAR leaves the individual parts intact but destroys the word ARE.

If we focus on the *act* of the components keeping the proper relation to each other, we may view a component entity 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.

As another example 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. Yet, the name “Oxford University” remained constant over the centuries. Although the name has

remained constant, it corresponds to no physical thing which 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. 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.

Western philosophy since Socrates has often seen the world in terms of things, of substances. Substances exist independently, in contrast to properties which exist only as properties of some substance. The property “red” doesn’t physically exist (it exists as a concept) unless it inheres in some substance, for instance, an apple. But, as physics has discovered, activity underlies myriad physical phenomena. From the Bohr model of the atom as a nucleus sun with orbiting electrons, to the quantum wave-function which evolves per Schrodinger’s equation, to elementary particles as “excitations” in quantum fields—these concepts contradict the idea of matter as just “dumb stuff” and point to matter as an appearance of something dynamic.

Do actions possess a deep identity? If we plug the drain and then tomorrow unplug it, is it the *same* whirlpool?<sup>30</sup> Or is the identity of acts and component entities provisional, temporary? We will return to such questions when we discuss the permanent self.

Notice how actions suggest an actor, an idea implicit in the dream analogy where the actor is the dreamer.

### Component Entities Possess Relative Existence

For a component entity to exist, its components must maintain the proper relation relative to each other. ARE and EAR have exactly the same components but 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. Thus, the existence of a component entity depends on its components *and* the component's arrangement relative to each other. If the relation ceases to exist, then the entity ceases to exist (though the components may continue to exist). Thus, we may say the table, the fist, and the word ARE possess relative existence in that their existence depends not only on the continued existence of their components but also on the continued right relation of the components to each other. Component entities have relative existence.<sup>31</sup>

Is there anything which is not a component entity? Is there anything which is not a mixture of distinct components? A book consists of paragraphs, which consist of sentences, which consist of words, which consist of characters of the alphabet along with typographical characters such as the comma, the period, etc. Individual characters are "that which lies at the bottom" of the book. A word has components, its characters, but characters themselves have no components. Characters are the ultimate ground of existence of the book.<sup>32</sup>

Physical objects also have something which lies at the bottom, something which has no components, something which we call "the ultimate ground of existence." Notice, if something has no components, it cannot have relative existence. Therefore,

the ultimate ground of existence (if it truly exists) must have some other type of existence, which we may call absolute existence.

### Old Theology: Experiencing God

If the universe is an artifact created by God, separate and distinct from God, then we have no natural way to directly experience God. God is outside and distinct from the universe so direct experience of God is impossible unless God enters the universe to communicate with us. Old Theology says 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. Some people claim experience which is much more intimate and profound; reports of vision of Jesus, Krishna, and other supernatural persons are common. Is it possible to directly experience the ultimate ground of existence?

### New Theology: Experiencing God

Does New Theology have the idea of direct experience of God, of the ultimate ground of existence? Is it even possible to directly experience our ultimate ground, something below the level of molecule, atom and quark? After all, we experience a thing’s properties (its shape, weight, smell, taste, etc.), but

never the “thing-in-itself.”<sup>33</sup> So, how can direct experience of the Real be possible?

We might answer,<sup>34</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>35</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.

What might direct experience of the One be like? We’ll discuss the records left by four people who have arguably<sup>36</sup> had such experience.

In 1945, a 42-year-old Jungian psychiatrist raised Protestant, had an unusual experience.

There 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>37</sup>

Her experience lasted for five days; the aftereffects lasted longer. 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.”

Saint Augustine describes a similar experience.

. . . 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>38</sup>

Augustine’s account suggests a God which is immanent (“I entered even into my inward self”) and impersonal (“It made me and I was made by it”). “Light Unchangeable” is an apt metaphor for such a God.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal also had an experience of God. He describes experience of something impersonal—FIRE—but identifies it with a Person God of his religion. On a folded parchment sown into a jacket pocket, so it would always be near his heart, Pascal wrote a memento of his experience:

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>39</sup>

Pascal experiences “FIRE,” a fire that gives him certitude, joy, and peace. He 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. Pascal identifies the fire with a God of his religion, Yahweh, also known as God the Father.

Lastly, we’ll discuss what Symeon “The New Theologian,” a monk of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, said about the Light which is God. Eastern Orthodox Christianity identifies “Uncreated Light” as the divine light that shone 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.

Symeon 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>40</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>41</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>42</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>43</sup>

If God is ultimate ground of existence, then God and the universe are entwined, are intimately related. 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. We would cease to exist the moment God stopped creating us. God resides in us immanently, at our deepest level. We cannot continue to exist separate from God. Therefore, direct experience of God should be potentially available to everyone. In fact, it is our birthright.

Direct experience of God is our birthright.

An observation: the experiences above include the person who experiences (e.g., Augustine, Pascal) and the experienced (ultimate ground of existence). But if we ultimately are images of Uncreated Light, then unitive experience should be possible where experiencer and experienced temporarily merge and only experience remains.

### 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?<sup>44</sup> allow or forbid capital punishment? allow or forbid war?” You’ll get contradictory answers.

Jesus cannot simultaneously be for and against something. So, what should we conclude? One answer is that the personal relationship is imaginary. Another answer is to admit they are experiencing something, perhaps something sacred, but not accept the explanation. It’s as if some primitive people use the bark of the white willow tree as a remedy for headache. In their experience, the remedy is effective. But if they attribute the efficacy of tree bark to some woodland nymph, they are attributing gratuitously. We admit the validity of their experience, i.e., that tree bark does indeed cure headache, but reject the woodland nymph explanation.

Similarly, 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 we do not accept the explanation. In a word, gratuitous attribution is the idea that experiences are similar, even identical, but descriptions of the experiences are shaped by religion, culture, personal beliefs, etc.

A final point: we use the word “Light” as a metaphor of mystical experience. Obviously, we don’t mean electromagnetic radiation. (“the Light Unchangeable. Not this ordinary light, which all flesh may look upon”—Augustine). “Light” avoids gratuitously attributing the experience to Jesus, God the Father, Allah, Krishna, Buddhism’s Clear Light of the Void, or Ultimate Ground of Existence. *We* attribute Light to Ultimate Ground of Existence. If our attribution is incorrect (i.e., if the Light is actually an experience of Jesus, Krishna, etc.), the experience nonetheless remains.

### Old Theology: Way of Knowing

The philosophic field of epistemology studies ways of deciding what is true, ways of obtaining genuine knowledge. There are several epistemological methods, several “ways of knowing.” Some are better than others.

Old Theology’s way of knowing—its way of deciding what is true—accepts the authority of scripture and/or 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” means clergy’s interpretation of scripture. So, in reality, “Clergy say it; I believe it; and that settles it for me.”

In Old Theology, revelation is complete, final, done. God’s Word has been revealed. Clergy and believers are left only to “properly interpret” what scripture says, then follow it. Some exceptions to this are denominations which accept the idea of continuing revelation, denominations such as the Quakers<sup>45</sup>,

the Latter-Day Saints, and some Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian sects.

Continuing revelation religions allow 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. A continuing revelation must conform to scripture, not contradict accepted dogma.

Old Theology's epistemological method is like that of the child in that truth is what someone—some clergy, 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" or "clergy."

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 statements. 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." At best, one of those statements is true. Faith is an inferior way of knowing that leads us to accept untrue statements.

Old Theology's epistemological method leads to contradictory theologies. Science's method does not. That is why we can answer a question such as "What does the science of physics say about . . .?" But we cannot answer a question such as "What does theology say about . . ." without knowing which theology. An epistemological method what leads to contradictions is an inferior method.

### New Theology: Way of Knowing

Science's way of knowing values truth above all; in particular, 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?

New Theology values truth above all; in particular, above accepted beliefs, above comforting beliefs that lack justification. To find the truth, New Theology would employ, as far as possible, the best epistemological method known today, science's way of knowing. Like science, New Theology could have no beliefs above question, no eternal, unchangeable dogma.

In 1859, Charles Darwin published his ground-breaking work, "On the Origin of Species." Since then, biologists have built upon his work and in the process found some of Darwin's ideas incorrect, in need of revision. Such is the nature of scientific progress. Thus, we should expect some of our ideas may one day be found to be incorrect and in need of revision. The

author looks forward to any corrections and new insights the future brings.

### 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. Later, 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 Catholic Church."<sup>46</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>47</sup> Some Baptists say Catholics and Mormons need to be saved. Some Christians believe baptism by immersion is essential to salvation. Ask Christians how to be saved and you will get different, contradictory answers. And, of course, Christianity and Islam have contradictory 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, 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 observations proved Einstein correct, science accepted his theories. Science has a superior epistemological method, a method that doesn't rely on authority, or 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. And due to their inferior epistemological method, probably never will.

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>48</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>49</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 differ, 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>50</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>51</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?

New Theology does not support an official clergy, but this is a strength, not a weakness. Many fields are meritocracies. Those fields have no official leaders, 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 the duties of 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; God rules the “Kingdom of Heaven.” 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>52</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>53</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>54</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 may come second.<sup>55</sup> 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>56</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>57</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>58</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>59</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: respect and obey authority. A democracy asks people to determine their own fate; the immature and gullible 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>60</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>61</sup> One race or ethnic group may dominate

others.<sup>62</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>63</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. But 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 supports 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>64</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 years old to discourage 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 having to make hard choices, a shield against the unimaginably vast universe itself. 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.)

Moreover, 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, because 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, perhaps even to direct experience of God.

### 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 historically how could a good, loving God have failed to communicate them clearly, i.e., have failed to communicate clearly what is and is not objectively moral? In medieval Europe, burning women to death for witchcraft was accepted as God's will.<sup>65</sup> For centuries, much of Christianity believed that slavery was objectively moral.<sup>66</sup> If these practices are objectively immoral, then why didn't God make that obvious? Today, serious moral questions exist 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. In reality, the opinion of the public, some dominant social class, or clergy subjectively 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, unquestionable, and come from God: people may accept as moral something their heart says is wrong. Some truly atrocious "morals" have been practiced, for centuries.<sup>67</sup> For example, recall the torture and death by fire 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>68</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>69</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 cannot 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, it is 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!

The female cat or dog is interested in sex only when conception is possible. Such a strict sexuality would have human couples behave like the lower animals. This view of sexuality 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, eternal torture, or a better reincarnation. The present may seem significant or not. If someone is trying to be saved, to go to heaven when they die, then the present may be of supreme importance because it 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 relatively unimportant.

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>70</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>71</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 those few, the “saints,” 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. We may revisit any frame we wish. 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>72</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>73</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.

### Regressives and Progressives

A stereotype is defined as an unfair, untrue belief about a class of people. Stereotypes are often rooted in bigotry and xenophobia. The author believes the following observations are fair, often true, and rooted in experience, but leaves the verdict to the reader. It appears that Old Theology addresses the regressive while New Theology addresses the progressive.

<b>Intuitive, Mythical, Regressive</b>		<b>Empirical, Rational, Progressive</b>
Fantasy view of past (Garden of Eden, Worldwide flood, all languages originating in one place), based on unchangeable scriptures immune to addition or correction.	The past	Evidence-based. Accepts Big Bang Theory as current best explanation of origins of universe, but will update beliefs if good contrary evidence is discovered.
The present is a degraded version of the past (Ex, original sin). The ideal earthy epoch has passed.	The present	The present is an improved version of the past, at least, from the purely human view: less hunger, better shelters, longer life span, etc.
The Earth and, indeed, the entire universe may not exist much longer when a "second coming" brings the universe to a close.	The future	As far as we can tell, the Earth and the universe will exist for another billions of years.
Ideal earthy epoch is in the past, when person could have personally listened to a sermon of Jesus, walked with Buddha, met Mohammed	Ideal epoch	We are continually progressing towards a better understanding and control of our environment. The ideal earthy epoch for humanity, if it ever occurs, lies in the future.

