

A photograph of a wooden bridge with a decorative railing, set against a backdrop of lush green trees and foliage. The bridge has a curved wooden railing with vertical slats and a central sunburst-like decorative element. The path leading to the bridge is made of irregularly shaped stones. The overall scene is bright and natural.

Dr. Anab Whitehouse

Spirit of Religion

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I was like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.

Isaac Newton

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For my mentor, Dr. Baig ... who taught me, among other things, that searching for the truth is essential to being human. He also taught me how important character is to such an undertaking.

I am unlikely to ever realize the truth in the way, or to the extent, that he did. Nonetheless, the fact that after more than four decades I am still deeply engaged in trying to bear witness to the foregoing process of searching – albeit in my own way and according to my very limited capacity -- is largely due to his example.

There are no words that adequately can convey the depth of gratitude I feel for the fact that he came into my life and helped make it better than it otherwise would have been. The words that follow are mere shadows of the truths that he tried to communicate to me, and I wish I had been a better student.



Foreword

The phrase: “Final Jeopardy” is an adaptation of the last stage of the quiz show ‘Jeopardy’ when contestants are asked to provide an answer to one last question and in the present context refers to the opportunity that life provides to all of us for working toward offering our best response concerning the challenge with which we all are faced ... namely, to try to provide as accurate and as wise a formulation as possible in relation to the reality problem that is posed by existence and to do so, according to whatever set of principles one feels are viable (but that might, or might not, be), within the temporal framework that is allocated before one’s last breath exits the hourglass of life.

The foregoing opportunity exists whether, or not, we want it. Moreover, the challenge inherent in that opportunity is staring back at us, waiting for our response, irrespective of whether, or not, we accept its presence.

The present volume ventures into the realm of religion ... and people – both believers and non-believers -- might find the ensuing journey challenging. This is because I often have been inclined to take the road less traveled and, indeed, for me, that has made all the difference (cf. Robert Frost) irrespective of whether at the time of moving down one path rather than another I understood the difference that would be forthcoming.

Up until the age of eleven (minus a relatively brief period of time spent in Colorado following my birth), I grew up in a neighborhood in western Maine whose inhabitants pursued spiritual beliefs of an unknown nature. All I was sure of was that they didn’t attend the same church as I did ... a Congregational Church in the next town over.

I can’t remember any conversation involving the kids with whom I played in the neighborhood that delved, even peripherally, into matters concerning God, religion, or spirituality. We played baseball, football, went skiing, swam, played army games, and built cabins in the woods, but I had no idea what they believed about religion, and, quite frankly, I didn’t care.

The first time that the issue of religious differences arose even in a vague sort of way was when I played basketball in a grammar school league that included schools from three towns in the area, and several of

the league teams represented two different Catholic schools located in another part of the town where I lived. From time to time, I used to chum around with some of those kids, and on one occasion – when I was about ten -- they invited me to attend Mass.

I asked my mother if it was okay, and she gave her permission. The kids with whom I attended the Mass ceremonies tried to warn me that Catholics offered a slightly different version of the Lord's Prayer than Protestants did ... it was shorter.

I thought my friends might be trying to play a trick on me. Consequently, when it came time to recite the Lord's Prayer, I was the only one in attendance who was continuing on when everyone else in the church had stopped reciting that prayer. Aside from a certain amount of embarrassment, there was no additional fall out from the incident.

Quite a few of the girls with whom I danced on Saturday night at a youth social center (known as the Institute) were Catholic. However, their religion wasn't what attracted me, and religion wasn't the topic of conversation when we danced.

Not only were the religious beliefs of my neighbors a mystery, but, quite frankly, so were the religious beliefs of several of my family members. Every Sunday I went to Church with my mother, but my father and older brother didn't go with us (at the time, my younger brother had not yet been born).

I never asked my mother, father, or brother about why things were the way they were in this respect. Nor did I wonder about it ... I just accepted it.

Occasionally – very occasionally -- there were times that my father offered a prayer of thanks prior to a special meal of some kind. The prayer seemed to be offered from a Christian perspective.

I can remember my father, mother, myself, and, sometimes, my older brother going to Church on special occasions such as Christmas Eve. Nonetheless, these times seemed relatively few in number.

My mother didn't drive or have a license. Consequently, my father would have to drive her to various church functions, and, then, he would return to the church when she needed a ride home.

I don't remember much about going to church in those days. I recall one occasion when I was five or six and forgot my lines in a Christmas

pageant of some kind and was quite distraught over the gaffe. I also remember several occasions when I stopped at a drug store while walking home from church (if my mother had administrative or choir meetings of some kind to attend following services) and ordered a cherry coke from the soda fountain using coins that should have gone into the church collection plate.

I have a few recollections that arose in conjunction with some of the summer field-day outings that had been organized by the church I attended. There were various kinds of competitions, including foot races and baseball throws.

One of the kids in these competitions (who was five or six years older than me) was later killed in an automobile accident. I don't recall going to his funeral or having heard much discussion about the circumstances of the accident ... although the incident was mentioned a few times by my mother.

For the most part, I don't really recall much about what went on in Sunday school in those early years. Furthermore, I don't remember much, if anything, from any of the sermons or services that I attended when accompanying my mother.

For the most part, I didn't read the Bible. Whatever familiarity I had with its contents was largely indirect and derived from other people.

I don't recall any discussions concerning religion that took place within our home. For the most part, everyone seemed to be pursuing things according to his or her own inclinations.

Probably most of what I knew about religion (which was very limited) came from movies or radio programs (the family didn't have a television set until I was about seven or eight years old). For me, religion consisted largely of going to church with my mother and participating in some of the sporting and social events (such as Halloween costume parties) sponsored by the church.

When I was ten, our family moved to another town in north-central Maine. The town was quite small (700-900 people).

Once again, I accompanied my mother to a local church sans my father, older brother, or younger brother (who had been born two or three years prior to our move northward). As an older child, I became more active in the local church and began to sing in the choir and teach

Sunday school, but the only reason I can think of for why those activities took place is because the ministers (there were a number of them over a period of time) appeared to be desperate for male participation in the church ... it certainly wasn't because I had a great voice or knew much about religion or the Bible (which was not the case in either of those matters).

When I was in high school, I was invited by whomever the presiding minister happened to be at the time to conduct a number of church services, including giving the sermon. Again, the idea seemed to be to encourage active male participation because the young, teenage women my age weren't being invited to do the same ... and, in fact, my mother used to have running battles with a variety of ministers about permitting women to play a role in the church that went beyond: Choir, teaching Sunday school, and baking something for some activity being organized by the church.

The people who attended the foregoing sort of services seemed to like what I was doing. However, I really didn't have a clue about what it was that I was doing ... I was just winging it.

I do recall one of the adult Sunday school teachers marveling at my ability to get the young children in the classes I conducted to speak up because she could never get them to do that. I also remember a number of adults in the congregation coming up to me after giving a sermon and saying that they felt I had a gift for speaking about religious matters and would miss my calling if I didn't pursue things further in that respect.

Between my junior and senior year of high school, I was selected to participate in a National Science Foundation program -- being held in New York City -- that was intended to explore the theory of semi-conductors. For whatever reason -- maybe due a sense of isolation and loneliness from being away from home for the first time in my life -- I would listen to religious programming late at night on a radio in the dorm room where I stayed, and, something began percolating in me.

The feeling was very diffuse. It was not about being a Christian per se but, instead, it had to do with one's relationship with God quite independently of organized religion.

It was not Bible-oriented. It was more of a wonderment concerning the nature of life and feeling a deep sense of connectedness to existence in some manner that was very difficult to articulate.

If someone had asked me what it was all about, I couldn't have explained in any coherent fashion what was transpiring. It had something to do with becoming open to spiritual possibilities ... of wanting to explore such possibilities, but I had no clear idea about what it was that I was seeking.

At some point during my stay in New York, the instructors took the students to see *Spartacus* that was being shown at a very large movie theater near Times Square. I'm not exactly sure why that particular movie was chosen but it might have had something to do with Dalton Trumbo's name being associated with the movie after ten, or so, years of being blacklisted in Hollywood because he had been a member of the Communist party.

Whatever the reasons were for our instructors bringing us to the film, the movie resonated with many of the sorts of emotional themes that were going on within me at the time. For me, it symbolized the existential circumstances of jedermann (everyman) to struggle to become free and to be willing to stand powerless before the presence of overwhelming forces, pronounce one's identity, and accept whatever consequences came from that act.

At some point in the mid-to-late 1950s, I recall seeing the movie '*A Man Called Peter*', a film about the life of Peter Marshall based on a book written by his wife. Among other things, he would become Chaplain for the United States Senate and, as well, served as the pastor for the prestigious New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. until dying at a fairly early age of 47.

One of the features in the foregoing movie that struck an essential chord within me involved an incident – which I am assuming is true – when a 21-year old Peter Marshall was walking across the moors on a dark night near a quarry area in his native Scotland. At a certain point during his walk, he believed that he heard someone call out his name.

He stopped, listened and looked around. Hearing and seeing nothing, he continued on, only to hear his name being spoken again and in an

apparently urgent manner. Once more he stopped, but when he heard nothing else, he began to move on.

Upon resuming his walk, he stumbled. When he fell, his hand reached out, and it did not find solid ground but was hanging over the edge of a quarry. If not for the stumble, he likely would have fallen to his death.

There are a number of ways to interpret the foregoing experience. I have referred to that incident for no other purpose than to indicate that Peter Marshall's sense of having been touched in some essential, existential manner by the universe (or more) during his walk across the moors resonates with my own sense of having been touched by something of an elemental nature when I listened to various religious programs late at night in the dorm room in Brooklyn, New York during my six-to-seven week stint that was being sponsored by the National Science Foundation.

I don't remember anything from those radio programs. I just felt that something had awoken within me.

When I returned home and, subsequently, began my final year of high school, I decided that I wanted to become a minister of some kind. My father sought to discourage me and said that I would come to regret such a choice.

My mother, of course, was quite happy with the decision. In fact, she had read something about Harvard broadening its search for the sorts of individuals who might benefit from such an education, and she thought I reflected some of the qualities for which they were searching.

As a result, she encouraged me to apply to Harvard. Shortly after that interchange with my mother, I sent for the application forms.

Much to my surprise – and, perhaps, to the surprise of a lot of people -- Harvard accepted me. I later learned that, apparently, one of the reasons why I was accepted at Harvard was because they wanted me to play basketball there ... something that (according to my older brother) was intimated to my mother at some point when she talked with someone from Harvard but if such an exchange did take place, the information – for whatever reason -- was never communicated to me until many years after my mother passed away when my older brother mentioned it.

If the foregoing scenario is accurate, there is a certain amount of irony coursing through the situation. With the exception of a few informal games between dormitory teams, I more or less retired from basketball, and, in fact, the idea of trying out for the freshman or varsity basketball teams at university never crossed my mind.

I played basketball in grammar school and high school because I was good at it and enjoyed playing the game as a game. I had almost no competitive feelings within me concerning the sport and had no interest in seeing how I might stack up against anyone else.

I began my career at Harvard with a pre-theological major. It didn't take long for things to go downhill in a variety of ways.

For example, learning ancient Greek might be handy to do if one were interested in pursuing a life in the ministry. Consequently, I took a course in Greek, but, unfortunately, when I went to the bookstore, all the copies of the textbook had been sold out, and either the bookstore didn't intend to order any more copies or 6-8 weeks would be required before any further copies would appear on the shelves at the book store.

I forget which of the foregoing scenarios was the case. The result was the same ... no textbook for an extended period of time.

The Greek instructor didn't seem to be all that keen in helping me to resolve my problem when I approached him about the matter ... although he did make a few accommodations later on to try to give me some sort of chance to pass the course. Moreover, 1962 was a time when copiers were not readily available (at least to me) and, so, I couldn't just borrow someone's copy of the text and reproduce the book.

To make a long story much shorter, I wasn't able to get a copy of the book until the course was almost over. When I did finally obtain the textbook, there was a person, Bill Weld, in my Greek class who would later go on to become Governor of Massachusetts, and he offered to help me out preparing for the final, but, despite his kindness and assistance, I was pretty much a lost cause as far as learning Greek was concerned (within the short span of time available to me), and, as one might have anticipated, I flunked Greek.

Coming from a rural school with a graduating class of eleven people, I was in over my head. I had no idea about how to be a student in such a competitive atmosphere.

As a result, I didn't do too well in several of the other courses I was taking besides Greek. Furthermore, I was going through some personal issues that were leading me toward an identity crisis of sorts.

When I first reached Harvard, I was assigned an advisor by the name of Bill Crout. Unknown to me at the time, Bill Crout was a gifted classical pianist, and later on, he would be instrumental in establishing the Paul Tillich lectures within the university.

Bill was very active with Memorial Church at Harvard. The church was located immediately behind my dormitory in Harvard Yard, and that is where I first met him.

Through no fault of Bill Crout's, I only saw him a few times during my first year at Harvard. During my last meeting with him – during the spring of 1963 -- he expressed being disappointed with me.

He felt that I had not been forthcoming with him. Among other things, I had failed to keep him apprised about what was going on with me at Harvard.

He was right. However, there were some – possibly -- mitigating circumstances.

I had never had an academic advisor before, nor even understood what such a person did. Bill Crout was an individual that someone within Harvard told me that I needed to see, and so I went and met with him.

One should add to the foregoing that I had a natural reticence when it came to talking to other people about my problems. I wasn't close with my: Father, athletic coaches, teachers, or ministers, and I didn't have any real friends ... mostly just acquaintances.

Bill Crout seemed like a very nice, spiritual person. Nonetheless, I didn't know him, and, consequently, I was not about to let him know me.

Finally, one might toss into the foregoing existential stew the considerable doubts, confusion and uncertainty I was experiencing at the time concerning my suitability for the ministry. Bill Crout seemed to be an individual that knew what he was about, and I was someone who did not know what I was about and, in fact, at the time, I was strongly thinking about moving away from a life of religion or spirituality altogether ... I didn't see much reason for talking to him about such matters.

As a result of all of the foregoing considerations, I didn't give Bill Crout much of a chance. Without understanding what I was doing, I took the fork in the path that led away from him and any idea of pursuing the ministry.

When I was going through my dark night of the soul during my freshman year, Memorial Church had decided – at least for a short period of time -- to open up the church for students, faculty and staff so that anyone who wished to do so could go into the church at night (up until 10:00 p.m., or so, I seem to recall), and pray, meditate, reflect, and/or enjoy the solace.

The lights in the church were turned off for the most part. Presumably this was done to help create an atmosphere that might be conducive to meditation and reflection.

I took advantage of this sort of semi-open house policy. Almost every night, I would walk over to Memorial Church and spend time there meditating on my concerns, issues, shortcomings, and problems.

One of the things that stayed with me in relation to my visits to the church and the hours that I spent there during this open-house period at Memorial Church is that I can't recall anyone – or, perhaps, at best, the odd (no pun intended) individual – who showed up at the church to take advantage of the opportunity that was being afforded to the Harvard community. In any event, during all the times that I went to the church during the evening hours, I didn't speak with anyone, and no one spoke with me ... mostly because no one seemed to be around at the times when I was there.

I ended my first year of university as someone who had put the issue of God and religion on a back burner. I wasn't an atheist, nor was I agnostic, but, instead, I just didn't want to think about such matters too much at that time.

When I returned to Harvard several years later, I went through a number of changes in my choice of major before finally ending up in Social Relations, an interdisciplinary concoction involving psychology, sociology, and anthropology. For unknown reasons, I started to do well academically, and eventually graduated with honors.