<p>Small, comfortable. The Earth is merely thousands of years old. Nothing of real significance occurred which is not in scripture.</p>	<p>Mental Universe</p>	<p>Vast, challenging. We live in an incredibly old, unimaginably vast universe, and there is much to be discovered.</p>
<p>Desires absolutely true answers, preferably directly from God. Finds uncertainty uncomfortable. Often refuses to seek or consider disconfirming evidence.</p>	<p>Knowledge</p>	<p>Can tolerate uncertainty and not knowing. Satisfied with best explanation of the evidence. Often willing to consider the other side of an argument and will consider disconfirming evidence.</p>
<p>Apparent contradictions to belief are threatening, and to be ignored</p>	<p>Anomalies</p>	<p>Apparent contradictions to belief motivate the search for a revised, improved understanding</p>
<p>Necessary but should not be overdone, especially if it leads to doubt and uncertainty about religion.</p>	<p>Education</p>	<p>Education and knowledge are inherently valuable, as well as useful.</p>
<p>Gullible. Believes peers, famous people, and Internet memes; distrusts experts and science.</p>	<p>Expertise</p>	<p>Skeptical. Generally trusts those whose background, education, and/or expertise seems to merit trust. Trusts science.</p>

<p>Just as God is above the angels who are above us, some people are financially above other people. The world is filled with evil people, who just want to free-load off the rest of us, so they can watch T.V. and do drugs and sex all day. There is nothing wrong with a society consisting of a few extremely wealthy people among a generally poor, uneducated populace.</p>	<p>Economics</p>	<p>All people are worthy. When people whose creations or invention improve our lives are rewarded, it's a win-win situation. But the economic "floor" should be high enough that everyone has decent food, clothing, shelter, and medical services. If wealthy, probably philanthropic.</p>
<p>Generally backward looking; believes things were better in the "good old days" when people "knew their place"</p>	<p>Politics</p>	<p>Forward looking; believes existing institutions should be improved or replaced to better serve humanity</p>
<p>Sex only between man and woman; ideally sex should occur only when conception is possible. The main purpose of sex is procreation.</p>	<p>Sexuality</p>	<p>Within the bounds of a balanced, sane sexuality, sex is for expression of love and intimacy. Procreation is its secondary purpose, especially in light of overpopulation.</p>
<p>People are either good or evil. Evil people should be punished. The condition of prisons is of little importance, because it pales next to what they will suffer in hell.</p>	<p>Punishment</p>	<p>People sometimes do good and sometimes do bad things. As far as possible, prisons should be places that salvage lives, not destroy lives.</p>

<p>Because there are so many evil people in the world, people who differ from us are to be avoided; they are probably evil or inferior to us. Just as God is above the angels, and the angels are above us, we are above people of a certain gender, race, or ethnic group.</p>	<p>Racism and Xenophobia</p>	<p>Celebrates the world's smorgasbord of cultures, ideas and cultures. We all have more in common than not.</p>
<p>Leaders often enjoy extraordinary, even supernatural, status. The pope is the representative of Christ on Earth. God has ordained our political leader. Kings derive their authority from God and rule by "divine right." Opposing leaders are evil, even Satanic.</p>	<p>Leaders</p>	<p>Leaders are human beings, no more. Some leaders are good; some not. But none are anything more than a man or woman in a position of leadership. Leaders derive their authority from the people, who can vote someone into office, or out of office.</p>
<p>Often accepts various superstitions such as belief in witches, demons, etc.</p>	<p>Superstition</p>	<p>Usually rejects superstition for lack of evidence.</p>
<p>Amygdala (emotions - the amygdala is the part of the brain which experiences emotions, in particular, fear and anger. It's responsible for the "fight or flight" response)</p>	<p>Dominant Lobe</p>	<p>Cerebral Cortex (higher thought - The cerebral cortex supports higher-level reasoning and intelligence)</p>

The amygdala is the part of the brain which experiences emotions, in particular, fear and anger. It's responsible for the "fight or flight" response. The cerebral cortex supports higher-

level reasoning and intelligence. It has been speculated that the regressive has an overactive amygdala and an underdeveloped cerebral cortex, while the progressive has a better developed cerebral cortex. Relative to their overall size, humans have the largest cerebral cortex of all mammals. So, it might be argued that people with an overdeveloped amygdala and an underdeveloped cerebral cortex are people who are failing to realize their human potential.

### The Four-Part View of the Human Person

We turn now to discussion of ourselves, of who and what we are. Of course, fundamentally we are a manifestation of the ultimate ground of existence, as is everything else. Our investigation, however, concerns who are what we are as an individual person.

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

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

India has a yoga (i.e., spiritual discipline) for each part:

- karma yoga - the yoga of the body
- bhakti yoga - the yoga of emotion and devotion
- jnana yoga - the yoga of knowledge
- raja yoga - the yoga of meditative consciousness

And the Roman Catholic Baltimore Catechism has, "Who made us? God made us. . . . To gain the happiness of heaven we must know, love, and serve God in this world."<sup>74</sup> Notice the correspondence: know and intellect, love and emotion, serve

and body. (Notice, too, that “*Who* made me?” presupposes a person God.)

Buddha taught a human being consists of five aggregates (the five Skandhas), which are described as:

- form (or material image, impression)
- sensations (or feelings, received from form)
- perceptions
- mental activity or formations
- consciousness

The four-part division of a human being seems to take perception for granted. Perception of what? Of physical sensations, emotional sensations, and mental sensations, with consciousness functioning to unite the sensations, to give the impression of a single person who experiences the sensations. If we rearrange five aggregates as follows: Consciousness of perception of:

- physical form
- emotional sensations
- mental activity or formations

we see a loose correspondence between the five aggregates and the four-part view.

### The Soul

The four-part view sees us as body, emotion, intellect, and consciousness or soul. We’ll take the fourth part as consciousness but will say a few words in passing about the soul.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>75</sup> describes the soul as the “spiritual principle of human beings . . . *the subject of human consciousness* . . . Each human soul is individual and immortal.” [Italics mine]. Of course, monist system such as

ours cannot accept an immortal soul which is eternally separate from the One. (If the existence of an eternal individual soul was ever demonstrated, we'd have to change our theology.)

The phrase "*the subject of human consciousness*" seems to imply the soul is the subject, i.e., the perceiver, and human consciousness is the perceived, i.e., the object. We regard human consciousness as the subject, i.e., the perceiver. In our view, "sense" data is delivered to consciousness by our body, emotions, and mind. (We put "sense" in quotes because our definition of sense data is broader than usual, as it includes emotions and thoughts. This is an uncommon view which we revisit below, in *The Seven Senses*.)

A reason for choosing consciousness instead of soul as our fourth part is that consciousness is concrete and empirical; it's something we all possess and all experience. Soul, on the other hand, is a faith-based concept. Is the soul also in any sense empirical? That is, can we experience our soul? Do we have any evidence, as opposed to faith, of its existence?

Suppose we cannot experience our soul but must accept its existence on faith. Then, an obvious, and disturbing, question is: why should I care about the fate of my eternal soul? If I do not experience my soul, then at this very moment it might be in heaven, in hell, or sitting atop the Eiffel Tower—but I wouldn't know it. So, why should I care where it is, or where it goes after I die?

### The Seven Senses

The four-part view pictures a human person as consisting of four parts: body, emotion, intellect, and consciousness. It

implies that we possess seven senses: the five physical senses (touch, taste, hearing, sight, smell), a sixth emotional sense (“heart”), and a seventh thought sense (“mind”).<sup>76</sup> Our consciousness directly experiences three types of input: physical (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste), emotional (love, hate, happy, sad, etc.), and mental (thoughts).

Our physical senses report on what we encounter “out there” in the physical world, which we’ll find convenient to call the “Landscape.” We walk in the Landscape and come upon an object, let’s say, a tree. The tree was there before we encountered it. We experience a pre-existent reality which “lives” in the Landscape. We’ll think of mind and emotions in the same way, as experiencing something “out there.” (This is an uncommon picture of mind and emotions.)

So, imagine the Mindscape<sup>77</sup>, a space where all possible thoughts already exist. When we have a thought, we experience a pre-existent thought, just as we experience the pre-existent tree. When we experience a thought, we “see” the thought in the Mindscape, where it existed before we encountered it.<sup>78</sup> In this view, thoughts are objects we encounter, not in the Landscape but in the Mindscape.

Most mathematicians have a similar view<sup>79</sup> of math; they regard mathematical truths as discovered rather than invented. The idea  $2 + 2 = 4$ <sup>80</sup> was in the Mindscape from all eternity, waiting to be seen. With this way of thinking, Einstein didn’t invent the theory of relativity; he found it in the Mindscape, where it had been all along. He explored the Mindscape and searched until he found ideas which describe reality, i.e., the ideas of the theory of relativity. Just as a prospector might strike gold somewhere in the Landscape, Einstein found relativity in the Mindscape.

To complete the sequence of Landscape and Mindscape, we'll call the space where all possible emotions live the Emotescape. When we experience joy or fear, we experience a pre-existent object, an object which "lives" in the Emotescape, just as trees live in the Landscape and thoughts in the Mindscape.

Just as we picture the physical world as "out there," as its entities (e.g., people, tables, rocks) existing before we encounter them, we regard the mental and emotional worlds as "out there," their entities (e.g., logic and math, love and hate) as existing before we experience them. This view has the virtue of simplicity: whatever we experience, we experience via a sense, be it a physical sense (touch, taste, hearing, sight, smell), an emotional sense (by which we experience love, hate, etc.), or a mental sense which allows us to explore the world of thoughts.

In our ontology, emotions and thoughts exist independently of us. All possible thoughts exist now in the Mindscape. 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.

It may seem odd thinking of emotions and thoughts as pre-existing objects, like a tree. Indeed, an obvious objection is that we are "objectifying" or "reifying" emotions and thoughts. That is, we are making something into an object which is not an object, as when we talk about a donut hole as if it were a thing. But it may be said we objectify the physical universe, too, as we'll see when we discuss perception.

### The Interior and Exterior Perspective

Our experience is of two broad types: interior/subjective and exterior/objective. I experience pain, headaches, dreams, emotions, thoughts, etc. from the interior, subjective perspective, the first-person perspective. I experience people, sky, sunlight, wind, rain, etc. from the exterior, objective perspective, the third-person perspective.

From the interior perspective, I experience myself as a presence, a consciousness which is aware . . . or, rather, I *am* a presence, a consciousness which is aware of an ever-changing stream of physical, emotional, and mental sensations. The sensations stream into and out of awareness.

From the exterior perspective, I experience myself in the context of an external world of people, places, and things. Rather than experiencing sense sensations, I experience external entities and my relation to those entities in terms of subject, relation, object. “I (subject) work for (relation with) the XYZ company (the object, the external entity). I (subject) love (relation) my wife and children (external entities). I play football, enjoy camping, and play the saxophone.”

I experience myself, my “I”, from both perspectives.

In the exterior perspective, the “frame,” i.e., the big picture, is the exterior world, of which we are a part. In that sense, the exterior world contains us; we live in it. In the interior perspective, the “frame” is all our sensations. Some sensations are from the outer world (that tree, that building). Some sensations are from our inner world (this emotion, that

thought). In that sense, we contain the exterior world; it exists within us.

### Consciousness

Our picture of the human person is a simple one: we are essentially a consciousness, a consciousness which is aware (usually) of a stream of various physical, emotional, and mental sensations.

But what do we mean by “consciousness?” Consciousness is notoriously difficult to define. It occupies a peculiar place in science, philosophy, and religion. Views about consciousness span a spectrum from consciousness as the result of brain activity to consciousness as our real self and the very basis of the universe.

Rupert Spira<sup>81</sup> describes consciousness” as “that in which all experience appears, with which all experience is known, and out of which all experience is made.” Consciousness has also been described as “first-person subjective experience.”

What do we mean by first-person subjective experience? A philosophical thought experiment known as the Knowledge Argument<sup>82</sup> illustrates. Consider a woman named Mary. Mary has lived in a black-and-white room her entire life and has never seen the color red. Mary has learned everything there is to know about color, in particular, the color red. She knows the frequency and wavelength of red light, what rods and cones in the eye sense color, what parts of the brain process color information, the psychological reasons for the sometime association of red with anger, etc. At this point Mary possess only the type of knowledge which can be written in a book or

stored on a computer. She has no first-person subjective experience of the color red.

One day Mary leaves her black-and-white room and *sees* red. That day, she gains something that all her knowledge failed to give her: first-person subjective experience of the color red.

We can *describe* consciousness as “first-person subjective experience,” but in the final analysis we can *know* the meaning of the phrase only if we ourselves experience it.<sup>83</sup> Thus, an adequate definition of consciousness may be difficult or impossible.<sup>84</sup> We understand the word “consciousness” only because we ourselves are conscious. According to the famous jazz musician Louie Armstrong, “If you have to ask what jazz is, you’ll never know.” The same might be said of consciousness.

In what manner does consciousness arise? In our monist system, its ultimate foundation must be the ultimate ground of existence. But does consciousness have a physical basis, or is it somehow outside contemporary physical laws? Is consciousness an object, a thing, i.e., a substantial entity?<sup>85</sup> Or is it a process?

The exterior perspective says consciousness is an activity, a process, “what the brain does.” To illustrate, a river is a process, a flowing of water. Stop the flow and the river ceases to exist. In its place, there is a lake. This perspective says it’s possible that someday physical laws will fully explain consciousness as brain activity.

The interior perspective, on the other hand, says consciousness is what we are. Here are two analogies. Imagine consciousness as the constant light illuminating a room. In this analogy, consciousness is what lights up the room, while the

body, feelings and thoughts are the ever-changing furniture in the room. In the second analogy, we imagine consciousness as a mirror; a mirror is not touched or changed by what it reflects. Consciousness becomes aware of body, emotion, and thoughts, but is not changed by them. In both analogies, the contents of consciousness change, but consciousness itself is unchanging. So, we picture consciousness as awareness, aware of our physical, emotional, and mental sensations, but not permanently affected by the sensations. As another analogy, imagine consciousness as space itself, and our sensations as objects in space.

We'll regard consciousness itself, in its native state, as presence, as a content-free awareness. Usually, however, a stream of various physical, emotional, and mental sensations fills our consciousness. So, we imagine consciousness as a mirror and sensations (physical, emotional, and/or mental) as reflections in the mirror. Or we imagine consciousness like the light shining in a room, illuminating the room in which there are various passing physical, emotional, and mental sensations.

Everything we experience, we experience in consciousness. Without consciousness, my brain might have biological, chemical, and electrical activity, but there would be no one to experience it.<sup>86</sup> The TV is on but no one is watching it. The phone is ringing but there is no one to answer it.

The light and mirror analogies suggest the possibility of "pure consciousness," which we might imagine as light shining in a bare room. Or a blank mirror, a mirror empty of any bodily, emotional or thought content. Or empty space in which sensations rise and fall.

### Consciousness: An Exterior Approach

The exterior perspective begins with the exterior physical world and then tries to explain what we experience. It says consciousness is a physical process. Consciousness emerges from biological, chemical, and electrical activity in the brain. It's a product of brain activity: "consciousness is what the brain does."

Science understands the universe in terms of four fundamental forces: gravity, electromagnetism, the weak and strong nuclear forces. Nowhere in those four forces do we find a basis for consciousness, or even the suggestion that consciousness can exist. But we are conscious. What is the bridge from the physical to consciousness?

Some scientists believe no bridge is needed. If everything is physical, then consciousness can be nothing more than an emergent property of the physical, nothing more than the result of brain activity.<sup>87</sup> So, scientists work to correlate experience with the behavior of certain sections of the brain. For instance, a man speaks and brain activity increases in his frontal lobes. He hears and brain activity increases in his temporal lobes.

Neuroscience is achieving an ever-deeper understanding of the relation between the consciousness and our thoughts, emotions, and bodily movements.<sup>88</sup> Suppose one day it finds a *perfect* understanding of the relation: that they are merely two sides of the same coin. So, if a person thinks "cheese sandwich" we'll know exactly what parts of the brain must 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 a perfect correlation between consciousness and physical phenomena.

But would correlation prove that consciousness is a purely physical phenomenon? Perhaps not.

As an illustration, imagine a mousetrap of the old kind: a wooden base, a spring connected to a hammer, cheese bait that triggers the hammer. Also imagine the mouse trap is conscious. It experiences anticipation when triggered, and peace after catching a mouse. There are physical correlates: the spring has more potential energy when set (anticipation) and less potential energy (peace) after it's been triggered. Spring potential energy might perfectly correlate with feelings of anticipation and peace, but would not explain how a mouse trap could experience those feelings.

Finding a perfect correlation is certainly difficult and may be impossible. Nonetheless, finding a correlation has been called the "easy problem of consciousness," easy in relation to the "hard problem of consciousness"<sup>89</sup> which is: how does consciousness arise from the physical? The exterior perspective sees perception as an activity of the brain, more specifically, as biological, chemical, and electrical activity. But how exactly can such activity create consciousness? Is electricity conscious? Are chemicals, molecules, and atoms? Panpsychism<sup>90</sup> says yes; many philosophers and scientists say no.

So, how do we account for consciousness? Physical correlates (e.g., brain activity) don't seem to adequately answer the question. Correlation doesn't seem to solve the hard problem of consciousness. Some scientists wonder if consciousness is an uncharted fundamental phenomenon, in addition to the

four already known: gravity, electromagnetism, the weak and strong nuclear forces.<sup>91</sup>

### Consciousness: An Interior Approach

The interior perspective begins with consciousness and then tries to explain what we experience.

This simplest explanation (which hardly anyone accepts) is solipsism, which says the universe exists entirely in my consciousness. The universe is a dream of mine. Only I exist. All the universe—the stars, planets, rivers, etc.—are figures in my dream. Other people don't really exist; they are merely figures in my dream, too. Hardly any philosophers seriously argue solipsism.<sup>92</sup> Rather, it's a type of "ground zero" starting point. (Notice: our idea of the universe as a dream in the mind of God is a kind of divine solipsism.)

Solipsism admits that we exist and that we have perceptions, but says that the perceptions tell us nothing about an exterior reality simply because there is no exterior reality. Non-solipsists believe our perceptions tell us something about an external reality. But what?

"Naïve Realism" says our perceptions accurately tell us about the objects of our perceptions. We see things as they are. The apple really is red and really does taste sweet. We are directly aware of the apple. We see it as it exists. Naïve Realism is a common view of the average person, but most philosophers reject it. Why?

Naïve realism fails for an obvious reason. Arthur sees the apple as red. Color blind Joe sees it as gray. An alien sensitive to radiation in the radio, infrared, ultraviolet, and/or X-ray

regions of the electromagnetic might see the apple as translucent. Or not see it at all. Neither human nor alien see the “real apple.” Rather, they see only some of its properties.

But surely some properties of the apple—its mass and charge, for instance—are independent of any observer. Thus, we are led to the idea of two property types: “secondary” properties and “primary” properties. Secondary properties depend on the observer; they are subjective and vary with the individual. But primary properties such as its mass and charge are the same for all observers. Or so it was once believed, before the Theory of Relativity discovered that mass depends on the observer’s inertial frame.

But whether a property is primary or secondary, it’s still a property. A specific observer under specific lighting conditions sees the apple one way. A different observer (perhaps color-blind) under different lighting conditions may see the apple quite differently. Different observers experience the apple differently. What is the apple “in itself”? What is the apple irrespective of any particular observer, irrespective of any specific environment or experiencer? Old Theology might answer God knows the apple in its entirety, as it is in itself.

If we can only experience some of an object’s properties, then we are unable to experience what it is “in itself.” What the object is in itself is unknowable to us. We can experience the apple’s appearance, but we cannot experience the ultimate apple-in-itself which support the properties. We experience appearance not reality.

But if the thing in itself is unknowable to us, why postulated it at all? Why not just eliminate the thing in itself; why not say only properties exist? If we are strictly empirical, we must

admit that we directly experience only properties. Based on the somewhat meager input of our five physical senses, our mind creates its picture of the physical world in which we live. We experience sensations, but reality, the “thing in itself” lies beyond our five senses.

The thing in itself eludes us; it remains for us a theoretical construct, i.e., something the mind creates to explain the properties we experience. For instance, we have no direct experience of mass. Rather, mass is based on an object’s behavior when accelerated. The harder we have to push to accelerate the object, the more massive we say the object is. We experience push, a force, rather than the theoretical construct called “mass.”

Perhaps only properties exist. Famously, philosopher George Berkeley took this view; Berkeley denied there was anything material, anything beyond experience. He believed that objects are only a collection of “ideas” (by which he seems to have meant “sensations”) and ideas depend on a mind to exist. Just as the sensation of pain or a headache cannot exist without a mind to experience it, Berkeley held that objects only exist while they are perceived. Existence and perception, Berkeley claimed, are inseparable.

There’s an obvious objection to Berkeley’s claim. We light a candle and experience its properties: its light, its odor. We are perceiving the candle, so it exists. But if we leave the room and return later, the candle had burned down, evidence that it existed when we were not observing it. Doesn’t that prove that the candle has an existence independent of perception? Not if we introduce God as the universal perceiver. God perceives the candle when we do not. God’s perception, said Berkeley, maintains the candle existence while we are not in the room.<sup>93</sup>

If we do not accept Berkeley's argument,<sup>94</sup> we are left with the thing in itself, forever beyond the reach of human knowledge, forever beyond any picture based on our bodily, emotional and mental sensations.

To sum up, the relation between the physical and consciousness depends on how we define consciousness. We regard consciousness itself as content-free awareness, so correlations don't matter. We imagine consciousness like a mirror and sensations (physical, emotional, and/or mental) as reflections in the mirror. Sensations may correlate to physical processes. But what the mirror reflects (i.e., the sensations) in no way explain the mirror itself.

### The Future

We do not yet have a complete understanding of consciousness. What may the future bring? What possibilities remain?