Six months after emerging from Harvard with a degree, I went to Canada to express my opposition to the Vietnam War. Within three years

of my entry into Canada, I stepped onto the Sufi path and, in the process, became a Muslim.

The transition to Islam didn't come quickly or all of a sudden. I went through a two-year period that consisted of a fairly intensive -- albeit conceptual -- exploration of different mystical traditions -- from: Gurdjieff, to Buddhism. In fact, for a period of time, I was an active participant in a Gurdjieff group in Toronto, and, through engaging readings by, and about, Gurdjieff, I was led to look at some of the spiritual sources that had shaped his understanding ... and one of those influential sources appeared to involve the Sufi mystical tradition.

Following the foregoing period of study and through a remarkable set of circumstances that I won't bother to detail -- and people can think whatever they like about my use of the term "remarkable" here -- I was introduced to a Sufi teacher. For the next sixteen years -- until his passing away in 1988 -- I went through a very intense set of occurrences of one kind or another.

For many reasons, the foregoing sixteen-year period was, perhaps, the most difficult period of my life. It also probably was one of the most -- if not the most -- exhilarating and constructive facet of my life.

The second or third occasion that I met with my spiritual guide, we got together in one of the first mosques that had been established in Toronto. On that occasion, he gave me a zikr or chant to say silently, and, almost immediately upon beginning the chant, my internal condition changed ... a change that continued on for some time even after I stopped reciting the Arabic formula.

I had not expected to be given a chant during that meeting. Furthermore, I had no expectations about what would, or would not, happen during the saying of the chant.

I was given some instructions concerning the saying of the chant. I followed the instructions.

During the aforementioned meeting with my future Sufi guide, my existential condition was torn in two directions that sort of typified my spiritual condition at the time. I lived some 20-30 miles from the mosque where I would meet the spiritual teacher, and before traveling to that appointment, I remember noting that among the television listings for

later that evening was one of my favorite movies: 'The Day the Earth Stood Still' with, among others, Michael Rennie and Patricia Neal.

I wanted to meet with my future mentor, discuss whatever was to be discussed and, then, return home so that I could watch the aforementioned movie. Yet, upon meeting my soon-to-be spiritual guide something happened to me, and, in a sense, although I actually was experiencing what was, for me, the day when the earth actually stood still, all I could think about was going home and becoming engaged in something unreal and fictional ... I'll have a few more things to say about this situation shortly.

Over the span of sixteen, or so, years that I interacted with my spiritual teacher, he observed 16 forty-day seclusions, as well as a number of 19- and 21-day seclusions. Having performed a few seclusions of my own, I can bear witness that such exercises are very demanding.

One: Goes into a room by oneself; kneels or sits on the floor for much of the time one is in the room; fasts from several hours before sunrise until sunset; says the five daily prayers; keeps the night vigil, and spends the hours during the period of seclusion engaged in combating one's ego and seeking to remember God. One breaks the fast with bread and water, and one does not order in other food to consume after the fast is over.

After a few days of following the foregoing regimen, one begins to sleep for, at best, only a few hours a day. When one does sleep, one does so on the floor and not on a bed.

In addition to the foregoing form of spiritual exercise and in order to accommodate the needs of various people – both Muslim and non-Muslim -- my spiritual guide would often spend night after night – until 3-4:00 A.M. in the morning – attending to the needs of such individuals I knew this because I was present at many of those meetings and gatherings.

He also took a very active role in addressing and attempting to resolve many of the problems that were facing the Muslim community at the time ... problems arising both from without as well as from within that community. Such activity took a considerable amount of his time, and I – along with a few other individuals -- assisted him with a lot of the tasks that were entailed by such matters.

One can add to the foregoing that he was a tenured professor at the University of Toronto and was a popular teacher who made himself available for his students outside the classroom. As well, he had an array of family responsibilities that were attended to with considerable care ... something that I also witnessed on many occasions.

I went on several extended journeys with my spiritual guide. During those sojourns, we visited England, Switzerland, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Pakistan, and Turkey.

One of the foregoing excursions occurred during the month of Ramadan, and, so, I had a chance to experience what fasting is like in an exceedingly hot climate (e.g., Saudi Arabia during the summer time). Such a process tends to be more demanding than fasting is in a more temperate climate, but, somehow, survival managed to embrace me on the far side of that fasting experience.

When my teacher passed away, he had left no indications that identified one of the surviving members of our Sufi circle to be his spiritual successor. However, since I felt the need to continue to pursue the Sufi path under the guidance of an authentic spiritual guide, I began to search about for someone who might be able to help me continue on with my quest.

My foregoing intentions were sincere. Nonetheless, despite the presence of such sincerity, I gradually became entangled with a charlatan who claimed to be a Sufi teacher but was not, and because he was very good at counterfeiting spiritual authenticity, it took eleven years for me to discover the manipulative nature of his various forms of duplicity.

After becoming disengaged from the foregoing individual, I went through a period of doubt, uncertainty, confusion, and soul-searching. Eventually, I emerged from this further dark night of the soul but did so with a reshaped understanding of many issues. In short, while my commitment to the Sufi path remained (although done so according to my very real limitations), I also began to exercise a greater caution -- if not skepticism -- concerning many matters of a religious and spiritual nature.

A great deal of my current understanding concerning an array of matters has been given expression through the 38, or so, books that have been issued through me over the last several decades, with the vast majority of those works emerging since 2002 ... the time when I was made

aware of the pathological side of a person who for a number of years I had considered to be an authentic spiritual guide (see *Spiritual Abuse: A Sufi's Perspective* for an account concerning such matters).

I have spent vast portions of more than 60 years critically reflecting on matters dealing with religion, spirituality, mysticism, philosophy, psychology, physics, evolution, and cosmology. The foregoing reflections are not only informed by purely conceptual, academic kinds of investigations but, as well, by active, hands-on exploration of many, but not all, of the foregoing issues.

Consequently, over the years I have managed to gather a certain amount of facility with some of the possibilities and problems surrounding and permeating the issue of religion. I feel there is a considerable amount of confusion and misunderstanding on the part of an array of both believers and nonbelievers concerning religion, and the following chapters are an attempt to critically explore a variety of issues through what I hope will be an interesting and constructive perspective.

Earlier in this foreword, I mentioned Peter Marshall's experience on the moors of Scotland when he believed he had a Divine encounter of sorts that saved his life. As well, previously, I alluded to an experience of my own when my internal condition changed in conjunction with saying a chant that had been given to me by someone who would become my spiritual guide.

By their nature, the foregoing experiences are not necessarily something that can be subjected to scientific study. One cannot scientifically examine what happened to Peter Marshall on the moors that dark night in Scotland, or what happened to me when I began reciting a chant.

Of course, one might attempt to study the process of chanting in some sort of a scientific fashion. Nonetheless, one cannot scientifically study what happened to me on that occasion because that event has come and gone ... there is nothing left to examine.

If I were to reveal the content of that experience, then, scientists, psychologists, and philosophers might each have her or his manner of interpreting my account of the experience. However, that is all it would be ... an interpretation by someone who had not been present at the time of the experience and who was basing their interpretation on nothing

more than their biases, beliefs, and ignorance concerning such an experience.

Although many remarkable things subsequently happened in the life of Peter Marshall, as far as I know, he never again heard someone calling his name urgently and, then, proceed to stumble, landing within a few inches of falling into a quarry. Although many remarkable things subsequently happened in my life, I never again experienced whatever occurred on that night when my earth came to a stand still.

Were the foregoing experiences products of overactive imaginations? Were they auditory hallucinations? Were they illusions of some sort? Were they real, and if real, what kinds of reality were they?

No psychiatrist, psychologist, theologian, religionist, atheist, or scientist can claim that he or she knows in any determinate, certain manner what transpired on the two nights mentioned previously. Those encounters were one and done experiences that left existential residues in the lives of the individuals to whom they occurred.

Some people refer to such incidents as anecdotal because those experiences are not based on rigorous research and, therefore, are not necessarily considered to be reliable. Unfortunately, the term “anecdotal” is often used like the term “conspiracy theory” as a means of dismissing lived experience as being something less than it might actually be.

To assert that some report is merely anecdotal says nothing at all about the truth, falsity, meaning, value or significance of what has been experienced. All an assertion about the anecdotal nature of something does is indicate there is not sufficient evidence available to be able to make a definitive determination concerning what has transpired.

For most people, much of life is anecdotal in the foregoing sense. We are left with the problem of trying to make sense of what transpires in our lives and to do so without the benefit of having rigorous processes of testing and scientific analysis at our beck and call.

I believe – based on experience -- in the value of reason, science, and critical reflection. However, I also believe – based on experience -- in the possibility of an essential, mystical dimension of reality that cannot necessarily be reduced to considerations of reason, science, and critical reflection.

The present volume is not going to be an exploration of Islam or the Sufi path – at least not in any traditional sense. This work will, for the most part, be a generic, yet critical, examination concerning the idea of religion together with many of the problems, questions, and themes that are entailed by such an idea, and, yet, I believe that everything that is written in the following pages is consistent with a mystical perspective ... although many people might fail to grasp this point because I don't use the sort of terminology with which they are familiar and because I don't quote from traditional texts in an attempt to shore-up what is being said.

This book does not constitute a proof of anything except, perhaps, that the essential problems and questions with which many of us are interested are far more complicated, nuanced, and subtle than many people – both believers and nonbelievers – might suppose. In the end, and along the way, we will all be making choices about which way to proceed.

The first verse of the poem 'The Road Not Taken' by Robert Frost goes as follows:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

No matter what one's choice of path might be, it will, indeed, make all the difference for no one has traveled down that particular road before. What, precisely, the nature of that difference will be is an issue to which I am not privy.

If an individual or a group of people believes something to be true, then one could claim that the existence of such a belief constitutes a fact. However, what that individual believes to be true or what those people believe to be true might not turn out to be all that factual.

Many scientists, medical doctors, and/or engineers have asserted all manner of "facts" that have turned out not to be true in relation to problems involving: Pesticides; iatrogenic diseases; the abuse of

antibiotics; the toxicity of thousands of chemicals that have been released into the environment; problematic pharmaceuticals; GMOs; nuclear issues (spent fuel rods, Chernobyl, Fukushima, nuclear weapons, and Three Mile Island, anyone); depleted uranium; the Challenger and Columbia disasters; the Mars 1998 Climate Orbiter; the Hubble Telescope fiasco; the addictive and carcinogenic properties of tobacco; 9/11; string theory; Supersymmetry; HIV research; fracking, and more. Consequently, the fact that a scientist says something does not necessarily say anything about the nature of reality or truth just because what was uttered was said by someone who is called a scientist or was said by a group of people who refer to themselves, or are referred to, as scientists.

To say the foregoing is not intended to denigrate science or scientists, for many incredible discoveries have emerged through the process of science that has been assiduously pursued by a remarkable group of men and women, and, as well, many of the mistakes concerning the nature of truth and reality that were committed by earlier scientists have been overturned or corrected by later scientists. Instead, the foregoing remarks are intended to be a way of reminding ourselves that not everything which glitters in the realm of science -- even though it might be praised by many people who call themselves scientists -- necessarily turns out to be gold.

When it comes to the nature of reality, determining what is factual and what is not factual can be a very complicated matter. Such complications tend to haunt the decisions that each of us makes as we seek to arrive at some sort of understanding concerning the nature of the reality problem.

I believe there might be more truth to be found in the interstitial dimensions of ontology that lie between so-called facts than there is to be found in the set of facts that supposedly gives expression to what we know about the nature of reality. The boundary dynamics of the existential manifolds through which phenomena and noumena make their presence known are exceedingly complex.

Chapter 1: Evolution is a Fact

Richard Dawkins states in the very first paragraph of the Preface to his 2009 book: *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution* that "...the 'theory' of evolution is actually a fact." On page 8 of the foregoing book, Professor Dawkins emphatically states: "Evolution is a fact. Beyond reasonable doubt, beyond serious doubt, beyond sane, informed, intelligent doubt, beyond doubt evolution is a fact."

One has to wait for another 25 pages, or so, to find out what Professor Dawkins means by the idea of evolution. When he finally gets around to defining the term, some problems and questions tend to bubble to the surface of reflective consciousness.

For example, at one point on page 33, he indicates that: "... when there is a systematic increase or decrease in the frequency with which we see a particular gene in a gene pool, that is precisely what is meant by evolution." Why use the term "evolution" to refer to a process that merely gives expression to the dynamics of population genetics?

To say that the frequency of genes changes (upwards or downwards) within a given population is one thing. To say that those changes in gene frequency will lead inevitably – although this might take time -- to the emergence of new life forms, tends to be quite another matter.

Consider a population of fully functioning organisms whose phenotypic and genotypic properties constitute the parameters of the existing gene pool that gives expression to the first life form. Let us assume that the frequency of those genes increases or decreases due to, among other things, both: Internal, genetic considerations (e.g., recombination), as well as external factors (e.g., conjugation among different members of that population).

What are the parameters of possibility for that population? Are there determinate limits to what phenotypic or genotypic properties can be generated through the foregoing processes of recombination and conjugation, or are there no limits to what can happen through the latter dynamics?

The questions being raised above are quite important. If there are determinate limits to the processes of recombination and conjugation, then although under those circumstances one might be able to conceive of how new species could arise out of that population by means of some

suitable dynamic involving recombination, conjugation, and changes in environmental circumstances, nevertheless, one also might have difficulty understanding how phenotypic and genotypic properties would arise that are “significantly different” (in some sense of this term) from what is made possible by the genes within that initial, primitive population irrespective of how much those genes might increase or decrease in frequency within that genetic pool.

Let’s put the foregoing problem into concrete terms. More specifically, although scientists don’t know how the first life form came into existence, recently, J. Craig Venter announced that his research team had constructed a synthetic organism consisting of 473 genes. Among other things, his team was trying to determine what the minimal number of genes might be through which life could be sustained.

Whether the foregoing number of genes can be pared down even further is unknown. This is because despite more than five years of intensive work involving the aforementioned synthetic life form, there are still almost a third of the organism’s genes whose functions remain a mystery, and, consequently, the researchers don’t know if those 149 genes serve processes that are essential or peripheral in nature with respect to being able to help sustain life.

For the sake of argument, let’s assume that the first, primitive life form consisted of somewhere between 324 and 473 genes. The human genome consists of about 20,000 genes.

How does one make the journey from, on the one hand, 324-473 genes (the population that, supposedly, constitutes the common ancestor for all subsequent life forms) to, on the other hand, say the 20,000 genes that exist within the gene pool that gives expression to human beings? Given three billion years, or so, of time, plus the capacities for recombination, and conjugation within that first primitive gene pool, as well as allowing for fluctuations in gene frequency within that gene pool, along with taking into account considerations involving changes in environmental circumstances across those three billion-plus years, can one demonstrate that the lesser gene pool is capable of leading to the greater gene pool through a process of speciation?

The foregoing issue does not just swirl about questions concerning the nature of the relationship between the genome of the first primitive life form and the genome of human beings. The issue outlined in the last

paragraph constitutes a problem for the entire history of life on Earth ... in other words, is the process of evolution as defined by Professor Dawkins on page 33 of his book: *The Greatest Show on Earth* sufficient to account for the emergence of new genes, new functions, new modes of organization as one moves away from the original ancestral life form consisting of 324-473 genes toward other life forms that contain either the same number of genes (but, perhaps, featuring different kinds of genes or the same genes with different functions) or moves toward other life forms that contain a greater number of genes?