1. Eventually, we'll explain consciousness in terms of existing physical laws. Neuroscience and brain imaging are only a few decades old. If we keep trying, eventually we'll solve the hard problem of consciousness—in terms of physical forces we know today.
2. Consciousness is a physical entity independent of the four known forces (gravity, electromagnetism, the strong and weak nuclear forces). Eventually, we'll discover a fifth force from which consciousness derives.
3. Consciousness is non-physical; it entirely transcends the physical universe. In this case, we'd be forced to reject monism and accept a dualism where the world

consists of ultimately two types of things: consciousness and the physical.<sup>95</sup>

4. Consciousness is fundamental. All phenomena—physical, emotional, and mental—exists in consciousness, and have consciousness as their fundamental ground. This idea entails a particular view of perception, to which we now turn.

### Perception

. . . let us remember that our knowledge of the world begins not with matter but with perceptions. I know for sure that my pain exists, my “green” exists, and my “sweet” exists. I do not need any proof of their existence, because these events are a part of me; everything else is a theory. Later we find out that our perceptions obey some laws, which can be most conveniently formulated if we assume that there is some underlying reality beyond our perceptions. This model of material world obeying laws of physics is so successful that soon we forget about our starting point and say that matter is the only reality, and perceptions are only helpful for its description.<sup>96</sup>

Under our interior perspective, all the possible emotions and thoughts a person experiences are pre-existent “out there” in the Emotescape or the Mindscape. We experience them much as we experience a tree. Even if our view about emotions and ideas is rejected, most people will admit that we possess five physical senses, which unarguably seem to experience

something “out there.” But if all I can *directly* experience of the physical world is sense data: i.e., sight, touch, hearing, smell, and taste, then how can I experience a tree? Without a special “tree-sensing” sense, how can I possibly experience a tree?

The answer is I do not *directly* experience the tree. I directly experience sense data. I see, i.e., directly experience, patches of brown and green. The brown patches feel rough; the green patches feel smooth. My mind retrieves the idea of a tree from the Mindscape. Or, if you prefer, my mind creates the idea of the tree. In any case, all I directly experience is the thought of the tree, along with the physical sensations of touch and color.

The tree I experience is a mental representation of the physical sensations that I experience. My idea of the tree represents the sense data I receive. That the tree is a material object in an exterior world is a (quite logical) conclusion, but it is not what I directly experience. What I experience is the mental idea of a tree. My idea of the tree and the physical object called a tree are two different things. Similarly, a city map has lines which correspond to city streets. But the map and city streets are two different things.

The tree I experience is a mental representation. I do not *directly* experience an external material world.<sup>97</sup> Rather, that world is an idea which makes sense of what I do directly experience: the five physical senses. Similarly, when I watch a video on a computer or TV monitor, all I experience are light and sound. Based on the lights and sounds, my mind accesses ideas such as people, sand, ocean, clouds, etc. I experience the monitor’s light and sound, and the ideas that my mind accesses. Similarly, I experience the world’s lights, sounds, odors, tastes, and tactile sensations, and the ideas that my mind accesses.

In the process of perception, we objectify the physical universe. We *experience* only sensations (physical, emotional and mental sensations) but we *think* object. “Tree” is a representation, something our mind creates<sup>98</sup> to explain what we do experience: the sight of brown and green, the feel of rough and smooth.<sup>99</sup> In a word, materialism objectifies sensations.

So, our direct experience is of three types: physical sensations, emotional sensations, and mental sensations. We can be absolutely certain of the existence only of those sensations. The tree we experience is a mental representation based on our physical sensations. Our access to the external, physical universe is through our five physical senses, which are all we directly experience physically.

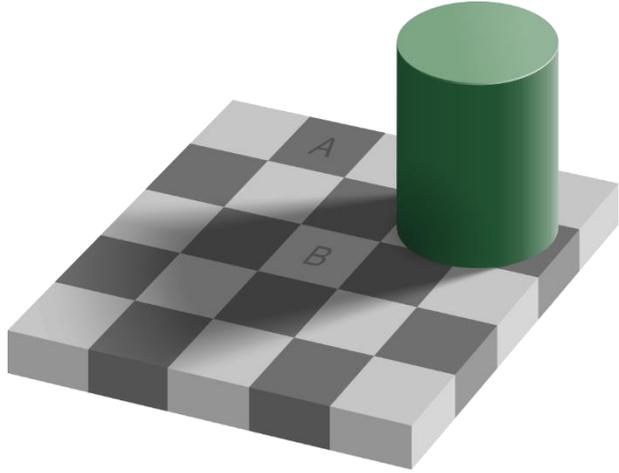
The idea is not a new one. Philosophers long ago created the “brain in a vat” thought experiment where someone is fed sense data such that they experience a seemingly exterior world. (This idea is the premise of the movie “The Matrix.”) Another way to imagine the situation is that someone is dreaming, but the dream is being controlled by someone else.

We routinely take our mental representations as reality. Sometimes, our representation is inaccurate, as when we see a mirage but believe we see water. Also, it is well-known that the physical image on our eyes is upside down. We don’t see the world upside down, because our mind automatically flips the image.<sup>100</sup>

Our eyes experience raw visual sense data, but often we do not. Rather, we experience a mental representation of our raw sensory input. We see what our mind creates. That we are

aware of our mental representation rather than raw sense data is strikingly illustrated by the Adelson's Checker-Shadow Illusion.

The squares labeled A and B are the same color! (I printed the image and cut out the two squares to convince myself. Try it.) If we



merely saw what our eyes saw, the squares would look the same.<sup>101</sup> But even after I *know* the two squares are the same color—even after I print, cut, and have the two squares side by side—my mind still automatically takes light and shadow into account, and creates a picture of reality. In this case, an untrue picture.

Our mind processes sense data and creates a representation; we experience the representation rather than the raw sense data. We experience the representation our mind creates based on what our physical senses report. Of course, sometimes we experience raw sensation such as pain, a massage, or walking in a light rain on a warm day. And sometimes we directly experience joy, sadness, and other emotions.

Our mind's automatic processing is a wonderful evolutionary advantage. For survival, seeing some orange, black, and white stripes is far inferior to seeing a tiger. But we have no tiger-

sensing sense. There is only one thing we can see: light. The mind does the rest.

Note: that we don't directly experience the external world, doesn't necessarily imply that the external world is unreal, an illusion, or a mirage. Anyone is free to decide that 1) the external world is real; 2) the external world is an appearance of something deeper; or 3) suspend judgment and leave the issue unanswered.<sup>102</sup> Our choice is 2).

### The Ultimate Ground of Perception

If we regard consciousness as that which experiences our stream of physical, emotional, and mental sensations, then our consciousness is the ultimate ground of our perceptions. Our perceptions are grounded in consciousness. Without awareness, we cannot perceive. With awareness, we perceive sensations. Sensations exist in awareness but are distinct from it.

So, our inner universe has an ultimate ground of perception and the physical universe has an ultimate ground of existence. But what, then, of monism? We can maintain our monist viewpoint if we suppose the two ultimate grounds are identical, or that one is derived from the other.

From the interior perspective, it is easy to argue that consciousness is fundamental. After all, consciousness is the ultimate ground of everything we perceive. There is no perception without consciousness. Physical sensations, emotions, and thought all come "alive" when consciousness shines its light on them. (Some philosophical systems do, indeed, say that consciousness is the ultimate foundation of reality.)

However, from the exterior perspective, consciousness is but one attribute of living beings. This perspective says simple matter lacks consciousness.

We'll regard the ultimate ground of existence as primary. Therefore, either our consciousness deriving from the One in some way or another, or our consciousness is somehow identical with the One.

So, we'll continue to use the term "ultimate ground of existence" in the sense of "all existence: physical, emotional, mental." We'll regard the ultimate ground of existence as the ultimate ground of our perceptions, the ultimate ground of our thoughts and emotions, and the ultimate ground of the physical universe.

### Experiencing the Thing-in-Itself

We directly experience thought, emotion, and the five physical senses. Anything more is a representation, a theoretical construct, something in our own mind. If we reject Berkeley's position, then there is some exterior thing stimulating our senses, i.e., the "thing-in-itself". But the thing-in-itself is completely inaccessible to us.<sup>103</sup>

Or is it? Consider that to someone else, *I am* a thing-in-itself. The thing-in-itself, which is I, exists irrespective of how anyone experiences me. Is it conceivable that I cannot experience my very own self, the thing-in-itself which is I? Surely, I can experience myself. But if I can experience myself, then there is a least one thing-in-itself—i.e., myself—which I can experience directly. (The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer seems to have made a similar point.)

“I can experience myself”? What can that mean? We’ve seen that the seven senses give us messages from the outside world. But messages need a receiver. I receive the messages. If I am a “thing-in-itself” then I should somehow be able to experience that part of myself. How can I come to experience the thing-in-itself which is I?

By attenuating concern, by withdrawing attention from the seven senses, and turning attention inward. Meditation, in other words. Not the type of meditation that uses imagery (“Imagine yourself in a peaceful forest, near a running stream”). Rather, we mean the type of meditation where you aim for a detachment from bodily, emotional, and mental sensations. Where you passively watch your sensations, as if you’re sitting on a mountaintop watching the clouds of sensations slowly pass. As awareness of sensations ebb, you experience yourself more vividly as a thing-in-itself.

It is a perennial philosophical reflection that if one looks deeply enough into oneself, one will discover not only one’s own essence, but also the essence of the universe. For as one is a part of the universe as is everything else, the basic energies of the universe flow through oneself as they flow through everything else. For that reason, it is thought that one can come into contact with the nature of the universe if one comes into substantial contact with one’s ultimate inner being.<sup>104</sup>

The quotation suggests our consciousness is somehow identical with the One.

## Ego

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

I don't experience myself as a consciousness. I don't experience myself as a soul. Rather, I experience myself as a presence, an “I”, an I that feels itself to be conscious and that experiences physical, emotional, and mental sensations. I usually describe the sensations as something I have. My body. My feelings. My mind. “I” is simply the possessor, the entity which experiences physical, emotional, and mental sensations. I can even say “my consciousness.”

What can we say about that unique entity which is “I”? We imagine consciousness as the experiencer. But if consciousness is generic, like light or a mirror, then one consciousness doesn't differ from another and therefore cannot account for my sense of being an individual, of being someone unique in all the universe, an “I.” So, where does “Arthur”—i.e., my “I”, my identity—fit into the four-part view? Physical, emotional, and mental sensations are something Arthur experiences, not something Arthur is. My consciousness is the experiencer but consciousness as a reflection of the ultimate ground of existence seems impersonal: a light shining in a room, a mirror reflecting sensations. So, what is the relation of the four-part view to the unique “I” which is Arthur?

To answer the question, we first discuss how and when the “I” comes into existence. We imagine the newborn infant experiencing a flood of sensory input, a kaleidoscope of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. In time, the infant discerns patterns in the kaleidoscope, realizes that some sights, sounds,

and tactile sensations “go together,” i.e., are objects. For instance, the toy that she can see, she can also feel, touch, taste, and smell. Later still, the child understands *object permanence*, an idea first described by child psychologist Jean Piaget. Object permanence is the idea that objects have an existence of their own and continue to exist when out of sight. Some objects are external and some are more intimately connected. For instance, when the infant chews on his blanket, he feels a sensation only in his mouth, but when he sucks his thumb, he feels a sensation in his mouth and his thumb.

Eventually, the child applies the idea of object permanence to his self. The child begins to think of herself as separate from the rest of the world. The *idea* of “I,” of myself as a separate person in a world of other people, comes into existence. The child has lost the “oceanic feeling.” The ego has been born.