Although biologists have created a tree that places all, known life forms (both past and present) in what is said to be an evolutionary relationship with one another, the branching process that gives rise to certain aspects of the aforementioned evolutionary tree is not necessarily straightforward. For example, while I have no doubt that speciation can be shown to occur at various branching points within the evolutionary tree, nonetheless, I harbor a great deal of doubt about whether, or not, one can show that all of the branching activity that is entailed by the evolutionary tree is due to a process of speciation as envisioned by Darwin and his neo-Darwinian descendants.

In other words, according to Professor Dawkins' statement on page 33 of *The Greatest Show On Earth*, the process of evolution (i.e., changes in gene frequency) treats the many branching processes that link the first primitive life form with human beings as leading to successive stages of speciation that are a function of: Time, transitions in gene frequency, alterations in environmental circumstances, and the parameters of possibility that are inherent in the capacity of the initial life form gene pool to engage in various processes of recombination and conjugation (we'll set aside for the moment the issue of mutation). While changes that take place over time in relation to the frequency with which various genes occur in a gene pool might be a fact, a theory claiming that a cumulative series of those kinds of changes actually accounts for how one can traverse all the phenotypic and genotypic changes that separate the 20,000 genes of human beings from the 324 to 473 genes of (possibly) the first primitive life form is not a fact because no one has shown how that series of changes took place.

There is a great deal of evidence demonstrating that speciation does, indeed, take place. However, there is very little evidence (although there

is a great deal of presumption) demonstrating that the entire evolutionary tree is a product of successive instances of a process of speciation that mixes together: Time, changes in gene frequency, mutation, recombination, conjugation, genetic shuffling, changes in environmental circumstances, and natural selection in various viable combinations.

Furthermore, even assuming that J. Craig Venter's synthetic organism is roughly in the ball park when it comes to the number of genes existing in the first functional form of life, Venter has no viable account for how those 324 to 473 genes came into existence in the first place, let alone how they became organized in a manner that could make a functioning, sustainable life form possible. Indeed, Venter is not alone when it comes to the foregoing set of problems since not one evolutionary biologist (including Dawkins and Darwin) has succeeded in accounting for the origins of genes, gene organization, or life, let alone account for the origins of the genetic code that underwrites those genetic dynamics.

Furthermore, while mutations do occur, and, while some of those mutations even lead to favorable changes within a given gene pool, there is a lot of explaining that remains to be done when it comes to plausibly accounting for the array of transitions that separate the 324 to 473 genes of the original life form from the 20,000 genes found in human beings by means of the mechanism of mutation working in conjunction with recombination, conjugation, more complex forms of genetic shuffling, and changes in gene frequency within changing environmental circumstances.

On page 31 of *The Greatest Show on Earth*, Professor Dawkins states: "Unlike Darwin and Wallace, they (Patrick Matthew and Edward Blyth) didn't see it (i.e., natural selection) as a general phenomenon with universal significance – with the power to drive the evolution of all living things in the direction of positive improvement." So, apparently, the process of natural selection drives increases and decreases in the frequency of genes in a gene pool in ways that result in positive improvement of some kind.

What is meant by the idea of "positive improvement"? How is natural selection capable of driving changes in the frequency of genes within a population in such a way that a directional component is introduced into the notion of those 'improvements' since the idea of directionality is implicit in both the word "positive" as well as the word "improvement".

The frequency of specific genes increases in a given population when the organisms possessing that gene are able to survive and, in the process, have greater reproductive success than other organisms within the same population that do not possess that gene. This is true irrespective of whether, or not, the gene at issue is essential or peripheral with respect to survival.

Consequently, the term “positive improvements” mentioned by Professor Dawkins presumably has something to do with (1) a capacity to survive and (2) a capacity for reproductive success. Natural selection favors those organisms that exhibit both of these properties.

One has no difficulty grasping how any set of genes that could manage to survive and undergo reproductive success should be described as displaying “positive improvements” relative to a set of genes that has difficulty surviving and experiencing reproductive success. Moreover, one has little difficulty understanding how the natural conditions existing at a given time in relation to those genes would tend to favor the genes associated with survivability and reproductive success over those genes that are associated with difficulties in survivability or reproductive success, and consequently, one has little difficulty understanding how natural selection has the capacity to drive changes in gene frequency associated with the capacity to survive and reproduce successfully.

Nonetheless, don't the foregoing possibilities represent the limit of what can be expected in the way of “positive improvements” that can be driven by the powers of natural selection? In other words, if a gene or set of genes is associated with greater capacities for survival and reproductive success relative to some other gene or set of genes, then while the frequency of the former gene or set of genes is likely to increase over time relative to the frequency of the gene or set of genes that possess some lesser capacity for survival and reproductive success, this is all that natural selection has to say in the matter.

Natural selection has the capacity to reward genes that are associated with a greater capacity for survival and reproductive success by increasing their frequency in a given gene pool. Furthermore, natural selection has the capacity to decrease the frequency of genes that are associated with a diminished capacity for survival and reproductive success.

Natural selection has no capacity to introduce any new, “positive improvements” into a given environmental context other than to increase or decrease the frequency of genes already existing within that context. Natural selection does not explain how a given gene or set of genes comes into existence but, rather, natural selection only enhances or diminishes the frequency of genes once a given gene or set of genes arises in some unknown fashion.

Can natural selection induce a gene pool to generate new capacities for survival or reproductive success? Sort of, but only to the extent that natural selection supports or opposes whatever the existing potential is for those kinds of new capacities emerging in a given gene pool.

If a gene pool can give rise to new possibilities through processes of recombining, exchanging, or shuffling genes, then natural selection can differentially act on whatever sort of genes are forthcoming in this manner. What the limits, if any, or potential are for producing new possibilities through processes of recombining, exchanging, shuffling genetic material, or mutational events with respect to any given gene pool are largely unknown.

We can know what already has occurred in a given gene pool with respect to the nature of the phenotypic and genotypic properties that have been generated through processes of recombination, conjugation, and shuffling to date. However, we do not necessarily know what might occur with respect to any future unpacking of the potential (both phenotypic and genotypic) of that same gene pool via processes of recombination, conjugation, shuffling, or mutation.

If recombination, conjugation, genetic shuffling, and/or mutation can produce genes that are associated with a greater capacity for survival and reproductive success, then, natural selection will give expression to positive improvements by increasing the frequency with which those genes occur within the gene pool. However, the relationship between natural selection and the idea of “positive improvements” is quantitative in nature – not qualitative in nature – and, therefore, is entirely a function of shifts in the frequency of occurrence with respect to existing genes that are associated with a capacity for survival and reproductive success.

Does the capacity of natural selection to generate “positive improvements” in the frequencies of genes that are associated with issues of survival and reproductive success account for how one goes from the

324-473 genes of the first primitive organism to, say, the 20,000 genes of human beings? Not in specific terms.

Do changes in the frequency (either upwards or downwards) of phenotypic and genotypic properties that are associated with the gene pool of the first, living organism – the feature that Professor Dawkins claims goes to the heart of the idea of evolution – provide an explanation for how one gets from the 324-473 genes of the first living organism to the 20,000 genes of the human genome? Not in any clearly identifiable manner.

Does the possibility of mutational processes account for how one makes the series of transitions needed to go from the 324-473 genes of the first living organism to the 20,000 genes inherent in human beings? This works only if one assumes one's conclusions – that is, one assumes all of the right mutations occurred at the right time and in the right sequence and set of circumstances that enable one to intelligibly link a gene pool consisting of 324-473 genes to a gene pool consisting of 20,000 genes.

If one takes: The passage of billions of years, processes of natural selection, changes in gene frequency, mutational events, as well as the dynamics of recombination, conjugation, or genetic shuffling and, then, places them in interactive juxtaposition with one another, does one end up with an understanding by means of which one is able to viably claim beyond a reasonable doubt about the precise nature of the sequence of transitions that take one from the 324-473 genes that might have been present in the first living organism to the 20,000 genes associated with human beings? Not necessarily!

If one grants that speciation does, in fact, take place, is one thereby forced – empirically and/or logically -- to conclude that the process of speciation – and only speciation -- accounts for all of the branches of the evolutionary tree that are believed to exist between the first living organism consisting of 324-473 genes and the 20,000 genes of human beings? No, one is not forced to do so because there are too many unanswered questions concerning the specific nature of the events that led to the emergence of those branches.

According to Professor Dawkins, evolution is a matter of the changes in the frequencies of genes that are driven by the process of natural selection toward “positive improvement”. Theoretically speaking, all of life descends from some initial, ancestral gene pool via the process of

evolution working in conjunction with the process of natural selection, and this theory is a fact, and, yet, empirically speaking, Professor Dawkins cannot account for the origins of the genetic code, the origins of the first gene, the origins of the first living organism, or the specific nature of the sequence of branching transitions that take one from, say, the 324-473 genes of the first life form to the 20,000 genes of human beings.

Frequency changes involving the kinds and numbers of genes that occur within a given gene pool over time are observable facts. Mutations are observable facts. Speciation is an observable fact. Differential rates of survival and reproductive success are observable facts. Processes of natural selection that affect the status of gene frequency are observable facts. The appearance of different kinds of life forms across billions of years is an observable set of facts.

However, despite Professor Dawkins' claims to the contrary, what is not factual is the overarching theory that seeks to bring the foregoing sorts of facts together to form a determinate, sequential, detailed account that is capable of clearly tracing an evolutionary path that leads from the first primitive form of life consisting of some 324-473 genes to the 20,000 genes of human beings. Changes -- considered either singly or in combination -- in gene frequency, processes of mutation, differential rates of survival or reproductive success, the vector-like nature of natural selection, the passage of billions of years, and the dynamics of speciation do not permit one to generate the specific details of the evolutionary path that supposedly links the first, ancestral life form with human beings or specific exemplars from any of the six taxonomic kingdoms (Animalia, Plantae, Fungi, Protista, Archaea/Archaeobacteria, and Bacteria/Eubacteria).

One can cite thousands of empirical facts concerning changes in gene frequency within different gene pools. One can cite thousands of empirical facts involving processes of mutation. One can cite thousands of empirical facts dealing with the forces of natural selection. One can cite thousands of empirical facts encompassing instances of speciation. One can cite thousands of empirical facts about the emergence of different kinds of life forms across billions of years.

Currently, however, what one can't cite is the existence of a reliable set of empirical facts that shows how all of the foregoing thousands of facts constitute a concrete, verifiable, account that permits one to

understand in concrete, specific terms how to go from – to take just one example -- the 324-473 genes of the first life form to the 20,000 genome of human beings. More generally, one cannot empirically prove – although one can use facts to suggest this -- that all of life is descended from one, initial, ancestral gene pool, let alone empirically demonstrate how the genetic code, functional genes, or the first life form arose originally that led to the existence of that first gene pool.

Is it possible that some day in the distant future the sort of reliable set of empirical facts being alluded to in the previous paragraph might be forthcoming and, consequently, would permit one to put forth a detailed account of how life descended from an ancestral gene pool to the gene pool that constitutes human beings? Yes, this is a possibility.

If such a possibility should become a reality in my lifetime, then, I will take that data into consideration and adjust my understanding accordingly. However, at the present time that possibility has not been realized and, as a result, there is no scientific account presently available that demonstrates -- in a detailed, factually reliable manner -- the precise nature of the transitions that take one from the first life form to human beings, and, therefore, I am free to pursue alternative possibilities concerning the mysteries surrounding the origin of the genetic code, functional genes, the first life form, and subsequent life forms as long as those alternatives are consistent with what is empirically known.

The theory of evolution is a narrative – if not mythology -- that seeks to give hermeneutical form, meaning, and direction to an array of facts that, at the present time, is collectively unable to prove -- beyond a reasonable doubt – the central claim of that sort of an evolutionary narrative/mythology. In other words, the evolutionary narrative or mythology cannot demonstrate that all life descended from an ancestral gene pool through a series of speciation dynamics that were shaped by the forces of natural selection acting on the frequency of genes present in that first life form.

Consequently, Professor Dawkins misleads people when he claims that the theory of evolution is a fact. Indeed, Professor Dawkins – whether consciously or unconsciously – pulls something akin to a bait and switch maneuver since he starts out with the simple idea that evolution only refers to changes in the frequency with which genes occur in a given population – something that can be shown – and, then, in various ways

attempts to expand that idea in ways that lead him to claim – problematically -- that those kinds of changes in gene frequency are able to account for the descent of all subsequent life forms from some common, ancestral gene pool ... something that has not been empirically shown in any viable, concrete, specific manner.

At various points in his book: *The Greatest Show On Earth: The Evidence for Evolution*, Professor Dawkins alludes to the ‘explanatory power’ of evolution as a scientific theory. An idea only explains something if what it has to say about the nature of reality concerning that something is true because if that idea does not give expression to the truth of things, then, it cannot be called an explanation in any reliable, demonstrable sense.

Does evolution explain how one gets from an initial life form consisting of, say, between 324 and 473 genes to something like the human genome that consists of approximately 20,000 genes? Not at the present time because there is no specific evidence to demonstrate that the two foregoing genomes are linked in the way that evolution claims they are.

Could the foregoing two genomes be linked together by some combination of: Changes in gene frequency, plus the dynamics of recombination, conjugation, or genetic shuffling, along with the occurrence of mutations, and the shaping forces of natural selection that are all mixed together across billions of years? Possibly, but one needs to establish what the precise combinations of those components are, as well as empirically establish how those combinations occur in the right sequences and circumstances, before one can say that one has a true, complete explanation for how life descended from 324-473 genes to any of the members of the aforementioned six Kingdoms of life that supposedly descended from that original ancestral life form.

The theory of evolution provides various people with a narrative or mythology that seeks to lend a certain degree of coherency, consistency, and meaning with respect to a multitude of facts. However, there are philosophies and theologies that attempt to offer a similar form of coherency, consistency, and sense of meaning with respect to the same multitude of facts, and, therefore, on what basis can one claim that evolution offers a better, truer explanation of those facts than philosophy or theology do?

Suppose I believe in God, and I claim that God created life. Let us further suppose that someone asks me to provide an account of how that kind of a creative process took place.

If I can't provide an empirically verifiable account concerning the nature of the creation process, then I don't really have an explanation for the existence of life. Consequently, why should one suppose that the theory of evolution has an explanation for the existence of life or the emergence of various life forms over billions of years when the theory of evolution is no more capable than I am with respect to the task of successfully responding – in concrete, specific terms -- to the challenge of accounting for how things actually took place in relation to the origin of life and the emergence of subsequent life forms?

I might entertain a creationist theory about the origins of life and life forms. However, if I can't prove that my theory is true, I can't honestly claim that I can provide an intelligible, detailed explanation for the origins of life or subsequent life forms.

The foregoing situation remains the case even if, ultimately, my creationist account were to turn out to be true. When truth exceeds our capacity to understand the nature of that truth, then we don't actually have an explanation for why and how things take place in the way they do.

Are things really all that different for a theory of evolution? To date, evolution has no reliable account concerning either the origin of life or the specific nature of the sequence of transition states that connect the gene pool of the first life form and the gene pools of subsequent life forms, and, therefore, those who subscribe to a theory of evolution are in no better of a position to claim that they have an accurate explanation for the origins of life or the emergence of subsequent life forms than someone who accounts for things by citing God ... and this remains the case even if, ultimately, an evolutionary account concerning the emergence of life forms were true.

One can't explain what one doesn't understand. This is true in a theological context, and it also is true in a scientific context.

The capacity of genes to experience changes in their frequency within a given gene pool doesn't explain anything of evolutionary importance unless one can tie those changes to concrete steps that demonstrate how

those dynamics have moved the original gene pool in some appreciable manner toward realizing the genomic properties of any specific member of the six biological Kingdoms. If one can't provide such a specific demonstration, then, one has no way to demonstrate that irrespective of whatever changes in gene frequency might occur, one will end up with anything that is all that different from the life form with which one began.

Even if – under the shaping influence of various forces of natural selection -- the changes in gene frequency that occur within the original gene pool lead to a process of speciation, one needs to be able to accurately account for how that kind of a speciation process is capable of producing anything more than variations on a theme similar to the ones that occurred with Darwin's finches. In short, one has to be able to demonstrate that something beside – for example -- a finch can emerge from that kind of speciation process, and, to date, the theory of evolution has not succeeded in accomplishing this in any manner that is capable of overcoming reasonable doubt concerning the sort of dynamics that are encompassed by a theory of evolution.

Creationists and proponents of intelligent design say: "God" whenever they are asked to explain how biological organisms move from one part of the tree of life to some other part of that same tree. Proponents of evolution say: "Evolution" when faced with the same sort of challenge.

Unfortunately, in both of the foregoing instances, the words that are being used to account for how things came to be the way they are in the realm of biology don't really explain anything. The dynamics being alluded to in each case are entirely vague.

I don't believe the solution to the foregoing dilemma is to argue that some form of creationism or intelligent design should be given equal time with the theory of evolution. Rather, I feel that no one should be permitted to treat ignorance as if it were knowledge and, as a result, try to claim that a given theory – be it theological, philosophical, or scientific – gives expression to a true explanation when so much that is necessary for establishing the veridical nature of that account is absent.

Professor Dawkins wants to be free from the annoying and frustrating interference of individuals whom he considers to be ignoramuses (and he does use this term) because those individuals don't accept his approach to things. I think students should be free from all people – whether

theologically, philosophically, politically, and/or scientifically inclined -- who are in denial about their own ignorance and, as a result, wish to be free to impose alleged explanations on students that those theoreticians claim to be a fact but are unable to demonstrate the truth of those accounts.

Population genetics is a rigorous, empirically based, scientific discipline. Evolutionary theory is a hermeneutical narrative or mythology posing as science that has no reliable, specific, concrete account for how life first emerged or how that initial life form was able to lead to the sorts of transitions that are manifested in the Six Kingdoms of biological organisms that populate the tree of life.

Some people – and Professor Dawkins is one of them – seem to indicate that they can't teach the principles of biology or population genetics without filtering everything through an evolutionary lens. Those individuals appear to be suffering from a form of pedagogical myopia because one can, without insurmountable difficulty, find ways to teach about biological organisms and changes involving: Gene frequency, recombination, conjugation, genetic shuffling, mutations, and natural selection without having to dip into the lexicon of evolutionary mythology.

Individuals like Professor Dawkins appear to want to paint everything biological in evolutionary hues because they apparently feel that such an inclination lends support to their beliefs concerning the nature of ontology. For example, Professor Dawkins seems to believe that the theory of evolution helps to corroborate or justify his beliefs that God is nothing more than a delusional idea.

Nonetheless, the theory of evolution – even if it were proven to be true – demonstrates absolutely nothing about the existence or non-existence of God, or whether the idea of God is delusional in nature. Evolution considered as a natural phenomena might simply encompass the principles of, among other things, population genetics that God used to give expression to life over a period of time.

Professor Dawkins appears to believe that if one can put forth a natural account concerning the origins of life and the subsequent emergence of various life forms, then this does away with any need to refer to the presence of a God as the means through which those kinds of natural events are rendered possible. Or, approached from a slightly

different direction, if one had to choose between, on the one hand, a purely natural account of life and, on the other hand, an account of life that required the presence of a God to make life possible by means of some set of natural principles, then many people believe that the simpler account is preferable than the God-based idea.

William of Ockham did not say that the simplest explanation is the correct explanation. Rather, he supposedly indicated (there is a certain amount of controversy concerning what he actually said in this respect) that one should not multiply assumptions beyond necessity, and, presumably, the nature of reality sets the limits on the number of assumptions that are consonant with being able to correctly understand the truth concerning the nature of something's reality.

The truth, whatever its complexities (or lack thereof), is the simplest possible account of reality. If the origins of life and the emergence of subsequent life forms can be completely and accurately accounted for by a purely natural theory that does not depend on God in any way, then, that is the simplest possible account of those matters, but if the origins of life and the emergence of subsequent life forms requires the presence of a God who is capable of generating life and subsequent life forms, then, the simplest possible account is the one that reflects those necessities.

According to Professor Dawkins (see page 6 of the hardcover edition of *The Greatest Show on Earth*), "... all except the woefully informed are forced to accept the fact of evolution." The foregoing statement is factually untrue.

I've been reading books and articles on biochemistry, prebiotic chemistry, evolution, molecular biology, cell physiology, genetics, and the like for more than forty years. I have an honors degree from Harvard and a doctorate from the University of Toronto, and, therefore, again and again, I have demonstrated I have the capacity to understand what I am reading.

As a result, I am not woefully informed. Nonetheless, I don't accept the idea of evolution in any sense except a trivial one in which the frequency of genes in a given population can change over time, and this means that I do not accept any so-called scientific account that claims to be able to prove that evolution in the foregoing sense -- even when those accounts are buttressed with ideas such as natural selection, mutation, speciation, and genetic shuffling -- adequately accounts for how the

original, ancestral life form led to, over time, the emergence of human beings.

I've written several books (*The Origin of Life* and *Evolution Unredacted*) that explore the idea of evolution in a purely scientific manner. In other words, the aforementioned books do not seek to argue for either a creationist or intelligent design perspective concerning the existence of life but, instead, those works have focused solely on engaging in a rigorously critical examination about whether, or not, a theory of evolution is capable of successfully addressing a variety of issues, questions, and problems that confront that idea.

Despite being well informed concerning the theory of evolution, nevertheless, contrary to Professor Dawkins foregoing claim, I do not feel forced to accept the theory of evolution as a fact. Consequently, Professor Dawkins is factually incorrect when he claims that: "all except the woefully uninformed are forced to accept the fact of evolution."

Could I be wrong about the theory of evolution? Sure, and I am willing to acknowledge that possibility, but I do not feel the current state of understanding concerning evolution requires me to admit, at the present time, that my judgment with respect to those matters is faulty.

Could proponents of the theory of evolution be wrong with respect to their understanding of how the universe operates with respect to biological dynamics? Yes, they could be, but, unfortunately, oftentimes, I find them to be every bit as dogmatic, arrogant, and rigid as their creationist counterparts when it comes to those sorts of matters, and, therefore, one is confronted with people like Professor Dawkins who, fully mesmerized by his own arrogance and dogmatism, make factually incorrect statements about how only the woefully uninformed could possibly reject evolution as a fact.

Professor Dawkins has come up with the term "history-deniers" to refer to "those people who deny evolution." I don't deny any of the factual findings that have been uncovered concerning the history of life on Earth.

What I deny are that the problematic ways in which evolutionary biologists tend to interpret the historical data are necessarily correct. What I reject is the untenable manner in which evolutionary biologists attempt to use that data as alleged proofs of evolutionary theories

concerning the origins of life or the origins of subsequent life forms when an impartial analysis of those sorts of proofs indicate that they are flawed in many ways.

To reject the foregoing sorts of claims, I don't have to deny the idea that the Earth is billions of years ago, or deny radioactive dating techniques, or deny geological data, or deny the evidence of fossils, or deny the findings of population genetics, or deny molecular biology, or deny the phenomenon of mutation, or deny the concept of natural selection, or deny the idea of speciation, or deny the notions of recombination, conjugation, and genetic shuffling. All I am doing is denying the validity of the conclusions that evolutionary biologists seek to draw from that data by pointing out the problems that permeate those conclusions.

People like Professor Dawkins and Charles Darwin are not history-deniers, but they are history-inventors or 'mythmakers' because they are inclined to claim that certain events took place despite the absence of facts to demonstrate that their claims reflect the actual nature of reality. They bundle together an array of facts and, then, envelop that data within a form of hermeneutical packaging that creates a myth or invents a history concerning the nature of the data within the package.

All kinds of evolutionary claims are made with respect to that packaging concerning the value, meaning, and significance of the informational contents contained within that packaging. Yet, when one analyzes those claims in a rigorously, critically reflective manner, many of those claims turn out to be epistemologically problematic, if not downright false.

Professor Dawkins states that *The Greatest Show On Earth: The Evidence for Evolution*: "is not intended as an anti-religious book. Page 6)" I find such a statement to be highly disingenuous because if one reads his book – and I have – one discovers that the book is peppered with all manner of diatribes against this or that religion or their believers.

If someone endorses the theory of evolution and wishes to put forth what that individual believes is evidence for that theory, then, I don't have a problem with that ... although, naturally, if I feel there are problems concerning that "evidence", then I might have something of a critical nature to say concerning that stance. Moreover, If someone is an atheist and wishes to cite the theory of evolution as justification for his or

her philosophical orientation, then, I don't have a problem with someone doing that ... although, naturally, if I feel there are problems concerning that process of justification, then I might have something of a critical nature to offer in relation to that sort of an orientation.

However, if someone claims that a book is only meant to put forth "evidence for evolution" and is not intended to be anti-religious, and, then, that person proceeds, to engage repeatedly in anti-religious rhetoric, then, I do have a problem with such disingenuous behavior. Even if I were to agree with some of the anti-religious statements that Professor Dawkins makes in *The Greatest Show On Earth* (and, surprise, surprise, I don't disagree with everything that he says in this respect), nonetheless, this does not undermine the legitimacy of pointing out the problematic nature of someone saying one thing, and, then, proceeding to do exactly what that individual claimed he was not intending to do.

In the first chapter of his book: *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution*, Professor Dawkins distinguishes between two senses related to the idea of a theory. One of the foregoing two senses talks about theories as instances of conjecture, belief, speculation, and/or unproven hypothetical claims, while the other notion of theory revolves around understandings that have been confirmed or accepted as providing an accurate account of what has been established through experiment and observation.

Professor Dawkins clearly indicates that when he refers to the theory of evolution as a fact he is using the word "theory" in the second sense outlined in the last paragraph. In other words, he is claiming that the idea of evolution gives expression to an understanding that has been confirmed by observation and experiment and, therefore, theory in the sense employed by scientists has nothing to do with speculation, conjecture, or unproven hypothetical claims.

The theory of evolution supposedly offers a fact-filled understanding concerning the nature of the emergence of life forms on Earth. Allegedly, this is an understanding that is rooted in observations and experiments that are capable of confirming or substantiating that theory's account of how those life forms emerged.

The observations and experiments that populate the theory of evolution might be able to confirm or substantiate that some life forms might have emerged through the interaction of those phenomena as:

Natural selection, mutation, recombination, conjugation, genetic shuffling, shifts in gene frequency, and speciation. However, there are no observations or experiments confirming that all life forms arising after the appearance of the first ancestral gene pool did so through a dynamic, interactive process involving: Mutation, recombination, conjugation, genetic shuffling, speciation, changes in gene frequency, and the forces of natural selection.

The empirical data indicating that some forms of life did, indeed, arise through the interaction of a set of dynamic principles inherent in the theory of evolution is being used as a warrant to attempt to lend credence to the claim that all life forms arose through the dynamic interaction of that same set of principles. Unfortunately, there are no observations, experiments, or empirical data capable of confirming or substantiating the latter claim.

If one goes back to the aforementioned 324-473 gene primordial life form, and, then, tries to move forward with an account that seeks to substantiate or confirm the claim that every subsequent transition toward a human genome of 20,000 genes (or the genome of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms) occurred through an interactive process involving the dynamic principles of evolution (e.g., natural selection, speciation, variation, mutation, gene frequency, recombination, conjugation, genetic shuffling, and time), one cannot confirm, with any specificity, that the foregoing sort of dynamic interaction did, in fact, generate all subsequent life form instantiations that emerged along the path linking the first life form and human beings or a particular member of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms. One might claim, of course, that all those transitions among subsequent, emerging life forms that appear on the path extending out toward human beings could be interpreted or understood as resulting from dynamic products of interacting evolutionary forces and principles, but this is not actually a confirmation or substantiation of evolutionary theory as much as it is merely a statement of a person's interpretation or understanding concerning how that individual believes things unfolded.

Interpretations or understandings involving the available data that give expression to the theory of evolution might even be true. However, those understandings or interpretations become factual only if one can

demonstrate that what is claimed by means of those interpretations, and interpretations are, in fact, what took place.

The data, observation, and experiments that are currently available to evolutionary biologists only permits the theory of evolution to assume that what it claims happened actually did happen. Moreover, those claims remain presumptive until one – in concrete, empirical terms – can demonstrate the truth of what transpired at each and every point along the path linking the first primitive protocell and any particular member of the six taxonomic Kingdoms that encompass life on Earth.

Evolution is a hermeneutical model that can be used to interpret an array of data, observations, and experiments. Therefore, it is not a fact, but a tentative, hermeneutical account of what might be the case, and, consequently, that theory stands in need of the sort of definitive data that can substantiate or confirm that what the theory of evolution claims to have happened in any given instance did actually take place in the way indicated.

The theory of evolution cannot account – in any definitive manner – for how the genetic code arose, or how the first protocell became established on Earth, or how photosynthesis came about, or how mitosis (simple cell division) or meiosis (a more complex form of cell division involving a halving of chromosomes inherited from parent cells) became possible, or how the transition from anaerobic (averse to the presence of free oxygen) to aerobic (able to utilize free oxygen) organisms took place, or how multicellular life forms arose from unicellular organisms, or how different systems of embryological unfolding were established, or how the immune system arose, or how the initial members of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms first came into existence, or how various forms of neurons or glial cells arose, and so on almost indefinitely. Proponents of the theory of evolution have offered a vast array of conjectures concerning all of the foregoing issues, but none of those conjectures has been demonstrated to constitute factual accounts concerning the actual set of conditions and forces that gave expression to those phenomena, and, therefore, one cannot claim with any justification that the theory of evolution accounts for any of the foregoing events and, therefore, one can hardly claim that the theory of evolution is a fact when it comes to accounting for those issues.

Professor Dawkins begins a discussion concerning the idea of fact (Page 14 of *The Greatest Show On Earth*) with a dictionary definition that describes 'facts' as phenomena or events that actually have taken place. According to the definition cited by Professor Dawkins, facts are particular truths that are rooted in experience that have been confirmed in some fashion, "as opposed to what is merely inference" ... a fact is "a datum of experience, as distinguished from the conclusions that might be based upon" such a datum.

Ironically, when Professor Dawkins asserts that the theory of evolution is a fact, he is unable to satisfy the conditions that the foregoing definition claims are necessary for a fact to be present. In other words, using the criteria set forth in a dictionary, Professor Dawkins cannot show that when, for example, one seeks to establish the pathway that was followed by the first protocell on its evolutionary journey toward human beings or any other particular instance representing one of the six taxonomic Kingdoms, that such a pathway consists of events that actually have occurred and have been verified by observation or empirical data that does not involve inferential conclusions concerning that data.