So, the ego is an *idea*, a *thought*, a thought which a newborn (presumably) lacks.

In time, the child understands that his *name* refers to himself, to a person who has an existence of his own, who is separate from mom and dad. Now, the child has a label for the idea of ego. Arthur embraces the *idea* that he has an existence of his own, and that his name refers to that existence, to his *self*. Arthur identifies with his name and sees himself as a separate person, an ego: “My name is Arthur. I am a different person from mom, dad, and any other person. I am 2 years old. I like chocolate ice cream. I love mom and dad.”

Thus, the ego is our sense of “I.” It’s our self-image. Of course, self-image presupposes a sense of self, which humans, elephants, and a few other animals possess. (To test for a sense of self, researchers surreptitiously put a mark on the

animal's forehead. When looking in a mirror, the self-aware animal notices the mark and tries to remove it; the unself-aware animal doesn't recognize the animal in the mirror as itself.) Evolution has equipped animals with an instinct for survival, but for ego defined as the thought of self, as self-image, a sense of self seems prerequisite.

The ego is also the foundation of our will. Without the ego, we'd have little motivation to act. The elements of the four-part view (i.e., body, emotions, thoughts, and consciousness) are mostly<sup>105</sup> passive. Our consciousness gives us awareness of our sensations but the sensations alone give us little reason to act. Without the ego, we might passively experience pleasure, pain, hot, cold, love, hate, and various thoughts. But add the "I" thought and action is a natural response. "I am feeling pleasure, which I find pleasant, so I will try to increase my pleasure." "I am feeling pain, which I find unpleasant, so I will try to decrease or eliminate my pain."

The "I" thought, the ego, is also the foundation of other thoughts which concern the needs and desires, the safety, the status and power of the separate person which I believe myself to be. We have the base thought—I am a separate person and must protect myself and try to advance my interest—provoking a whole series of related thoughts. A question of what to do becomes a question of what should *I* do, what will benefit *me* the most or harm *me* the least. Life poses a question: should I accept the job offer or not? In response, a multitude of thoughts arise, all explicitly or implicitly involving the concept of I. "I will have a longer commute." "My salary will increase." "I will have more opportunity for advancement in my profession." Etc. My ego tells me to cross the road carefully or I may be injured; that if I work hard maybe I'll get

that promotion; that Fred is my friend but I don't think Gene likes me. Etc. Etc.

Once Arthur sees himself as a separate person with needs and desires of his own, he naturally becomes concerned with satisfying those needs and desires. The Arthur-thought-complex, which we call the ego, works to satisfy those needs and desires. The ego functions as a kind of chief executive officer who guides the body-emotion-thought-consciousness complex through life.

Of course, once Arthur sees himself as a separate person, he sees other people as separate, too. To satisfy his needs, Arthur often has to compete with others who are intent on satisfying their needs. Thus, the strife and competition we see in the world. Egos competing for food, clothing, shelter, and the power to control their lives and, often, the lives of others; trying to feel safe, loved, admired.<sup>106</sup> In many situations, the ego idea naturally leads to the question, "What should I do?" when a better question would be, "What should **we** do?"

The idea of ego, of self, is essential for recognizing dangers to our self, that is, to our body, emotions, mind, and/or consciousness. On the other hand, the ego's self-centeredness can also be a burden. The feeling of being a separate, vulnerable person can be uncomfortable. That is why we so often wish to escape, to forget the ego for a while. Much of the time, we seek release from the ego. We seek to forget our self. So, we forget ourselves in fiction, in sports, in movies, in surfing the Internet, in merely looking at a sunrise, in whatever helps us forget our separate existence.

Sometimes the ego spins out of control, like the cancer cell, and ultimately harms the person whose job it was to protect

and advance. The person afflicted with such an out-of-control ego never has enough, always wants more: think the scrooge, the miserable individual who is glories in his gold; think the person who indulges in sex to the point of addiction, to the detriment of other relationships; think the power-mad person who becomes a dictator. Think the extreme egotist who ruthlessly acts in his own self-interest with no regard for others. It's easy to feel such persons have lost a part of their humanity.

To sum up, just as the tree I experience is a mental representation, the ego is a mental representation. The ego is a mental picture of myself in relation to the world. In the process of perception, we objectify the physical universe. Similarly, we objectify ourselves as person, an ego, separate from all other persons.

Our view of the ego is similar to our view of external objects. We don't experience the external world directly but rather experience sensory data which bring to mind the thought of an object which makes sense of our sensory data. The ego is an idea in the mind just as the external object is actually an idea in the mind.

### Old Theology: The Ego

Arthur learns he is vulnerable. Sometimes he feels pain. He reads about people who suffer a terrible disease. Arthur learns people die and that someday he will experience the same. Such thoughts alter Arthur's self-image: "My name is Arthur. 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, Arthur may seek the comforting protection of a more powerful person, a person God.

Religions answer Arthur's need various ways. Christianity uses a carrot and stick approach to answer Arthur's need for reassurance. Christianity addresses the two poles of Arthur's emotional nature: fear/terror (stick) and the desire for bliss (carrot). It teaches that Arthur was born with original sin and (in some versions of Christianity) is a filthy sinner, totally depraved. Arthur deserves eternal punishment (Fear/Terror). Such teachings serve to increase Arthur's anxiety to the n<sup>th</sup> 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>107</sup> such that God listens to and answers their petitions. Taken to the extreme, we might imagine someone longing to rule his/her own planet as a God.<sup>108</sup>

Old Theology religions reinforce the ego; they help 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 of the ego.

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 it’s an ego-centric lack of concern for the needs of others?)

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 to the ego self. And believers routinely run soup kitchens,<sup>109</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, the cave, or the desert?

### New Theology: The Ego

Arthur’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 a mental image of 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 person who avoids the Seven Deadly Sins. 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 society and the external world. A person in deep meditation may become unattached to their temporal selves of body, emotion, thought. All in an effort to experience the deep, underlying ocean of Uncreated

Light. So, New Theology explains the behavior of the monk and ascetic as leaving the ocean's surface and diving deep.

Thus, a lessened concern with ego<sup>110</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.

### The Permanent Self

#### Know thyself – Socrates

So, who or what am I? There are the physical senses, the emotions and thoughts, consciousness, and the ego. Am I one of these? Or am I a combination of two or more?

If the question "Who am I?" is taken in the everyday sense, then I am the ego; I am my current collection of temporary selves, selves that come and go. I begin as an infant. Later, I am a student. When I leave school, I cease to be a student. I become an employee. When I retire, I am no longer an employee.

If we take the question in a deeper sense, we are asking about an enduring, permanent self. As we've seen, a monist system such as ours leaves no room for a self which is eternally separate and distinct from the ultimate ground of existence. So, can we say that my enduring, permanent self is identical to the universe's ultimate ground?

Yes, and no.

Yes, in that what does not change, what accompanies me throughout my life is my consciousness. In this sense, it makes sense to say that consciousness is my permanent self, that I am consciousness and consciousness is me. In my consciousness, a stream of physical, emotional, and mental sensations rises and falls. The stream is not my enduring self. Neither is the ego idea, which I often take to be my true self. Rather, the ego is my idea, my mental picture, of myself in relation to the world. A feeling of "I-ness" often accompanies the ego idea. But temporary feelings and ideas cannot constitute my permanent self.

No, if we require my permanent self to differentiate me from everyone else. For in our model, consciousness is like a light or a mirror. Light and mirrors are generic: one light of a certain frequency and intensity is the same as another with the same frequency and color; two mirrors may have different frames, but they function identically. The ultimate ground of existence as our permanent self does not differentiate me from anyone else; only my ever-changing stream of sensations does that. So, if we require my permanent self to differentiate me from everyone else, then we must conclude I possess no permanent self; I am a bundle of temporary selves, with no underlying unchanging permanent self. This seems to be the Buddhist "non-self" dogma, which says I am a bundle of the "five

aggregates"—perception, material form, feelings, mental activity, and consciousness—none of which are constant and unchanging.

The realization that our genuine self is not the ego has led some mystics to refer to themselves (i.e., to their collection of temporal selves) in the third person.<sup>111</sup> It's as if when Sam means himself, he says "Yesterday Sam was walking . . ." The practice may seem strange, but it takes to its logical conclusion the idea that ego is not the deep self.

In a monist system, on the fundamental level only the One exists. So, in a monist system either our permanent self is the One, or we do not possess a permanent self. In some Old Theology religions, we possess a permanent self which serves to differentiate me from everyone else; i.e., a supernatural soul.

### The Supernatural

Benjamin Franklin invented the lightning rod in 1752; the religious condemned it as "the heretical rod."

As late as 1770 religious scruples regarding lightning-rods were still felt, the theory being that, as thunder and lightning were tokens of the Divine displeasure, it was impiety to prevent their doing their full work.<sup>112</sup>

In America the earthquake of 1755 was widely ascribed, especially in Massachusetts, to Franklin's rod. The Rev. Thomas Prince, pastor of the Old South Church . . . expressed the opinion that the frequency of

earthquakes may be due to the erection of "iron points invented by the sagacious Mr. Franklin." He goes on to argue that "in Boston are more erected than anywhere else in New England, and Boston seems to be more dreadfully shaken. Oh! there is no getting out of the mighty hand of God."<sup>113</sup>

There is a story that the young student Max Planck was advised not to study theoretical physics because there was little left to be discovered. Planck, of course, later created the idea of the quantum. Later still, Einstein developed his theories of Relativity.

The anecdotes illustrate how easily and how wrongly we once thought we knew the limits of the natural world. "Supernatural" means above and beyond the natural world. It's a valid, internally consistent concept. It's also an empty, useless concept because we do not know the limits of the natural. We do not possess the means of verifying that some phenomenon is, in fact, above and beyond the natural world.

We have yet to discover all that is possible. We may *believe* phenomena such as lightning, walking on water, riding a winged horse, or rising from the dead are phenomena beyond nature, but we cannot know it. In the past, we might have believed someone in Africa could not have a real-time conversation with someone in South America. We might have believed that we would never be able to ask a tiny handheld box for directions home. Today, mobile phones routinely perform both tasks.

Old Theology ontologies often include supernatural beings and places: Gods and demons, heaven and hell, Bodhisattvas and nirvana. New Theology has no use for the concept of the

supernatural. Until we know for certain the limits of the natural universe, we cannot know if something is beyond those limits.

### Me-ness

We've concluded that consciousness is generic, the same in everyone, like sunlight is the same for everyone. As such, my consciousness doesn't make me an individual; it doesn't differentiate me from anyone else. My body, emotions, and thoughts differentiate me from everyone else, but body, emotions, and thoughts are transitory, and thus cannot serve as the basis of a permanent identity. We've also concluded that the ego is a thought, an idea, the idea of me as a separate person. So, consciousness and ego don't seem to really capture my sense of "me," of "I," as a someone distinct from everyone else who persists over time. They don't seem to adequately describe my sense of myself as an individual; my sense of "I-ness," of "me."

What is lacking? A more accurate, believable understanding of who or what I am? Yes, that seems like a reasonable answer. So, exactly what is that more accurate, believable understanding? Answering that question may require some self-examination. Know thyself, said ancient Greek philosophers. The Hindu sage Ramana Maharshi recommended dwelling on the question "Who am I?" as a path to enlightenment.

Perhaps words cannot capture our idea of "I" because there's an unsuspected depth to the question that defies description by words. Or maybe this author is simply not up to the task. Either way, the path to a visceral realization of who and/or what I am can be a surprisingly long one. But the path leads to

a goal that, if the wise can be believed, is well worth the effort. The thought brings to mind The Pearl of Great Price parable of Jesus.

### After Life

One of the ego's prime motivations is survival; one of its prime fears is death. If death is the end, then we simply cease to exist—an idea that horrifies some people.

What happens to me after death? Do I survive in some form or another? We'll explore the questions and *speculate* about some answers, without pretending to any special knowledge as to what actually occurs.

### After Life: Heaven and Hell

One answer to the question of what happens after death is that my eternal soul survives. Some religions say the soul exists for all eternity, ultimately in either heaven or hell.<sup>114</sup> The soul is not God. It is separate and distinct from God. It is ontologically basic. God creates the soul but once created, it exists for all eternity.

The idea of an eternal heaven and hell 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 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 has satisfied 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. But eternity is a long, long, long time. 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. Perhaps only God can withstand eternity.

Millions long for immortality who don't  
know what to do with themselves on a rainy  
Sunday afternoon. — Susan Ertz

Another observation is that heaven and hell make the universe (also called “creation”) pointless. The reasoning is as follows:

1. Eventually, only heaven and hell will exist. Many Christians believe that will occur at the second coming of Jesus. A Catholic might say later, after all the souls in purgatory have paid their debt and migrated to heaven. But Christians agree that at some time in the future only heaven and hell will exist.
2. Before creation, God knew exactly which people would end up in heaven and which people would end up in hell (assuming God can foresee the future).
3. God could have created people destined for heaven IN HEAVEN, bypassing life on earth entirely. God could have created people destined for hell IN HELL, bypassing life on earth entirely.
4. Conclusion: The entire drama of creation—the Fall, the passion of Jesus, etc., etc.—is entirely unnecessary. God could have skipped creation entirely. God could have created in heaven people who God knew would go there. God could have created in hell people who God knew would go there. (A kinder, gentler God would have simply not created people who would end up in hell.)

It seems there are logical problems with the idea of an eternal soul and an eternal heaven and hell.<sup>115</sup> Of course, if eternally individual souls in an eternal heaven or hell were ever proven to exist then we'd need to revise or abandon our basic premise

of monism—something we should always be willing to do if we want to follow the evidence.

### After Life: Reincarnation

Another answer to the question of what happens to me after death is that I eventually reincarnate. To be more precise, the permanent self and some traits and tendencies<sup>116</sup> eventually reincarnate. 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>117</sup> i.e., the One. In this view, a permanent individual self is not eternal; it ultimately merges back with the One, from whence it came, as a river merges with the ocean.

Buddhism also has the idea of reincarnation except in Buddhism no permanent self exists. Buddhism says that the permanent self is illusory. It says there is nothing underlying the temporary selves that come and go.<sup>118</sup> We are at any time merely a bundle of our current temporary selves. This idea occurs in Buddhism’s *Anatta*<sup>119</sup> doctrine (non-self doctrine) which says I consist only of the “five aggregates”: perception, material form, feelings, mental activity, 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 permanent self.

### After Life: Between Lives

Let's suppose I and the body have parted, but I'm still am aware of thoughts and emotions. I as consciousness along with some emotional and mental tendencies somehow continue to exist. What would it be like? Like dreaming? Like being alone in a dark room?

Like being trapped in some closed, confined space? No. If I've left the body, then I am spaceless. Without a body, what is there to be confined? Can a box confine thought? Can a box limit emotion? Can a box imprison consciousness? Evidently not. So, let's imagine the emotion/thought/consciousness complex free floating, in some vast space, or a place where the word "space" has no meaning.

A fish freed from a bottle, swimming in a vast ocean, might look back at the bottle and notice how small and limiting the bottle was. We might reflect on what the body/emotion/mind complex usually contained: merely pleasant or unpleasant body sensations, happy or sad emotions, thoughts of various kinds. Nothing profound, usually. We might see memory, too, and all the past snapshots memory holds. And it all might seem so . . . small. Finite. Interesting in its own way. But does it all merit remembering? Or can much of it be forgotten?<sup>120</sup> Most people are born with no memory of a past life. And for those that do claim memories of a past life, the memories are often of a traumatic incident such as being executed or dying in some accident. If we reincarnate, do we routinely forget most of our past life?<sup>121</sup>

Let's now imagine consciousness in the between-lives state. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*<sup>122</sup> describes what occurs, according to Tibetan belief. Briefly, the consciousness/tendencies complex begins a natural ascent to its source, its ultimate ground: the Real. On first encountering the Incomprehensible Boundless Light, some deceased persons merge, losing their separate identity and ending reincarnations. Other deceased persons retreat from the intensity of supreme naked reality, and descend to lower levels of existence. The text describes the deceased as experiencing "peaceful" and "wrathful" deities before finally incarnating in a physical body. We might imagine some deceased persons able to wander in the Mindscape, sampling thoughts and ideas as they please. We might imagine others wandering the Emotescape, sampling emotions of all kinds. Others descend to the physical plane, taking birth in another body, previous existence having been mostly forgotten, although there are stories of young children recalling scenes from an alleged previous life. Reincarnation has occurred.

*The Tibetan Book of the Dead* says the "peaceful" and "wrathful" deities are projections of one's own mind. We might imagine experiencing peaceful deities as heaven and wrathful deities as hell. But why would our own mind create such experiences?

Imagine a loving person who spent their life helping others, trying to make the world a better place. A person who thought, mostly, kind, loving and noble thoughts. That person alone with his/her emotions and thoughts would be in a light, elevated place: a "heaven."

On the other hand, imagine a person who spent a life filled with greed, hate, and anger alone with those emotions. He will

have no one to hate but himself. No one to be the target of his anger but himself. The experience would be a dark, oppressive state: a “hell.”

Thus, there could be a type of judgment built into the universe, without the need of some God who is a person. A judgment based on the fact that it’s more comfortable to experience love rather than hate, more comfortable to experience peace rather than violence. There could be a temporary, non-eternal heaven and hell awaiting us in the between-lives state.

#### After Life: No Afterlife

Death is when the body ceases to function. Perhaps our emotional and mental activities also cease to exist. Perhaps, our consciousness ceases to function, too. Consciousness seems to disappear during deep sleep, so it’s easy to believe it ceases to exist after death.

So, another answer is that at death my deep self and temporary selves simply cease to exist. One moment I’m consciousness—let’s say, right now. The next moment Arthur is nowhere to be found.<sup>123</sup> His permanent self, if he had one, has vanished. Death is the end, utter annihilation.

Let’s suppose for a moment that this is the case; that when I die, I utterly cease to exist. Many people would find the idea frightening, even horrifying. However, if I cease to exist, I won’t be there to know it. The thought is not so threatening when I realize that I can never experience the state of non-existing.<sup>124</sup> After I realize that, ceasing to exist may seem less fearful, even inconsequential. For, if we rule out reincarnation, then before I existed, I couldn’t experience anything, including the state of non-existing.

“I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it.” — Mark Twain

Similarly, if I utterly cease to exist after death, I'll never know it. I'll never experience it. I can only experience the thought of non-existing. A thought may be sad or frightening, but it's still only a thought. Thoughts come and go.

Sadness might be a more appropriate response. For if I cease to exist upon death, then all those who have died previously—family members, friends, acquaintances—have ceased to exist, too. If that were true, it would be natural to experience sadness.

Many people are deeply attached to the idea of an eternal soul, or to some sort of continued existence. The no-afterlife answer may appear threatening and frightening. It's natural that an ego would regard non-existence as a horror.

A response is that being a soul—being an eternal individual, eternally separate from God—may not be so desirable, as we noted previously in the legend of Satan's rebellion in heaven.

Also, we can contrast the idea of an eternal soul with another, possibly superior, concept. The idea of an eternal soul says we came *into* the universe. It suggests we are not a part of nature, but spiritual visitors in a material world. Thus, the only world we know is depreciated. Matter is dumb and “there must be something more.” And the environment suffers abuse.

A possibly superior concept is that we didn't come coming into the universe; we came *out of* it.<sup>125</sup> Our relation to the universe is like that of the apple to the apple tree. That I (or, at least, my

body) came out of the universe is why the common elements of the universe (with one exception) are the common elements of my body. The most abundant elements in the universe are hydrogen, helium, oxygen, carbon, and nitrogen, in descending order. Helium is a noble gas that doesn't combine with other elements to form molecules. If we discard helium, we find that the most abundant elements in the human body are hydrogen, oxygen, carbon, nitrogen, in descending order.

<b>The universe's most abundant elements in descending order</b>	<b>The human body's most abundant elements in descending order</b>
Hydrogen	Hydrogen
Helium	---
Oxygen	Oxygen
Carbon	Carbon
Nitrogen	Nitrogen

The universe has become me (and everything else). And we know matter is hardly dumb. Rather, it contains complexity beyond imagination. In trying to understand matter, we are forced to ideas like string theory and quantum field theory, complex theories that may not be complex enough to capture all that matter can do.

If we call matter “dumb” we insult ourselves, because matter is what we are. If we understood ourselves correctly—as temporary manifestations of something vast and ancient beyond comprehension—that would be enough.

So, suppose death is the utter end to Arthur. So what? Why should I care if my finite self persists beyond the life of the body? Most of the time, my finite self focuses on corresponding finite concerns - how to be comfortable; how to gain wealth, power and fame—or focuses on entertainment

that puts the mind in a passive state, so that I can hardly remember an advertisement I saw just a few minutes ago. Of course, our lives are also filled with noble moments, too. Moments of love, of empathy, of elevated thoughts. But these moments pale measured against our infinite self, our vast and ancient larger self, the universe itself.

Perhaps, eternal existence as a limited, finite self is not as desirable as it seems. In any case, it can be argued that non-existence is nothing to fear.

### Self-Transcendence

Suppose I am entirely physical. Suppose I am matter and only matter, matter that somehow is conscious and intelligent. Suppose my destiny as an individual is annihilation. When I die, I utterly cease to exist. The biosphere absorbs my body's atoms. My emotions, mind, and consciousness simply cease to be. This idea may seem unwelcome, threatening, and frightening. But considered deeply, it can lead to self-transcendence. And self-transcendence can be viewed as a type of salvation, salvation from fear of death.

As we've seen, if I'm merely matter, matter which lacks a soul, then it's plain that I didn't come into the universe; I came out of it. My body emerged from the universe. I emerged from the universe. I am not separate from the universe but a part of it. The universe gave me birth. It is my parent. Something which is ancient and vast beyond imagination has given me birth. I am a person on a planet with billions of other people, a planet that is a microscopic speck of dust in an almost infinite universe.

I am a small speck. Yet, I can contemplate the vast and ancient universe. I feel my small presence in the infinite universe and the feeling is an odd mixture: one part realizing my own smallness and insignificance; one part feeling a part of a vast, magnificent universe, no matter if only an infinitesimally small part. The universe has created me. I am not the universe but the universe is me, just as the wave is not the ocean but the ocean is the wave. Something ancient and vast has become me.

*The God's Script*<sup>126</sup> by Jorge Luis Borges tells the story of Tzinacán, an Aztec priest imprisoned and tortured by the Spaniards. After decades in prison, Tzinacán has a vision; he believes certain words of power will destroy his stone prison, evict the Spaniards, reconstruct his nation, and make him immortal. But he knows he never shall utter the words, because "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."