On the one hand, Professor Dawkins can cite a great many facts involving: Changes in gene frequency, mutation, recombination, conjugation, genetic shuffling, natural selection, and the like. However, on the other hand, there are a great many claims associated with the theory of evolution that are nothing but inferential conclusions and, therefore, according to the criteria set forth in the dictionary definition cited by Professor Dawkins, do not factually support the claims of the theory of evolution concerning what actually took place from point to point along the path that supposedly links the first protocell with human beings or with particular instances of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms, and, indeed, there are no confirmed truths or empirical data that can be cited that demonstrate how the evolutionary claims that are made concerning the pathway between the first protocell and human beings or particular instances of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms are factual in nature.

In short, one can cite facts about the dynamics of population genetics for any given gene pool. Nevertheless, the theory of evolution cannot make anything but inferential conclusions concerning how life moved from point to point along the alleged evolutionary pathway that extends from the first protocell to human beings or to any of the six taxonomic

Kingdoms that supposedly emerged at various points after that first life form, and its gene pool, came forth on the Earth.

After pointing out the criteria associated with a dictionary definition concerning the notion of a fact (i.e., something that has actually occurred, or is a particular truth, or is a datum of experience), Professor Dawkins seeks to water down the rigor of the foregoing notion of a fact by emphasizing the importance of inference ... something that the foregoing dictionary definition set in opposition to what was meant by the idea of a fact. According to Professor Dawkins, "This book (i.e., *The Greatest Show On Earth: The Evidence For Evolution*) will take inference seriously – not mere inference but proper scientific inference – and I shall show the irrefragable [i.e., indisputable] power of the inference that evolution is a fact."

Apparently, facts are no longer to be thought of being a function of what can be shown to actually have occurred and, therefore, are a true reflection of some aspect of reality. Facts might also be defined as being a function of inference, and, therefore, if we make an inference – in a proper scientific way – then what is inferred can be construed as not only being factual but factual in an irrefragable or indisputable fashion.

Presumably, a "proper scientific inference" is one that is supported by a great deal of evidence indicating that some understanding (in the form of an inference) that is rooted in that empirical support must necessarily be true. Why this should be the case is not readily clear.

Do inferences exist that are rooted in evidential support and which make claims that subsequently can be shown to demonstrate the significance or meaning of that evidence when applied to some particular set of circumstances? Yes, those sorts of inferences do exist.

Police detectives often use inference successfully by gathering a lot of data and, then, using that data to gauge, through the use of inference, where that data points with respect to the identity of the individual or individuals who might have committed some crime connected to the underlying evidence. Medical doctors also frequently make use of inference by studying the data permeating a person's symptoms as well as that individual's medical history and, then interpreting that data in a way that points, via inference, to the sort of medical issue that is consistent with the relevant data. Moreover, scientists often are quite successful when they use inferential processes to establish links between some body

of data and the nature, significance, value, and meaning of that data relative to some given aspect of reality.

However, in order for the foregoing process of inference to be viable, there must be a way to demonstrate that the inferences arising out of that process are, in fact, true. Making an inference is one thing, and proving that the claim being made through that inference is true is an entirely different matter.

For instance, if one uses empirical evidence concerning the realities of: Mutation, population dynamics, speciation, recombination, conjugation, time, and natural selection as a basis for inferring that, across billions of years, the first protocell proceeded to transition, step by step, toward human beings or toward any particular instance of the six taxonomic Kingdoms, then, surely, one must be able to prove, demonstrate, or show how what is being claimed in the inference constitutes an accurate account with respect to the subsequent emergence of a particular instance of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms is, in fact, true. However, one has difficulty finding that kind of a proof or demonstration when it comes to the tree of life.

In any number of instances, one can demonstrate that: Mutation, changes in gene frequency, speciation, recombination, conjugation, time, and natural selection have all occurred. However, what evolutionary theory can't show is how the inferences that are rooted in those empirical realities accurately reflect what is taking place when applied to any particular branching dynamic in the tree of life.

The fact that mutation, changes in gene frequency, speciation, and so on can be shown to have occurred in particular cases does not prove that the same kinds of processes must necessarily underlie the subsequent emergence of any particular instance of one of the six taxonomic Kingdoms. To be sure, a consistent inference of evolutionary theory is to take what can be shown to be true with respect to changes in gene frequency, speciation, and so on in various specific cases and infer that the same sorts of phenomena are responsible for the appearance of all subsequent life forms, but, there is no proof that such an inference is correct, true, or factual.

One can accumulate as much evidence as one likes concerning the manner in which mutation, changes in gene frequency, recombination, conjugation, genetic shuffling, speciation, and natural selection play

shaping roles in an array of specific cases. Nonetheless, the existence of all that data does not necessarily say anything relevant with respect to accounting for how a given instance of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms arose from the first protocell unless one can show that, in fact, the emergence of those life forms is due to the sorts of dynamics and principles that lie at the heart of the theory of evolution.

Inferences by themselves are not enough. One must be capable of demonstrating that those inferences are accurately reflective of whatever is taking place with respect to a given life form in one, or another, of the six taxonomic Kingdoms that emerges subsequent to the appearance of the first, functional protocell.

Of course, the sorts of inferences that arise out of evolutionary theory might be correct. However, there must be evidence independent of the inference to demonstrate that the latter is true.

Unfortunately, the evidence that evolutionary biologists wish to cite in support of their inferences concerning the emergence of particular instances of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms from some ancestral protocell tends to involve only what has been shown to be true with respect to some other case instead of the problem at hand. And, the problem at hand requires one to demonstrate – in concrete, specific terms -- how the transition from the first, functional protocell to any given instance of the six taxonomic Kingdoms is made.

There is nothing in the foregoing that prohibits an evolutionary biologist from arguing, hypothetically, that the aforementioned transitions that supposedly populated the pathway between the first protocell and any subsequent instance of one of the six taxonomic Kingdoms took place through: Mutations, changes in gene frequency, recombination, conjugation, genetic shuffling, speciation, and/or natural selection. Nevertheless, one would like to know the specific character of the mutations, changes in gene frequency, speciation dynamics, or processes of natural selection that led to the emergence of this or that instance of one of the six taxonomic Kingdoms.

However, evolutionary theory cannot supply that information. All it has to offer is an inference based on data that is relevant to an array of biological contexts but has not been shown to be relevant to the question of how to account for the emergence of any of the life forms that

represent any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms subsequent to the appearance of the first, functional protocell.

There are no “irrefragable” or indisputable evolutionary accounts that link the first protocell with the subsequent emergence of life forms that possess the properties that are indicative of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms. There are many inferences regarding those matters, but very little independent evidence capable of demonstrating that those inferences give accurate, factual expression to what actually happened with respect to the emergence of the six taxonomic Kingdoms.

Many, if not most, biologists believe that the account provided by evolutionary theory is correct – at least, in general terms -- with respect to its understanding concerning the emergence of each of the six taxonomic Kingdoms that occurred subsequent to the appearance of some ancestral protocell. In other words, those biologists believe that each step along the evolutionary pathway from protocell to any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms can be explained as being a complex function of mutations, changes in gene frequency, speciation, natural selection, time, and some form of genetic shuffling.

Conceptual differences among evolutionary biologists tend to revolve about the problem of trying to identify which of the many possible inferences is correct that can be made in relation to identifying the actual nature of the pathway(s) that links the first protocell with any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms. Consequently, the possibility that none of the inferences they might make will be capable of reflecting the truth concerning how the six taxonomic Kingdoms arose subsequent to the appearance of the first protocell because those life forms did not arise through an evolutionary process – at least as they understand the idea – is rejected as an anathema to them because it is antithetical to everything to which they are committed.

Yet, to date, no evolutionary biologist, singly or collectively, has been able to demonstrate – in specific, concrete, factual ways -- how the branching processes occurred that supposedly led from the initial, functional protocell to particular exemplars of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms. Those branching processes are described purely in terms of unproven inferences about how the dynamics of evolutionary theory allegedly link the first protocell with the emergence of subsequent exemplars of the six taxonomic Kingdoms.

Some evolutionary biologists not named Richard Dawkins might acknowledge the foregoing point but go on to counter with the idea that evolutionary theory is the best scientific account available for explaining how the branching processes that populate the tree of life are likely to have taken place. Such a position seems, at best, to be empty of any substantive meaning.

For example, one wonders what could possibly be meant by use of the term: “Best”. After all, the sorts of “scientific” explanations being alluded to by the notion of “best” in evolutionary theory are currently incapable of being able to be tied to a set of facts that can demonstrate the truth of the inferences made by biologists concerning the purported transitions from first, functional protocell to any particular instance of one of the six taxonomic Kingdoms, and, therefore, one wonders how anyone can adjudge something as being the best, available scientific account of how any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms arose from the first protocell when none of those accounts can demonstrate the truth of the inferential assertions being made concerning the alleged evolutionary origins of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms.

What makes a theory scientific is that one can show, by means of a process of science, how that theory can factually account for the inferences that arise out of that theory with respect to the nature of problem under consideration. At the present time, evolutionary theory can’t meet that challenge because it cannot provide a factual account to support its inference that the six taxonomic Kingdoms arose from an ancestral protocell by means of an evolutionary process, and, therefore, evolution is not a scientific theory when it comes to those issues.

Other biologists might counter with a defiant challenge. More specifically, if one does not wish to accept evolutionary theory as an account of how the first protocell or any subsequent instances of the six taxonomic Kingdoms arose, then what is the alternative?

The simple answer is that I don’t feel compelled to come up with an alternative to evolutionary theory. What I do know is that up until the present time, scientists – biological or otherwise -- have not been able to provide the sort of concrete facts that are capable of substantiating the evolutionary inferences that are being made concerning the origin of life, as well as in relation to the possible pathways that are inferred to exist between the first, functional protocell and the subsequent emergence of

particular life forms that represent the six taxonomic Kingdoms that are used to organize thinking about the differences among various life forms on Earth.

The fact of the matter is that irrespective of whether one is scientifically inclined or theologically inclined or one is inclined toward both possibilities we all possess a great deal of ignorance concerning the particulars of how life originated on Earth or how any of the life forms representing the six taxonomic Kingdoms came into existence. Evolutionary biologists can wag disapproving fingers in the direction of those who don't accept the theory of evolution and those who are theologically inclined can shake disapproving fingers at those who are committed to the theory of evolution, but both sides suffer from a severe dearth of the sort of facts that could substantiate their scientific or theological inferences concerning the origins of life on Earth or how subsequent forms of life came into being.

The remainder (i.e., beyond Chapter 1) of Professor Dawkins' book: *The Greatest Show On Earth* consists of a vast array of facts that he believes constitutes evidence capable of corroborating the factual nature of evolutionary theory. I have made hundreds of notes concerning what he has to say throughout that book, and, as a result, I easily could write a lengthy book concerning those sorts of issues, but let me sum up the central problem with his book in particular, and by extension, any work on evolutionary biology in general ... neither Professor Dawkins nor any of his fellow supporters (present or past) of evolutionary theory can present the sort of facts that are capable of corroborating the inferential claims or conclusions made within the parameters of evolutionary theory concerning the origins of life or the origins of the life forms that constitute exemplars of any of the six taxonomic Kingdoms.

Once the foregoing sorts of life forms arise, then, over time, they might be subject to the dynamics of population genetics, mutational events, some form of genetic shuffling, changes involving gene frequency, speciation, and natural selection. However, there are no facts that can confirm that the inferences made on the basis of the principles of evolutionary theory are capable of satisfactorily dealing with the problem of origins with respect to life, or even given such an ancestral life form, are capable of factually accounting for the subsequent emergence of any of the life forms that are entailed by the six taxonomic Kingdoms.

Chapter 2: The Origins of Faith

In 2009, Nicholas Wade released his book: *The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved & Why It Endures*. Wade is a science writer who in addition to having written half a dozen books also has worked for *The New York Times*, and, in addition, was, at one point, a deputy editor for the English science magazine *Nature*, as well as, at another juncture, he was a member of the news staff for the U.S. magazine *Science*.

In the aforementioned book, Wade explores what he considers to be both the weaknesses and strengths of religious activity. He especially wishes to account for why, despite whatever weaknesses it entails, religion continues to endure.

Before delving into various aspects of the perspective being outlined by Wade in his foregoing book, it might be instructive to take a look at some of the meanings to which religion supposedly gives etymological expression. Words are ways of linguistically and conceptually parsing the universe, and, therefore, it is important to understand the structural character of the logic that is inherent in different ways of engaging and parsing experience.

Various individuals claim that the etymology of religion rests with the Latin word re-li-gare. The central sense of the foregoing Latin word refers to a process of tying or binding.

The obvious questions are: What is being tied, and what is the nature of the tying process? The foregoing questions might be best engaged through another Latin word: “re-li-gi-o-nem” that conveys a sense of reverence for that which is considered sacred.

When combined together, the foregoing two etymological possibilities give expression to the idea of becoming bound or tied to that for which one has reverence or that which one considers to be sacred. At the heart of this condition of being tied or bound is a state of belief, understanding, commitment, knowledge, and/or faith concerning one’s relationship with that which is considered to be sacred or worthy of reverence.

Another possibility involves the term “religion” that comes from the Old French and refers to a process of devotion or piety, as well as refers to communities in which that devotion and piety plays a central role. Devotion and piety both give expression to a sense of being bound or tied

to that which is sacred or worthy of reverence, but, as well, piety alludes to a set of behaviors, some of which are moral in nature, that are intended to manifest conscientiousness concerning the presence of the realm of the sacred.

When discussing the meaning of religion, some individuals make reference to Cicero's use of the word "*re-le-gere*". This term refers to a process of going through a text or a textual reading more than once.

Perhaps, the idea of reading something again is intended to make reference to a process of taking care with, and critically reflecting on, the possible meanings inherent in a text. In other words, one goes through a reading again in order to make sure that one understands what is being said ... in order to try to be certain that one has arrived at the truth of a given text.

The foregoing sense of things might be relevant in contexts in which the texts being studied have to do with issues considered to be sacred in nature. One wants to bind oneself or tie oneself to the truths – assuming there are some -- that are being given expression through various sacred themes contained in a given text, and one does not want to become bound or tied to some distorted or false understanding concerning those matters.

There is a need to exercise care in how one reads a given text or parses a given experience. One engages the material again and again to work toward a correct understanding of what is being said.

The Oxford English Dictionary indicates there are some question marks surrounding the etymology of the word: "religion". Nonetheless, one should keep in mind that etymological factors have to do with how certain root ideas associated with this or that word were used in the past and, in the process, shaped the way in which language was used to parse experience.

Nonetheless, while etymology can help create a sense of some of the possible meanings that might be woven into the semantic and syntactic fabric of a word, the fact of the matter is that words tend to evolve over time. As this occurs, words become used in a variety of ways that often juxtapose, if not blend, older senses of a word with newer nuances, leading to different understandings and ways of describing experience.

Today, there are a growing number of people who are of the opinion that the general idea of “religion” has acquired what they consider to be a deserved aura of negative connotations ... if not problematic denotations. Those individuals seem to believe there is something inherently defective in the process of binding or tying oneself to a sense of the sacred in a manner that establishes parameters of piety and moral behavior for purposes of engaging the sacred in an appropriately reverential manner.

An obvious question that arises in conjunction with the foregoing considerations is what, if anything, is the relationship between “the sacred” and “the nature of reality”? Does that which is considered sacred necessarily give expression to some dimension of the real or is the notion of sacredness merely a human construction?

If there are dimensions of reality that are worthy of reverence and, thereby, give expression to the sacred, then identifying the actual nature of those dimensions becomes a very important process. If one reads or parses reality in the wrong way, then, one’s sense of the sacred will be skewed.