Tzinacán has achieved salvation, salvation from ego concerns, a type of salvation unlike the ego salvation of Old Theology religions.

We live in an unimaginably vast and ancient universe. Yet, our concerns often revolve about ourselves. Ego issues dominate: "I want to go to heaven. I want to be reincarnated. I. Me. I." Ego concerns are understandable; they help us survive. But the person who can self-transcend, who can rise above ego; 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 above those who practice

religion out of fear of hell, hope of heaven, or of a better reincarnation.

A person who achieves that perspective while still in the body has achieved some degree of self-transcendence. That person finds their “I” in the Real rather than in the ego and its transitory selves. Mystic slogans such as “Die before you die” and “The art of dying” take on a real, literal meaning. Self-transcendence utterly defeats death. For if I die to my transitory selves before the death of my body, then there is nothing that death can take.

#### After Life: Recap

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>127</sup> The second is that upon death the individual continues to exist in one form or another, perhaps in heaven or hell, perhaps reincarnating eventually.

Although our fate immediately after death is unknown, 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.

### Meditation: Returning to Source

Imagine the mind of a newborn infant, flooded with a stream of sensations, a stream originating from she knows not where. She is trapped in a solipsistic prison of sensation, with only vague suggestions of anything external.

Eventually, she acquires object permanence, the idea that things have their own existence, independent of her perception; that things exist independent of, and exterior to, herself. When she acquires an ego, she sees herself as one person among many in an exterior world. As she grows, her world widens. There are other places, other cities, other countries. There is the sun and the planets and the galaxies. The universe grows very large indeed.

At first, that view of herself and the external world is liberating, liberating from the confining, almost solipsistic, idea that she is awareness isolated from an exterior world, which she knows only through the input of her senses. That idea may seem too confining, too much like a prison—an idea best forgotten or ignored.

But once she realizes that she shall one day leave the world, the situation may change. She realizes the world will continue even if one person—herself—leaves it. The thought of her eventual death, if not pushed aside and ignored, may motivate her to find something in herself which is permanent and which, possibly, survives death.

A logical first step is to find what is permanent and unchanging, what in her has existed throughout her life. Certainly not her sense perceptions of the external world, which change from moment to moment. As she mentally eliminates all that changes, all that is momentary and transitory, she may find

herself driving back to what seemed like a prison but now appears as a sanctuary, as a quiet place, free from the world's distractions, where she can seek the permanent within herself. She seeks a refuge from the external world, a world which she shall one day leave (or, equivalently, which shall one day leave her).

At that point, she may wish to meditate, to intentionally try to enter the inner space and go towards her core, her center, as the "medi" in meditation implies. In meditation, she tries to experience her deepest self, her ground of existence. She strives to come to know what has been with her all of her life, which, in reality, **is** her. For if anything in her survives death, surely it must be this.

We mentioned earlier that emanationist systems are sometimes paired with an explanation of how we can return to our ultimate source. Meditation can be viewed as an effort to return to our own ultimate source.

As an analogy, imagine a conscious ocean wave. The wave sees itself as separate from other waves. The wave realizes that one day it will cease to be, an event it calls "beach." The thought of beach prompts the wave to question itself. What am I, really? What happens after beach?

I am part, thinks the wave, of a vast, ancient ocean. I am not ocean but ocean is me. Yet, I feel separate and vulnerable and afraid of beach. What can I do to consciously realize my identity with ocean? To physically merge with ocean, I would have to cease to be. Which would be the death of me. But I can go halfway. Now and then, I'll sit and meditate on my identity with ocean. Sitting in meditation, I'll try to cultivate a still peaceful mental state. In mentally giving up thoughts,

emotions, and physical movement, I abstract myself from myself and feel myself as ocean, vast and unlimited. Some say that at beach we merge with ocean.

### Old Theology: Prayer, Meditation

In some Old Theology religions, 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, i.e., superstition?

Can prayer impact the world in a supernatural way? Studies have failed to find the fingerprint of the supernatural<sup>128</sup> in natural events<sup>129</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, loving communion with the separate person God. This might be called the prayer of adoration.

The highest form of prayer is contemplative prayer, where self is lost in direct experience of God, the self’s ultimate ground.

### 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>130</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 that the sensations are temporary, passing. Thoughts and feelings 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>131</sup> Can I step out of the stream of transitory sensations, even if for only a moment?

What would it mean if I did somehow step out of the stream? That would mean consciousness temporarily devoid of thoughts and feelings. What might the experience feel like, at first? It might feel empty, as if something is missing that should be present. The experience at first might seem uncomfortable, even unpleasant. This is not surprising. We usually pay attention to the stream of thoughts and feelings within consciousness, rather than to consciousness itself. When the stream ceases, we notice its absence, and may experience absence as emptiness. But if we persist, the emptiness can seem very full indeed. Consciousness begins to experience its own presence, its own radiance. When awareness contains no thoughts or feelings. it can experience its own existence more intently.

An analogy: consciousness is the stage upon which thoughts and feeling come and go. The stage endures, but the actors naturally occupy our mental foreground, pushing the stage in our mental background. Clearing the stage, brings the stage into focus. Of course, the stage analogy, like any analogy, doesn't describe the situation exactly. What is experienced

may be difficult to describe. Or impossible. No matter. The experience itself is primary; the description is secondary.

The experience has been described as “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>132</sup>

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. I can experience *thoughts* of past and future, but *reality in the raw* can only be experienced in the present, in the here and now.

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 eternal, 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 eternal—the more the eternal 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>133</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>134</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>135</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>136</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>137</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>138</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 permanent self and an expanding 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>139</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 book *“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>140</sup> We list some points of agreement between his experiences and topics we’ve previously discussed, which 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>141</sup> Huston Smith,<sup>142</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>143</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>144</sup>

In his famous 1902 *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,<sup>145</sup> James describes some characteristics of his experiences: ineffability, noetic, passivity, and transient.

- 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>146</sup>
- Noetic – universal truths revealed that not available via any other means. Follows from ineffability—even the

experience of eating an apple gives knowledge about its taste beyond what descriptive 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 (just as a prism show that white light contains all colors) and/or no thought, i.e., is beyond thought. But paradox indicates not that the idea of Uncreated Light is invalid and untrue. Rather, it indicates our inability to fully describe something when that something is infinite, is so beyond the range of human understanding.

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>147</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 admits entheogens might induce mystical experiences of the first two types but not of the third type, not of what he regards 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 experience of some personification. So, we differ with Zaehner and rank the third type of mysticism below the other two, because experience of some personification is below experience of Reality in the raw.

Might entheogens have a place in a New Theology religion? The question is difficult. 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 banned psychedelics.

The use of a psychedelic, even taken as an entheogen, does not guarantee 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 delusion 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 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>148</sup> compared to the lifetime of a star. If I lack a permanent self or my permanent 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>149</sup> For if the light of reason uncovers disturbing truths, one solution is to turn off that light.<sup>150</sup> 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>151</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>152</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?

What might such a converged theological view look like? We've sketched one possible answer, one possible picture 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.

We've 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> (Watts, 1962) xviii

<sup>2</sup> “There is talk of a new astrologer [Nicolaus Copernicus] who wants to prove that the earth moves and goes around . . . The fool wants to turn the whole art of astronomy upside-down. However, as Holy Scripture tells us, so did Joshua bid the sun to stand still and not the earth.” – Martin Luther

<sup>3</sup> The idea that the fundamental difference between science and religion is their respective domains is often called “NOMA” for the Non-overlapping Magisterium hypothesis, expounded by evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould.

<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

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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> 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>8</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>9</sup> We seem prone to personification, e.g., Father Time; the Grim Reaper; new year as a baby, old year as an old man.

<sup>10</sup> New Theology contains elements that are ancient. Its virtue is combining the elements in a coherent logical whole.

<sup>11</sup> “Transpersonal” might be used in place of “impersonal.” But impersonal has a more defined meaning (i.e., not a person) than transpersonal (i.e., “extending or going beyond the personal or individual. of, denoting, or dealing with states or areas of consciousness beyond the limits of personal identity.”) If we consider the perspective of Old Theology as the thesis and the perspective of New Theology as the antithesis, the idea of transpersonal might play a role in a Hegelian synthesis of the two perspectives, to create a *New New Theology*.

<sup>12</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. “ (Dionysius, 1940) p. 4

<sup>13</sup> Specifically, New Theology is a neutral monist theology. Monism may be subdivided into three types, where the supreme entity is 1) Physical: mind derives from the physical; 2) Idealism: the physical derives from the mind; 3) Neutral: both physical and mind derive from something more fundamental. A common alternative to monism is dualism, which says two fundamental substances exist, such as mind and matter, or two fundamental domains exist, such as the natural and the supernatural.

<sup>14</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,

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which when traced from molecule to atom to subatomic particles lead to the Standard Model's seventeen fundamental particles.

<sup>15</sup> From a purely secular point of view, the One is similar to Aristotle's *prima materia*, the formless basis of all matter.

<sup>16</sup> We use the same noun "God" (capital) to refer to *all* person Gods because we regard them all as personifications. In a somewhat similar spirit, Early Quakers refused to use the honorific "ye" and "you." Rather, they addressed all people with the same pronouns: "thee" and "thou."

<sup>17</sup> Here is a longer excerpt: Zen does not go along with the Judaic-Christian belief in a personal Savior or a God—outside the universe—who has created the cosmos and man. To the Zen view, the universe is one indissoluble substance, one total whole, of which man is but a part. Ruth Fuller Sasaki, an American-born Zenist, head of a famous teaching center in Kyoto, and author of *Zen, a Religion* has expressed this attitude in the most direct and simple terms: "Only THIS—capital THIS—is. Anything and everything that appears to us as an individual entity, or phenomenon, whether it be a planet or an atom, a mouse or a man, is but a temporary manifestation of THIS in form; every activity that takes place, whether it be birth or death, loving or eating breakfast, is but a temporary manifestation of THIS in activity. Each one of us is but a cell, as it were, in the body of the Great Self, a cell that comes into being, performs its functions, and passes away, transformed into another manifestation. Though we have temporary individuality, that temporary limited individuality is not either a true self or our true self. Our true self is the Great Self; our true body is the Body of Reality." (Ross, 1966) p. 145

<sup>18</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>19</sup> (Carrthusian, 1962) p. 101

<sup>20</sup> Quakerism is properly called The Religious Society of Friends.

<sup>21</sup> Our view may be called a type of pantheism (which identifies God with the universe, or regards it as a manifestation of God). Or, better yet, panentheism (where God and the world are inter-related; the world is in God and God is in the world; God is in every part of the universe but not limited by the universe.)

<sup>22</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 . . .

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. a possible ultimate *one-ness* . . . a psychophysical one-ness of all life phenomena.” (Jung, 1964) p. 309

<sup>23</sup> For instance, if I dream I’m back in college, then my dream self will be much younger than myself today.

<sup>24</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>25</sup> *Substance* article in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/substance/> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, was a philosopher and mathematician who along with Newton, discovered calculus.

<sup>26</sup> (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 1942) p. 81

<sup>27</sup> We use the term “component entity” rather than “component object” because “object” suggests something physical, something which exists in space/time. Some component entities, such as a table, are physical. Other component entities, such as words and other abstract ideas, are not. (A word is an abstract idea which does not exist in space and time; it is a “universal.” We may instantiate a universal in space/time—as when we write the word ARE on paper, carve it into stone, or display it on a computer monitor—but the word itself remains an abstract idea.)

<sup>28</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>29</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>30</sup> “The Ship of Theseus” is a familiar philosophical thought experiment that examines if a component entity that slowly changes all components is fundamentally the same object. Note: the human body is a component entity that slowly changes all components.

<sup>31</sup> One account of Buddha’s last words is “Decay is inherent in all component things, work out your own salvation with diligence.”

<sup>32</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 play *Macbeth* is a complex thought, a thought which is instantiated materially in one language or another, stored in one digital format or another.

<sup>33</sup> Philosopher Immanuel Kant famously claimed we can experience a thing's properties (i.e., "phenomena") but never experience the "thing in itself" (i.e., the "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/>)" To

illustrate, we see the brown wood of a table. We feel its hardness. We tap and hear a sound. But an alien sensitive to the infrared or X-ray regions of the electromagnetic spectrum would see the table quite differently. Kant says the table "in itself" is inaccessible. That is, what the table is irrespective of how anyone experiences it, is unknowable.

<sup>34</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>35</sup> 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 experience ourselves inwardly as noumena—that we are unable to experience that which we, in fact, are?

<sup>36</sup> We say "arguably" because the experiences may be attributed to some person God, an angel, a demon, a psychotic episode, an hallucination, etc.

<sup>37</sup> (Foster, 1985) p. 33-44

<sup>38</sup> *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Bk. VII, Ch. X

<sup>39</sup> (Underhill, 1974) p. 189

<sup>40</sup> (*Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, 1951) p.132

<sup>41</sup> (Lossky, 1963) p. 121

<sup>42</sup> (Symeon, 1982) p. 138

<sup>43</sup> (*Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, 1951) p. 113

<sup>44</sup> Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus speaking: "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your

head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

<sup>45</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>46</sup> <https://catholicism.org/eens-fathers.html> lists some verses from fathers of the Church on this point

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, "Whether the Eucharist is necessary for salvation?"

<sup>48</sup> (Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, 1945)

<sup>49</sup> (*Bhagavad-Gita*, 1972) p. 11-12

<sup>50</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>51</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>52</sup> Most states allow religious exemptions from child abuse and neglect laws (Sandstrom, 2016)

<sup>53</sup> Or as genuine gods themselves as were the ancient pharaohs of Egypt.

<sup>54</sup> "The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

<sup>55</sup> For example, did the resurrected Jesus have a body of flesh and blood, or some sort of spiritual body? The first chapter of Elaine Pagels' celebrated *The Gnostic Gospels* (Pagels, 1981) describes the political implications of the two views, and how the first view—that Jesus rose bodily from the grave—supported the organized religion that was later declared the Roman Empire's official religion.

<sup>56</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>57</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>58</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>59</sup> Although, as Winston Churchill famously said: "democracy is the worst form of government – except for all the others that have been tried."

<sup>60</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>61</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>62</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>63</sup> One reference is <https://www.worldhistory.org/Cathars/>

<sup>64</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>65</sup> "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Exodus 22:18

<sup>66</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

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of the Confederate States of America, from a February 14, 1850 speech in the US Senate

<sup>67</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>68</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>69</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>70</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>71</sup> Luke 17:21

<sup>72</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>73</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>74</sup> (The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism, No. 1, 1964) p. 12

<sup>75</sup> (Catholic Church, 2000) p. 900

<sup>76</sup> If we possess other senses, ESP for instance, they don’t alter our argument significantly.

<sup>77</sup> “Just as a rock is already in the Universe, whether or not someone is handling it, an idea is already in the Mindscape, whether or not someone is thinking it. A person who does mathematical research, writes stories, or meditates is an explorer of the Mindscape in much the same way that

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Armstrong, Livingstone, or Cousteau are explorers of the physical features of our Universe. The rocks on the Moon were there before the lunar module landed; and all the possible thoughts are already out there in the Mindscape.” (Rucker, 1982) p. 36

<sup>78</sup> Many philosophers regard thoughts different, as an act of some thinker, an act of some mind. In contrast, the Mindscape view is similar to Mathematical Platonism, which says that mathematical truths exist independently of us. The Mindscape extends this idea and says that all possible thoughts exist independently of us.

<sup>79</sup> That is, the view of mathematical Platonism. A less popular view of mathematics is called formalism.

<sup>80</sup> Of course, the same idea “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” can be expressed differently; for instance, using Roman Numerals we have “II + II = IV”

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHXgRFOOEB4&t=61s> at about 4:35

<sup>82</sup> Search the “Knowledge Argument” for more information.

<sup>83</sup> Some religious traditions make a related point when they warn against acquiring too much knowledge about God at the expense of experience of God. We can only really know what an orange tastes like by tasting, not by learning about its taste.

<sup>84</sup> The classic paper “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” by philosopher Thomas Nagel makes a similar point.

<sup>85</sup> “Being and becoming” is an old philosophical topic. The process/entity question concerns becoming and being, respectively.

<sup>86</sup> Philosophers label someone who has all the normal biological, chemical, and electrical activity of a human being but who lacks consciousness as a “p-zombie” or “philosophical zombie,” and debate if a p-zombie could actually exist. If consciousness derives from the physical, from biological, chemical, and electrical activities, then a p-zombie is impossible. If consciousness somehow transcends the physical, then p-zombies are theoretically possible.

<sup>87</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>88</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>89</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

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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>90</sup> Do material objects possess innate consciousness? Panpsychism says yes; it says that every material object, include electrons and quarks, possesses some small element of individual consciousness. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy’s *Panpsychism* article describes various objections to panpsychism. Refer <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panpsychism>

<sup>91</sup> For relevant articles, search the Internet for “is consciousness a new form.”

<sup>92</sup> A genuine solipsist denies the existence of any other person so with whom he can argue?

<sup>93</sup> Berkeley’s argument and God created the universe are similar arguments. In both views, all we have access to is phenomena (sense data, God’s creations); we lack access to the ultimate, to that which lies beyond (thing in itself, God).

<sup>94</sup> Berkeley’s answer—God’s perception keeps objects in existence—is similar to other so-called “God of the gaps” arguments.

<sup>95</sup> Where “physical” includes thoughts and emotions, regarded as purely physical phenomena.

<sup>96</sup> Universe, Life, Consciousness, Andrei Linde, Professor of Physics, Stanford University, <http://www.andrei-linde.com/articles/universe-life-consciousness-pdf>

<sup>97</sup> In philosophy, this idea occurs in phenomenalism and idealism.

<sup>98</sup> To be consistent, we shouldn’t say “our mind creates” but “our mind finds an appropriate idea in the Mindscape.” For simplicity, we’ll sometimes employ the usual way of speaking about the mind creating ideas.

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<sup>99</sup> Imagine three-dimensional holograms perfected so that seeing a tree hologram is indistinguishable from seeing a tree. Imagine, too, that a smooth or rough force-field can be projected so that if we touch the “tree” we feel it. In this case, it is clear that sensations of a tree are all we actually experience. The object we call a tree exists only in our mind.

<sup>100</sup> Refer, for example, <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/91177/how-our-eyes-see-everything-upside-down>

<sup>101</sup> Presumably, a newborn baby experiences in a world of pure sensation and would perceive the same color in the two squares. Only later does the infant acquire the idea of objects and object permanence.

<sup>102</sup> A similar thought occurs in the philosophy of Phenomenology, which defines epoché as “the methodological attitude of phenomenology in which one refrains from judging whether anything exists or can exist as the first step in the phenomenological recognition, comprehension, and description of sense appearances: transcendental reduction.” - <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epoche>

<sup>103</sup> Orthodox Christian hesychast spirituality, following Saint Gregory Palamas, makes a similar distinction between God’s unknowable essence (ousia) and God’s energies (energeia). God’s essence is inaccessible to us. But we can experience God’s energies. We gain a new perspective on person Gods if we view them as human representations of God’s energies.

<sup>104</sup> (Arthur Schopenhauer, 2021)

<sup>105</sup> “Mostly passive” because some responses are automatic and instinctual, where the will plays no part. For instance, if I inadvertently place my hand near fire, my body reacts automatically.

<sup>106</sup> The reader may recognize these as the bottom layers of Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

<sup>107</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>108</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>109</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>110</sup> “Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it’s thinking of yourself less.” C. S. Lewis

<sup>111</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>112</sup> (White, 1910) IV. Franklin’s Lightning-Rod

<sup>113</sup> (White, 1910) IV. Franklin’s Lightning-Rod

<sup>114</sup> The after-death destination of Limbo once existed in the Roman Catholic Church but has recently fallen out of favor.

<sup>115</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>116</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>117</sup> Refer <https://www.chakras.net/yoga-principles/jivatma-atma-paramatma>

<sup>118</sup> The philosopher David Hume also believed that there is no self.

<sup>119</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>120</sup> This brings to mind the comedian who said his life was so boring that once when he almost died, someone else’s life passed before him.

<sup>121</sup> In Orphism, a Greek mystical religious movement, it was believed that the newly dead who drank from the River Lethe would lose all memory of their past existence.

<sup>122</sup> (Evans-Wentz)

<sup>123</sup> The body doesn’t immediately cease to exist after death, of course. But it’s inert matter and eventually dissolves back into the biosphere.

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<sup>124</sup> “Death is nothing to us. When we exist, death is not; and when death exists, we are not. . . The fear of death arises from the belief that in death, there is awareness.”—Epicurus

<sup>125</sup> The cosmos is within us. We are made of star-stuff. We are a way for the universe to know itself.—Carl Sagan, scientist and author

<sup>126</sup> (Borges, 1964)

<sup>127</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>128</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>129</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/31/health/longawaited-medical-study-questions-the-power-of-prayer.html>

<sup>130</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>131</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.

<sup>132</sup> (Witness, n.d.)

<sup>133</sup> (Parrinder, 1977) p. 26

<sup>134</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>135</sup> (Jones R. M., 1909) p. 467

<sup>136</sup> (Jones R. M., 1909) p. 475

<sup>137</sup> (Jones R. M., 1909) p. 188-189

<sup>138</sup> (Underhill, 1974) p. 149

<sup>139</sup> (Entheogens in Ancient Times, 2021)

<sup>140</sup> (Huxley, *The Doors of Perception / Heaven and Hell*, 1954)

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<sup>141</sup> (Huston Smith, n.d.)

<sup>142</sup> “. . . widely regarded as one of the world's most influential figures in religious studies.” (Huston Smith, n.d.)

<sup>143</sup> (Smith, 2000) p. 11

<sup>144</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>145</sup> (James, 1917)

<sup>146</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>147</sup> (Mysticism: Sacred and Profane, 1957)

<sup>148</sup> Our sun’s estimated life is  $1 \times 10^{10}$  years. Assuming a human life span of 100 years, our life span is  $1 \times 10^{-8}$  the life span of the sun.

<sup>149</sup> In his book *Table Talk*, Martin Luther wrote: “Reason is the greatest enemy that faith has: it never comes to the aid of spiritual things, but—more frequently than not—struggles against the divine Word, treating with contempt all that emanates from God.” It is the belief of this author that if reason is the greatest enemy of a person’s faith, then there is something wrong with their faith.

<sup>150</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>151</sup> “Miracles” such as a six-day creation, a world-wide flood, a single Tower of Babel from which all languages derive, etc.

<sup>152</sup> King James Bible, Job 13:15