Consequently, one must be careful to distinguish between, on the one hand, what, if anything, reality actually requires of us, and, on the other hand, what, if anything, we are imposing on reality inappropriately. If there is a sacred dimension to reality, then binding or tying oneself to that dimension in a manner that distorts the nature of that sort of a reality, is likely, sooner or later, to lead to problems of one kind or another ... both for oneself as well as for others.

Perhaps Cicero was on to something when he mentioned the idea of going through the reading of a written text or reality (which is a text of another kind) more than once. Binding oneself to the sacred should be done in accordance with the nature of the sacredness to which reality actually gives expression – to the extent that it does this -- rather than in accordance with some human construction that is arbitrarily imposed on reality.

In many ways, the general idea of religion might carry a lot of negative connotations for so many people precisely because all too many individuals have done such a poor job of: Reading reality, understanding its dimensions of sacredness, and determining what, if anything, the idea of sacredness requires from us. In and of itself, the idea of binding oneself

to the sacred and developing a sense of reverence in that regard is not necessarily the problem.

After all, everyone binds himself or herself to a hermeneutical orientation or set of beliefs that they consider to be sacred and deserving of reverence, and, therefore, commitment. Consequently, the essential issue is: What, if anything, does one's sense of the sacred have to do with the actual nature of reality?

Nicholas Wade – the author of the aforementioned book: *The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved & Why It Endures* -- believes that religious behavior can be studied quite independently of the issue of whether, or not, God exists. Surely, however, unless one wishes to reduce religion down to just an arbitrary, philosophical exercise (and, of course, there are those who wish to proceed in precisely that fashion), then, removing the issue of God's existence from the realm of religion tends to ignore the possibility that religion constitutes a process of exploring experience for the purpose of establishing the truth concerning the nature of reality ... and if one is disinterested in whether, or not, God exists, then, one is blind to various possibilities concerning the nature of the relationship that might exist between religion and reality as well as whether, or not, religion is reality-based or delusional in nature

At its heart, religion gives expression to a search for the truth concerning one's relationship with Being. Sacredness has to do with one's sense of reverence concerning either the nature of Being or the nature of one's relationship with Being, or both.

By binding or tying oneself to a given sense of the sacred, one is attempting to commit oneself to understanding and engaging reality in a certain way. The question, then, becomes a matter of the quality of one's search for the truth, and whether, or not, one's search has correctly uncovered, in part or in whole, the presence of sacredness in reality and what that presence entails with respect to human behavior.

Wade defines religion as: "... a system of emotionally binding beliefs and practices in which a society implicitly negotiates through prayer and sacrifice with supernatural agents, securing from them commands that compel members, through fear of divine punishment, to subordinate their interests to the common good." The foregoing definition raises a number of questions.

For example, how and why does a given belief or practice become emotionally binding? Does one become emotionally committed to a belief or practice because it reflects some sort of truth concerning the nature of reality, or is the emotional commitment due to various needs within an individual that have little, or nothing, to do with the nature of reality independent of the individual, or is the aforementioned emotional commitment a matter of some kind of process of indoctrination or undue influence being imposed on a person and through which, over time, the object of the exercise (i.e., a child, teenager, or an adult) acquires the sense of sacredness that is being imparted through indoctrination and/or undue influence?

Is religion primarily a social or group activity? Or, is religion an individual pursuit that can be co-opted by various social influences?

Is religion really just a matter of negotiating with supernatural agents via prayer and sacrifice? Or, is religion a process of seeking the truth concerning the nature of reality and one's relationship with reality?

Is prayer a process of negotiating with the supernatural realm, or could prayer be a process of remembering, praising, and making contact with That which makes reality possible? Is prayer a means to an end or is it an end in itself?

If sacrifice is necessary, then what is the nature and purpose of that sacrifice? Isn't undergoing personal sacrifice for the sake of discovering the truth, one of the most important forms of religious sacrifice?

Should religion be about rewards and punishments? Isn't discovering some aspect of the truth its own reward, and isn't missing out on, or becoming closed to, the truth its own form of punishment?

How can one define the common good in terms other than those that have to do with establishing the truth of things? Why should one subordinate one's search for the truth to potentially arbitrary conceptions of what constitutes the common good?

Who gets to determine what the common good is? What justifies those determinations?

In the aforementioned book, Nicholas Wade indicates that religion has been described as a means for acquiring personal rewards, or a system for creating circles of trust, or a way of binding people together for purposes of collective action, as well as a framework of moral rules

through which to organize and regulate society. Irrespective of the uses to which some people or communities have put religion, if religion is considered independently of its capacity to seek the truth, then, don't all of the foregoing uses become suspect?

For example, what is the point of using religion to rally collective action if those actions are not rooted in the truth? If one divorces a process of rallying collective action from the truth, then, doesn't that process become little more than arbitrary exercises in propaganda, manipulation, and control?

What good is achieved by creating a system of moral rules that do not reflect the truth of things? Will circles of trust long survive in the absence of truth?

One can come up with any number of utilitarian and social uses for religion. However, if the dimension of religion that matters is its capacity to assist an individual or a group of individuals to seek the truth concerning the nature of reality, then what is the value of any usage of religion that ignores its role in seeking the truth concerning existence?

When one says that religion has a dark side, is it really religion that has the dark side, or are the human uses to which religion is put the dark side of things? Isn't the so-called dark side of religion really just an indication of how far people have pushed religion away from its role as a methodological means for searching for the truth of one's essential relationship with Being?

Wade claims that: "Biological drives for all functions essential to survival are embedded in the human brain; it need surely be no scandal to people of faith that an instinct for religious behavior is one of those necessities. That the mind has been prepared by evolution to believe in gods neither proves nor disproves their existence."

Wade does not demonstrate – nor does any evolutionary biologist provide the details for -- how those biological drives came into existence or how they became embedded in the brain. Wade is assuming that mind and brain are one and the same, but he puts forth no proof to demonstrate the alleged truth of his claim.

He assumes that religion is a product of evolution and that religion is merely one among many biological drives that have become embedded in the brain for purposes of enhancing survival, but he doesn't reveal the

precise nature of that sort of an evolutionary process? For instance, Wade doesn't account for how the evolutionary changes came about that supposedly prepared the human mind to believe in gods ... in other words, he doesn't account for the origins of intellect, consciousness, logic, language, imagination, emotion, insight, understanding, or how any of this led to the emergence of religion.

Wade argues that: "... an instinct for religious behavior is an evolved part of human nature. Because of the decided survival advantage conferred on people who practice religion, the behavior had become written into our neural circuits by at least 50,000 years ago, and probably much earlier."

Even if one agreed with Wade that the practice of religion gives expression to a survival advantage of some kind, this doesn't account for how those practices came into being in the first place. Moreover, I have more than a few questions about the precise nature of the "survival advantage" that is supposedly conferred by those sorts of practices.

One might conjecture that as many people died – if not more – practicing those behaviors as were able to survive while observing the principles and requirements of religion. So, what is the proof that those practices conferred a survival advantage?

Every group has an array of practices, so how does one show that any given set of practices – for example, religious ones -- provided a survival advantage for one group relative to the beliefs and practices of some other group. All belief systems offer emotionally binding elements that could lead to collective action of a concerted sort and provide ritualistic ways of trying to control the events of life, so how does one show that religion per se provided some sort of survival advantage rather than techniques for: Waging war, and/or securing food, and/or providing shelter, and/or dealing with power issues, and/or caring for the young, and/or organizing families and communities in one way rather than another?

According to Wade: "Like language religion is a complex cultural behavior built on top of a genetically shaped learning machine ... culture supplies the content of what is learned."

Wade does not adequately explain how the contents of what is learned came into being. Nor does he account for how the capacity to generate those contents originated.

Furthermore, while culture might provide a great deal of the content for many religious frameworks, religion does not necessarily give expression to only complex cultural behavior, nor does religion necessarily constitute behavior that is rooted in a “genetically shaped learning machine”. This is especially the case when religion is an individual activity that occurs in the midst of, and oftentimes in opposition to, cultural influences, and this is also the case if understanding is considered to be a function of processes that might be shaped by the genes that regulate brain activity but cannot necessarily be reduced to the activity of those genes.

No one has shown that phenomenology is a strict function of genetic or biological activity. No one has shown that this or that gene, working in conjunction with other genes, is causally responsible for the consciousness, language, reasoning, understanding, creativity, imagination, or morality that is given expression through human phenomenology.

While biology might help to frame and shape the process of learning, nonetheless, learning, insight, understanding, and so on might not be strict functions of biology or genetics. Indeed, until we understand the essential nature of consciousness, intelligence, reason, language, insight, intuition, imagination, and so on, it is entirely possible that there are extra-biological and extra-genetic dimensions underlying the process of learning and understanding.

Furthermore, individuals do not always necessarily submit to a given culture’s representation of religion. People ask questions in those contexts ... people critically reflect on what they are being told ... people often rebel against or disregard those cultural influences ... people who are not satisfied with the religious answers that are given by cultural leaders and institutions often go in search of truths beyond the parameters of what a given culture offers in the way of religious content.

Unfortunately, pursuing the truth does not always constitute a survival advantage. Power structures, institutions, educators, and cultural leaders often seek to resist, oppress, or eliminate those who go against the cultural flow, and, therefore, while institutional religion might offer a

survival advantage to those who submit to those institutions, survival, in and of itself, does not necessarily have anything to do with the truth or seeking the truth.

In his book, Wade claims that: “As with language, religion is most significant as a social behavior. One can speak or pray to oneself, but both are most meaningful when done in company.”

Praying to God or seeking God is not necessarily a social activity ... although both can be done in a social context. People can only pursue God, reality, and truth through their own phenomenological experiences, and while social influences can modulate that phenomenology, it is the individual’s experience and understanding of that experience that is the medium through which reality or Divinity is engaged.

Prayer and seeking God are most meaningful when done in conjunction with discovering the truth about the nature of reality. This is the case irrespective of whether it is done individually and/or socially.

While developing his theoretical perspective concerning the similarities between the development of language and the development of religion, Wade states: “It is easy enough to see why natural selection would have favored genes underlying the faculty of language, given the immense advantage to members of a social species of being able to share those thoughts and information.” In this regard, Wade notes that: “... the first genes affecting language have started to come to light, beginning with the discovery in 2001 of the FOXP2 gene which affects several neural and muscular skills underlying the articulation of speech.”

Whatever the role of the FOXP2 gene might be with respect to making language possible, none of this explains how that kind of a gene came into being in the first place. It is not enough to say that a given gene confers this or that sort of survival advantage ... one must be able to explain how those genes came to be, and if one can’t do this, then the absence of that data constitutes an important source of lacunae in the theoretical fabric being spun by people like Wade.

Being able to understand what value something might have once it has arisen says absolutely nothing at all about how that something came into being in the first place. Explaining (possibly) something after the fact is not nearly as impressive as being able to explain the origins of that

same something before the fact of hypothesizing about whatever value or advantage that sort of a development supposedly has.

Wade continues along the foregoing lines and asks: “Why should religious behavior have evolved? What benefit does religion confer, other than spiritual fulfillment? How can religious behavior make a difference on the only scale measured by natural selection, that of leaving more progeny?”

Once again, Wade is asking the wrong questions. As is the case with language, the foregoing author needs to ask how the capacity for religion arose in the first place? How did the capacity to search for meaningfulness, purpose, identity, and truth come into being?

Moreover, contrary to Wade’s foregoing remark, people do not always find spiritual fulfillment through religion. There are many obstacles standing in the way of fulfillment, and, as a result, people need to develop character traits of: Patience, perseverance, courage, humility, and so on to endure the dark night of the soul that tends to prevail prior to the point – if it occurs at all -- when spiritual realization and fulfillment come into the picture.

Furthermore, irrespective of whatever social or evolutionary benefit Wade believes might be conferred by religious behavior, the purpose of religious activity need not be about conferring either social or evolutionary benefit. Leaving more progeny is not necessarily the measuring scale that should be used to assess the value of religion.

The foregoing sort of measure is skewed by the assumptions underlying evolutionary theory. Such a measure presupposes that social benefit and evolutionary advantage are the only things that matter in conjunction with the issue of religious activity.

If religion is an individual search for the truth concerning the nature of sacredness, then measures involving social benefit and evolutionary advantage are secondary to, if not irrelevant for, that kind of a search. If religion involves an array of problems that face an individual when she or he attempts to bind himself or herself to such a search, then whether, or not, an individual succeeds or fails with respect to solving those problems might, or might not, carry any sort of social benefit or evolutionary advantage.

In his book, Wade argues that: “The practice of religion is heavily social” ... that its “religious services and rituals are communal. A religion belongs to a community and shapes members social behavior, both toward one another (the in-group) and toward non-believers (the out-group).”

If a religion does not permit individuals to find the truth concerning the nature of reality as well as to discover the nature of one’s relationship with reality, then, whatever sense of community religion provides and whatever evolutionary value it might confer, those accomplishments constitute little more than pyrrhic victories. The victories are pyrrhic because truth has been sacrificed on the altar of social cohesion.

If one leaves progeny who have lost the desire for seeking truth and merely wish to perpetuate themselves and their cultural institutions, then, however, long-lived that society might be, the soul of life – that is, the search for truth – has been lost and, consequently, the value of survival in and of itself becomes questionable ... there are more ways to assess life than through the limited scales of evolutionary and sociological theory.

Wade maintains that: “Practical morality is not universal. Compassion and forgiveness are the behaviors owed to one’s in-group, but not necessarily to an out-group and certainly not to an enemy.”

What is the nature of the proof that supposedly demonstrates how the only group that is owed being treated with compassion and forgiveness is the in-group? Perhaps, there is no in-group or out-group when it comes to morality ... perhaps all human beings are owed an array of cares of duty and evolutionary advantage be damned.

Any morality that is divorced from the truth is not practical. Sooner or later, that sort of a morality will always lead one away from adequately resolving social problems.

Furthermore, where does the capacity for morality come from? What makes it possible? Shouldn’t one understand the origins of the capacity for morality before one begins to say what it can and can’t be?

Wade’s distinction between practical and universal morality seems quite arbitrary. It is a distinction that appears to be largely driven by the requirements of evolutionary theory rather than being a function of

evidential considerations that have been derived independently of those theoretical requirements.

Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of sociology, argues in his book: *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that: “The faithful are not mistaken when they believe in the existence of a moral power to which they are subject and from which they receive what is best in themselves. That power exists, and it is society.”

Durkheim ignores – or discounts -- the possibility that the moral power in which at least some of the faithful believe might transcend society. He seems to overlook the possibility that some sort of moral power could be given expression through reality quite independently of society.

Moreover, Durkheim is being fairly arbitrary when he claims that the best of what can be received comes from society. Society did not generate consciousness, language, intelligence, reason, creativity, talent, or the capacity for morality. Rather, society is made possible because its survival is predicated on, among other things, the existence of the foregoing sorts of capabilities.

Society might have a role to play as a catalytic agent that helps consciousness, language, intelligence, reason, creativity, talent, and the capacity for morality to develop, but the best that we receive through those activities comes from the source of those capabilities. That source is not society but, rather, a function of the nature of reality that transcends society and existed before societies came into being.

Durkheim defines religion in the following way: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church all those who adhere to them.”

Again, what is the origin of the foregoing beliefs and practices? Are they man-made or are they extra-human in origin?

What is the nature of the origins of one’s sense of sacredness? Is it merely a function of indoctrination and the social construction of reality, or is it a function of a resonance of some kind between something within human beings and the nature of reality? And, if the latter is the case, then what is the structural character of that resonance?

Should one agree with Durkheim that the sacred is something that is set apart and forbidden by a set of social beliefs and practices or is the sacred a reflection of something fundamental concerning the nature of reality independent of those beliefs and practices? Isn't sacredness something to which all of existence gives expression to varying degrees? Aren't the capabilities inherent in human beings all relevant to the issue of sacredness and whether the nature of that sacredness will be shown to be inherent in reality or merely a delusional imposition?

Is Durkheim right when he claims that beliefs and practices become fully united into a single moral community called a Church (or Temple, Synagogue, Circle, Mosque, Meeting Hall, etc.)? Or, will there always be expressions of disagreement, discord, disharmony, and difference that are sprinkled throughout society. If the latter is not the case, then, how does one account for the rise of differences over the course of history with respect to any given community?

Is religion only a powerful way of inducing individuals to sacrifice their sense of self-interest to the interests of the group? Are the interests of the group necessarily different from those of the individual?

Isn't it possible that what is in the best interests of the individual is also in the best interests of the community or society, and vice versa? What determines what is in the best interests of the individual or society?

Wade says that: "Religious knowledge is not like knowing the day of the week ... it is something a person feels and is deeply committed to."

While a person can have knowledge of his or her own religious phenomenology, that knowledge does not necessarily give expression to the truth concerning the nature of reality. The fact that someone is deeply committed to something he or she feels does not necessarily give expression to any truth other than that it is the way the person feels or gives expression to an individual's sense of commitment.

The knowledge to which the mystics allude transcends the foregoing sorts of feelings and commitments. Although one might become committed to those transcendent truths and believe one feels them deeply, the presence of commitment and deep feelings, in and of themselves, does not guarantee that one is committed to the truth or that one actually feels the presence of truth ... there is a difference between

having knowledge concerning some aspect of reality and having a deeply felt commitment with respect to this or that opinion.

In his book, Wade claims that: “Morality is older than religion – its roots can be seen in monkeys and apes – and religious behavior was grafted on top of it in the human lineage alone.”

What Wade doesn’t explain is how the capacity for rudimentary morality originated in monkeys or in other species of life ... nor does he account for how the capacity for religion became grafted on top of those moral capabilities. Much of what is said in Nicholas Wade’s book: *The Faith Instinct*, is based on assumptions that are far from being either credible or plausible, and, then, he puts forth explanations that are a function of various kinds of conceptual retrofits involving those assumptions.

Human beings supposedly emerged out of Africa some 50,000 years ago. They were mostly hunter-gatherers.

It wasn’t until about 15,000 years ago that permanent settlements came into being. Moreover, supposedly by this time, religion had become an important dimension of lived life.

By analyzing DNA of living people, Wade believes that one can separate those groups that have been relatively isolated from groups that display a shared genetic pool. Wade assumes that those isolated groups might provide insights into the nature of the religious practices of ancestral populations.

I think the foregoing method is of questionable value. That approach assumes that the value, understanding, purpose, intention, meaning, and so on associated with religious practices have remained the same across time. He is ignoring the possibility that those practices might have become corrupted over time such that although some kind of a religious form remains, the essence originally at the heart of that form might have long since disappeared, and, in the process, the intensions and understandings that led to those practices have become lost in the mists of time, leaving individuals like Nicholas Wade to arbitrarily speculate about what actually went on among ancient peoples.

Even if one could find x-number of “primitive” groups today, this proves nothing about the actual origins of religion tens of thousands years ago and proves nothing about whether, or not, “modern” groups

represent an accurate picture of group-life tens of thousands of years ago, or whether those modern groups constitute a devolution of belief systems that began with people seeking the truth about their relationship with Being and over time the original purpose was corrupted into a system of rules, practices, beliefs, and values that took on more of a role that was rooted in wielding social power for purposes of control and, in the process, left the search for truth far behind.

The search for truth is a long and difficult process, and, therefore, perhaps some people in the distant past became frustrated and impatient with the demands of that sort of a search and, as a result, began to fashion religion into being something with social, institutional and ritualistic dimensions that were quite independent of considerations concerning the nature of reality. Those activities gave expression to theologies – that is, theories about religion – rather than the activities associated with the search for the sacred dimensions of reality ... perhaps those activities became ensconced in belief systems that were focused on social control and uses of power associated with social and/or institutional control rather than being a methodology for seeking the truth.

According to the aforementioned book: *The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved and Why It Endures* by Nicholas Wade, many biologists, over the last 4-5 decades, have been putting together an understanding concerning the origins of morality that has nothing to do with rooting that capacity in either the exercise of reason or in religious teachings/revelation. Instead, those biologists believe a great deal of moral behavior is a function of genetic circuits that have been wired into the brain, and, thus, to use a term introduced by Edward O. Wilson, those scientists are seeking to “biologize” morality and ethics.

For example, one of the proponents for a biological account of the foregoing, perspective concerning morality is the psychologist Jonathan Haidt. On the basis of research programs conducted by him and others, Professor Haidt has proposed that there might be two pathways in human beings that led to the formation of a moral judgment.

One of those paths displayed properties that were: “Intuitive”, occurred relatively quickly, and took place unconsciously. The other pathway was said to be slower, manifested itself within conscious

awareness, and arose after-the-fact in the sense that it sought to rationalize whatever decision had been made intuitively or unconsciously through the first pathway to moral decision-making and behavior that was described at the outset of this paragraph.

Professor Haidt claimed that the aforementioned intuitive, unconscious generation of moral behavior consisted of two components. One was genetic in nature, while the other dimension had to do with the manner in which moral learning is shaped by cultural forces.

More specifically, the genetic dimension of moral behavior was described as consisting of specialized, cognitive neural modules. Those modules either predispose or enable human beings to exhibit qualities like: Compassion, love, empathy, and so on, while other facets of those neural modules appeared to render human beings receptive to learning certain kinds of moral teachings to which they are exposed when young – perhaps during some sort of an extended critical period.

Donald Brown, an anthropologist, uses the term “Universal People” to refer to individuals who exhibit a set of moral principles that show up in virtually every culture and society. These principles include: reciprocity (e.g., do unto others as you would have others do unto you); avoiding harm to others; caring for the weak and helpless, as well as being opposed to actions such as: Stealing, dishonesty, adultery, killing, and cheating.

Notwithstanding the fact there are exceptions to the foregoing set of principles that occur both within certain individuals and various social groups, nevertheless, many scientists are convinced that the relative omnipresence of those principles across human history and social arrangements constitutes important clues concerning the origins of moral behavior. More specifically, they believe there must be some sort of genetic component that makes those sorts of moral ideas, principles, decision-making, and behavior relatively universal in character.

Frans de Waal, a primatologist who has studied captive monkeys and apes over a number of years, discovered (both through observation and experimentation) that not only do different kinds of monkeys and apes have species-specific methods for dealing with social tensions and hostilities, but they also often exhibit qualities of empathy when encountering fellow monkeys or apes who are in pain or difficulty. In addition, the monkeys and apes that de Waal observed often

demonstrated a capacity for reciprocity, as well as seemed to possess some degree of understanding concerning conditions of fairness that had to do with being treated differently under similar sorts of circumstances.

De Waal felt that the foregoing kinds of capacities were genetic in origin. He also believed that those properties constituted some of the precursor, building blocks out of which human morality subsequently emerged.

All of the foregoing ideas seem to make a lot of sense ... at least on the surface. However, when one begins to critically reflect on them, a lot of questions begin to arise.

For example, how did the cognitive, neural modules underlying moral behavior get constructed by means of evolutionary processes? How – specifically -- did: Time, changes in gene frequency, mutation, recombination, conjugation, genetic shuffling, speciation, and natural selection interact in a way that was able to put together a set of neural circuits that had the capacity to make moral decisions based on compassion and empathy or had the capacity to learn various moral lessons to which they were exposed in a given culture?

No current biologist has a viable way of accounting for how any of the foregoing events took place through a process of evolution. Because there is absolutely no evidence to demonstrate that the foregoing sorts of capabilities have an evolutionary origin, those cognitive modules can only be assumed to have arisen, in some unknown fashion, by means of evolutionary processes.

Neurobiologists have a sort of backup position concerning the nature of the foregoing sorts of cognitive modules. For instance, even if one puts considerations of evolution aside for the moment, nevertheless, a great deal of evidence can be put forth indicating that those neural modules appear to be fully biological in nature.

After all, considerable data exists – both with respect to an array of animals, as well as in relation to human beings – that if -- accidentally or intentionally -- the brains of animals or human beings suffer physical trauma, then, various kinds of functionality is loss. For instance, there is a portion of the prefrontal cortex located near the nose that is referred to as the ventromedial area, and when that region of the brain is damaged in some way, then, human beings have been observed to display various

kinds of deficits with respect to moral behavior and decision making that were not present prior to the occurrence of that kind of neural damage.

However, no one has yet been able to account for how the neuronal circuitry in the ventromedial area generates moral behavior or makes processes of moral decision-making possible. To date, the relationship between the ventromedial area of the prefrontal cortex and moral behavior is merely correlational in nature and not necessarily causal in character.

Consequently, by way of summation, evolutionary biologists do not have a way to demonstrate that the neural circuitry located in the ventromedial area came about through an evolutionary process. Moreover, neurobiologists have not been able to demonstrate how those neural circuitry produces moral behavior or gives expression to processes of moral decision-making.

Given the foregoing difficulties, some individuals are inclined to proceed by saying that if the ventromedial area is not directly responsible for the generation of moral behavior or moral decision-making, than what is? This is a legitimate question, but the absence of a viable answer with respect to that question does not, thereby, as if by default, automatically mean that some kind of biological account must be the only possible way to engage that sort of a question.

Similarly, someone might also wish to raise the question that if evolution does not account for the origins of the neural circuitry in the ventromedial area, then what does account for the existence of that circuitry. Again, our current ignorance concerning how to resolve the foregoing sort of problem in a viable fashion does not justify making evolution the default account or “explanation” for the presence of that circuitry.

Ignorance is ignorance. Ignorance not only means that we do not understand those phenomena, but, as well, ignorance does not entitle anyone to claim that the “best” answers concerning those issues must necessarily be either evolutionary or neurobiological in nature.

Of course, the foregoing possibilities constitute potential candidates with respect to attempting to account for the nature of reality. However, until we actually discover – if we do – how (in specific terms) the ventromedial area of the prefrontal cortex came into being or how that

area generates moral behavior or processes of moral decision making -- if this is, in fact, what takes place -- then the theory of evolution and various biochemical and physiological accounts of neurobiology fall far short of what is needed to provide tenable ways of resolving our ignorance concerning those matters.

At some point prior to 15,000 years ago, Nicholas Wade believes there was a major shift in how human beings began to think about life. This consisted in a transition that led human beings from: Aggregates of human beings operating in accordance with primitive, hierarchical principles that revolved about an alpha male, to: Hunter-gatherer communities that were characterized by considerable egalitarianism. According to Wade, somewhere during this period of transition is when religious behavior is likely to have emerged and, as a result, human beings began to expand upon, as well as take advantage of, moral precepts that already had – allegedly -- been genetically wired into human beings.

Religious behavior, along with the underlying conceptual perspective in which that behavior was rooted, were hypothesized – at least by some - - to be the way through which human beings came to constrain their own interests and were willing to place the welfare of the group above their own narrow sense of self-interests. In other words, religion became the means through which human beings became emotionally committed to the larger social group and, thereby, achieved the cohesiveness that was needed for society to survive in the absence of the more primitive alpha male-based hierarchical way of doing things.

Supposedly, when the members of a given society believed there was some sort of supernatural entity that could peer into their minds and hearts, then those people tended to be more willing to adhere to social rules. Moreover, when members of a society believed that supernatural retribution of some kind would occur if they were to deviate from the moral principles governing behavior in that society, then, they were more likely to have reverence for their social arrangements and treat them as sacred duties.

According to the foregoing perspective, rituals (e.g., formal prayer), dance, music, and song all arose in conjunction with religious beliefs in order to establish a sense of deep commitment and cohesiveness among the members of a given group. Moreover, those rituals and rhythmic activities were said to be ways through which members could gain access

to the realm of the supernatural by means of, for example, trance states that were associated with the foregoing sorts of practices, and those trance states were considered to constitute a seizure of the individual by the realm of the supernatural during which communication and learning could occur between the individual and the higher realm.

There are a number of mysteries that tend to hover about the foregoing account concerning the origin of religion. For example, from where did all the conceptual, rhythmical, linguistic, emotional, and musical capabilities come that would make that sort of a religious orientation possible?

Wade indicates there was a tripling in brain size that occurred in the evolutionary lineage that led to human beings after it separated from chimpanzees some 5-6 million years ago. The implication appears to be that such a tripling in brain size made possible all of the aforementioned cognitive capabilities that were associated with the emergence of religion.

Unfortunately, no one – least of all Nicholas Wade -- has explained how an increase in brain size generates enhanced capacities for: Intelligence, reason, belief systems, language, musical ability, emotional complexity, trance states, and a readiness to make the transition from an alpha-male-based hierarchical society to an egalitarian social arrangement. Furthermore, nothing that Wade states in his book *The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved & Why It Endures* indicates why religion should be considered to have arisen primarily as a way of engendering social cohesion rather than, possibly, giving expression to an effort on the part of individuals to use capabilities involving intellect, language, emotional complexity, musical ability, and trance states to assist one's search for the truth concerning the nature of Being and one's relationship with Being.

Conceivably, social cohesion was a function of the manner in which members of society sought to assist one another in the foregoing sort of search for truth as opposed to constituting a mere, blind adherence to a given social arrangement predicated on survival. There is a potentially huge difference between operating in accordance with the idea that the truth might be more accessible through an egalitarian, group effort than operating in accordance with the idea that one should submit to the group's way of doing things because the group is more important than the individual, and that huge difference revolves around the understanding

that having an opportunity to search for the truth might be as important – and, sometimes perhaps, more important – than either individual or group survival.

Treating physical survival as purely an end is one thing. Considering survival as a means to some other end – such as providing an opportunity to seek, realize, and apply the truth concerning the nature of Being and one’s relationship with Being -- might be quite another matter.

Seeking, realizing, and applying the truth is of value to both the individual and the larger social group of which that individual is a part. If nothing else, seeking, realizing, and applying the truth carries implications for enhancing the prospects of survival with respect to both the individual and the group.

Being willing to sacrifice oneself might be more palatable or acceptable to an individual if he or she believed that such a sacrifice served the interests of truth (something in which an individual has a stake quite apart from the collective) rather than just serving the interests of the group with respect to survival. Similarly, altruism might have more to do with how an individual believes she or he is connected with certain ‘truths’ concerning the nature of reality rather than just being a reflection of an individual’s willingness to subordinate his or her interests to the desire of the group to go on surviving.

Furthermore, one’s sense of reverence and the sacred might have more to do with one’s feelings, beliefs, and commitments concerning the nature of the truth than that sense of reverence and the sacred has to do with the existence and survival of the group per se. Certainly, very different motivational systems would appear to be at work with respect to each of the foregoing senses of what is considered to be sacred and toward which one should have reverence.

In addition, observing rituals, dancing, and singing need not be considered merely as techniques for enhancing group cohesion. For example, dancing, singing, and performing various rituals could be efforts by individuals – done in a social context -- to show reverence for the reality of existence and, in the process, enhance group cohesiveness as a shared form of worshipping whatever truths were grasped by individuals and the group as a whole.

As far as the idea of trance states are concerned, one has several possibilities from which to choose. For instance, do trance states constitute a way of interacting with Being through which individuals are provided with various kinds of insights that accurately communicate certain modalities of understanding concerning the nature of different dimensions of reality, or are trance states merely some form of individual or group hysteria that leads to delusional modes of thinking concerning the nature of reality.

Of course, the matter might not a matter of either/or. Perhaps, on occasion, trance states might have put some individuals in contact with different dimensions of the truth concerning the nature of reality that might not be readily accessible outside of the trance condition, while, on other occasions, there are some individuals who might have experienced a trance state that does not necessarily put the individual in touch with any sort of truth at all.

Furthermore, irrespective of whether one considers the phenomenon of a trance to be either a fabricated, delusional experiences or one considers those states to give expression to a form of epistemological contact with some dimension of Being, the issue of a trance serves as a potential source of disruption for the established way of doing things and, consequently, for social cohesion. In addition, each and every person within a community is faced with the problem of trying to decide what significance should be assigned to any given instance of trance. In other words, each person is faced with the problem of whether, or not, to accept any given instance of trance as an authentic experience that, in some manner, constitute a means of making contact with Being in a non-ordinary way and, therefore, should be reflected upon carefully, or should one discount those experiences ... if not try to constrain the impact they might have on the individual or community.

We don't know what was going in the minds and hearts of human beings thousands of years ago. There could have been many ideas, intentions, reasons, understandings, purposes, and motivations that influenced why individuals: Danced; sang; observed various rituals; entered trances; treated certain things as sacred; were willing to entertain more egalitarian social arrangements with one another, or were willing to subjugate their own self-interests to the interests of the group or to the perceived requirements of reality.

Earlier in this chapter I briefly outlined an idea of Professor Jonathan Haidt that proposed the possibility that there were two cognitive pathways in human beings that were connected to moral decision-making and moral behavior. One of those pathways was described as being intuitive, unconscious, and taking place quite quickly, while the other pathway was slower, occurred within the conscious mind, and arose as a means of trying to rationalize the first, intuitive, unconscious sort of moral pathway.

Professor Haidt considered the first pathway to be genetically given and, therefore, the product of some sort of evolutionary history. However, as pointed out earlier, no one has been able to provide a viable account with respect to that history, and, moreover, no one has come up with a viable, causal account for how the brain actually generates those sorts of moral decision-making processes and ensuing behavior.

People agree that human beings currently possess – and have possessed for quite some time -- capacities for: Awareness, intelligence, reason, understanding, insight, complex emotions, language, music, memory, learning, creativity, morality, reverence, and various kinds of talent (e.g., artistic). However, people tend to disagree about how those capacities came into being.

If one puts aside the issue of origins for the time being, there is no evidence to indicate that various human beings long ago didn't seek to employ the foregoing sorts of capacities in a search for the truth concerning the nature of reality and one's relationship with reality just as many modern humans attempt to do. Furthermore, ancient and modern human beings also share similar kinds of experiences when it comes to the fact that sometimes the foregoing efforts led to fruitful results and sometimes they did not ... in other words, sometimes the end results of those efforts were delusional in character and on other occasions those efforts generated useful, valuable results.

Somehow, across both thousands of years of history as well as across divergent social circumstances, -- and despite certain deviations from the following norms – human beings have consistently exhibited capacities that provide them with a fundamental, inherent inclination that, among other things, considers: Stealing, killing, lying, and cheating to be wrong, while, simultaneously, being inclined, among other things, to treat: Reciprocity, honesty, sharing, fairness, and caring for others as being

right. What if – irrespective of how such a sense of things arose within human beings – Jonathan Haidt was correct (at least in principle, although not necessarily in detail) when he postulated that there are two moral pathways operating in human beings ... one that is conscious and one that seem to be unconscious (but only in the sense that what we normally refer to as the conscious mind doesn't seem to have ready access to the latter's contents and activities and not because the so-called unconscious mind does not exhibit all manner of intelligence, awareness, and the like)?

Without understanding how any of the foregoing is possible, human beings acknowledge that in a broad set of circumstances we appear to have a capacity for differentiating between what is right and wrong when it comes to dealing with various aspects of lived existence. In addition, human beings tend to acknowledge that the conscious mind has a capacity to critically reflect on the moral contents that emerge from the unconscious mind and that the activity of reflexive consciousness with respect to unconscious moral intuitions either constructively works with the nature of those intuitive offerings or problematically interferes with them.

For example, Jonathan Haidt indicates that one of the activities of the conscious mind is to enter into attempts to rationalize why, in any given situation, our unconscious intuitions have the form and content they do. If those conscious, after-the-fact attempts to explain things are rooted in delusional forms of rationalization, then, a person is likely to develop a distorted sense of the actual character of so-called unconscious moral intuitions, and such a skewed sense of morality might, in time, actually interfere with the capacity of the unconscious mind to provide conscious awareness with moral intuitions that constructively engage on-going circumstances, and, in the process, we tend to distance ourselves, or alienate ourselves, from what is essential to being human.

Several other, but similar, ways to think about the foregoing possibility concerning the presence of two moral pathways within human beings could be construed in terms of either 'truth' versus 'falsehood' or 'good' versus 'evil'. For example, if one were to consider the unconscious, intuitions concerning moral decision-making and behavior that appear to be present in human beings (both ancient and modern) as giving expression, in some sense, to 'truth' and/or 'goodness' with respect to the issue of how to engage reality in a constructive fashion, then, perhaps

our conscious attempts to interfere, corrupt, distort, or undermine those sorts of moral intuitions through means that involve various kinds of conscious beliefs, theories, ideas, rationalizations, vested interests, or commitments could be considered to be 'false' and/or 'evil' because they tend to stand in opposition to what is morally constructive.

The foregoing possibilities are fraught with all manner of potential difficulties – many of which will be explored during the remainder of the present volume. These issues are not necessarily straightforward or clear-cut.

However, the manner in which one addresses those issues is likely to go a long way toward shaping how one thinks about: The idea of religion; what religion signifies; how religion arose, as well as how and why religion might have changed over time. Similarly, the way in which one engages the foregoing sorts of issues is likely to have a sizable impact on how one understands the ideas of reverence and sacredness, as well as how one thinks about the role (s) one considers ritual, dance, song, and trance to have in the context of religion.

Moreover, the intentions through which, and purposes with which, one pursues religion will be affected by whether one considers religion to be: (1) A means of enhancing group survival; (2) a way to bring about social cohesion; (3) a method for controlling members of a given community and inducing them to serve the interests of leaders; (4) a technique for getting the things in life that one would like (e.g., the defeat of one's enemies, a nice house, happiness, success, fame, the spouse of one's dreams, riches, power, health, and so on), or (5) a framework through which to seek, realize, and apply the truth quite independently of the capacity of that religious activity to enhance group survival, control people, promote group social cohesion, and/or secure the worldly things one might like to possess.



Chapter 3: Dangerous Spells

Fairly early in his book: *Breaking the Spell: Religion As A Natural Phenomenon*, Daniel Dennett provides what he contends is a tentative definition of religion. More specifically, he states that religions are: "... social systems whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents whose approval is to be sought." (Page 9)

Professor Dennett refers to religions in plural terms because he feels that the possible social systems that are associated with the word are often quite diverse and entail an array of phenomena that have a family relationship, of sorts, with one another even as they differ from each other in various ways. However, he might be wrong not only about the aspect of his definition that requires a religion to be some sort of "social system", but, in addition, Professor Dennett might be incorrect when it comes to the issue of whether religion is a singular or plural phenomenon.

For example, perhaps religion is primarily an individual pursuit that sometimes occurs in a social context rather than primarily giving expression to forms of social life that seek to organize the activities of their adherents in various structured ways. Moreover, perhaps Professor Dennett is wrong when he claims there are many religions ... as opposed to the possibility that religion constitutes a singular form of activity that might manifest itself in different ways under different circumstances in an attempt to realize the essential nature of religious activity.

In addition, during the foregoing, tentative definition, Professor Dennett indicates that religion requires individuals to profess a belief in a supernatural agent or agents. This poses something of a problem since the nature of the natural has not been established, and, therefore, one doesn't have a reliable reference point through which to establish some manner of demarcation that separates the natural from the supernatural.

Let us assume, at least in the present context, that God exists. If God exists, then what requires that Being to be supernatural in nature? Why must one suppose that existence needs to be divided up into a natural and supernatural realm?

For instance, if everything that exists or takes place does so due to the Presence of Divinity, then, in what sense is manifestation necessarily a natural phenomenon while the Presence of Divinity is something supernatural? What is the connection between the two?

One need not feel forced to posit some form of pantheism (i.e., all that exists and happens is Divinity) in order to be able to argue that while Divinity, in some unknown fashion, makes manifestation possible, and, therefore, manifestation is dependent on the Presence of Divinity, nonetheless, manifestation is, in some sense, something less than Divinity and, yet, one can refer to the simultaneous relationship of manifestation and the Presence of Divinity and, consequently, there is no line of demarcation – other than a phenomenological one -- between the natural and the supernatural ... that is, on the one hand, there is manifestation, while, on the other hand, there is that which is not manifest but which makes manifestation possible.

God need not be removed from the realm of the natural. In fact, everything natural (that is, of a manifested nature) is made possible, in some unknown fashion, through the Presence of God, and that Presence does not make its Presence felt except through the modality of manifestation.

Consequently, there is no division between the natural and the supernatural. There is only the distinction between the manifest and the non-manifest, but both given expression to what constitutes the realm of the natural ... in other words the natural is that which exists in one way (e.g., the manifest) or another (e.g., that which is not manifest but Present).

The final facet of Professor Dennett's tentative definition of religion concerns his idea that adherents are seeking the approval of a supernatural agent or agents. This need not be the case.

The manner in which manifestation operates gives expression to the natural laws of existence. The potential inherent in that manifestation also constitutes the natural law of existence.

One of the tasks or challenges with which human beings are confronted involves trying to discover the character of whatever natural laws exist as well as the potential of those laws. This is especially so with respect to trying to determine the nature of the truth that governs the way in which those laws can impact on human existence.

When one seeks to trace out the nature of the laws governing gravitational phenomena, one does not do so in order to seek the approval of gravity. Instead, one does so in order to come to an

understanding concerning the nature of the dynamics of those laws in order to be able to engage those laws in a constructive and effective fashion.

The purpose of religion need not be a matter of seeking the approval of a supernatural agent. Rather, religion could be considered to be a search for the truth concerning the natural laws that govern human existence, and, in addition, that sort of religious perspective might entail the idea that truths concerning the natural laws of reality are to be treated as sacred ... that those truths give expression to a perspective for which one would have reverence and, therefore, a framework to which one could become committed.

If one seeks, realizes, and applies those natural laws, then one will be doing all that one can with respect to trying to understand the nature of one's relationship with the realm of Being. If one fails to seek, realize, and apply those laws, then, one will have to accept whatever consequences come from ignoring those sorts of natural laws, just as one accepts that various consequences arise when one fails to take into account the laws of gravity in various situations.

Professor Dennett appears to be saying something similar to the foregoing when he talks about treating religion as a natural phenomenon by placing it in opposition to the supernatural and, thereby, treating human phenomena as: "...composed of events, organisms, objects, structures, patterns, and the like that all obey the laws of physics or biology, and hence do not involve miracles." (Page 25) However, Professor Dennett is framing religion in a skewed manner by saying things in the way he does because he is insisting that all natural laws must be a function of the laws of physics and biology and, yet, he cannot demonstrate that all modalities of manifestation are capable of being adequately and completely explained in terms of those two kinds of laws.

That which is presently inexplicable does not necessarily have to be a function of some dimension of the supernatural and miraculous erupting into the realm of the natural. That which is currently inexplicable marks the presence of unknown realities concerning the way in which natural laws manifest themselves in various circumstances.

If the real manifests itself in ways for which the current laws of physics and biology provide no viable account, then one is left with several possibilities. One possibility, of course, is that those

manifestations of reality are, indeed, a function of physical and biological law, but we have not, yet, discovered the precise character of the physical and biological principles that govern those phenomena, while another way to account for the inability of physical and biological laws to viably account for certain manifestations of reality is because those phenomena are not a function of physical and biological dynamics but operate according to some other set of natural laws.

Let's consider a particular set of cases. Is the inability of physics and biology to put forth a viable account concerning: The origins of the genetic code, or the origins of life, or the origins of specific instances of any the six taxonomic Kingdoms, and so on, due to fact that there are actual, existing principles of physics and biology governing the origins of those phenomena but we haven't, yet, discovered the nature of those principles, or is the current inability to explain those phenomena in terms of the principles of physics and chemistry due to the fact that some other set of natural laws – beyond physics and biology -- is responsible for the origins of those phenomena?

Or, let's consider some other possibilities. For instance, is the reason why there is no current, viable account concerning the origins of: Intelligence, reason, language, talent, and creativity (as a function of principles of physics and biology) because we haven't, yet, uncovered the precise character of those laws even though they exist, or is the aforementioned inability due to the fact that those phenomena are a function of various natural laws that are not a function of principles involving – at least directly -- physics and biology?

The natural encompasses the way in which reality operates. There is nothing that we know of that requires reality to operate only as a function of principles that are limited to physics and biology ... even though this might be the hope of individuals like Professor Dennett.

Professor Dennett cites David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* and in the process quotes the opening sentence from that book during which Hume raises two questions. One of those queries concerns the extent to which religion has "its foundation in reason," and the second issue involves whether, or not, the origin of religion can be found in human nature.

What requires religion to have its foundation in reason? Nothing, actually, and by saying this, one does not necessarily relegate religion to the realm of the irrational.

Suppose someone is given a certain kind of understanding concerning a dimension of reality by means of: Dreams, trances states, religious experiences, revelations, or the like. Let us suppose that the nature of those understandings cannot be reached through the exercise of reason.

Is that sort of an understanding necessarily irrational? Or could one refer to that kind of an understanding as constituting something that is transrational in nature – that is, an understanding that is beyond the capacity of reason to generate?

Are ideas and insights generated by means of reason? Or, do the understandings associated with those ideas and insights give expression to something that comes as a whole – that is, all at once – without being the step-wise, cumulative product of a series of rational inferences?

When one grasps a pattern in an array of data, does one reason one's way to that understanding? Or, does the understanding come as a conceptual package in a way that permits one to grasp the character of some dynamic or aspect of reality that is present in the data but does not exist in that data in a way or form that is easy to see or grasp ... maybe, the understanding even runs contrary to various other kinds of reasoned ways of representing that data?

When a person does something of a creative nature – whether musically, artistically, literarily, scientifically, commercially, or medically – is the process of “seeing” what to do in a given endeavor a matter of reasoning or is some other process at work? An understanding could be rational in character – that is, it possesses detectable, logical features that make sense when reflected upon – and, yet, that sort of an understanding might not be generated through the exercise of reason.

We don't know from where ideas, understandings, dreams, and insights come. We don't know how they are generated.

We don't know what makes reason possible. Moreover, we don't know whether, or not, religion must be rooted in processes of reasoning in order for the understanding to be true that gives expression to some sort of religious activity.

Religious experiences might, or might not, accurately reflect some dimension of reality. The understandings to which those experiences give expression (and which are often characterized by intense emotions of one kind or another) might be perfectly rational in nature even if they were to arise in ways that fall beyond the possibilities that can be generated through reasoned thinking.

On the other hand, a reasoned way of understanding something might be coherent, consistent, evidence-based, and endorsed by more than one person yet still not constitute a correct understanding of some given phenomenon. This happens quite frequently with respect to police work, medical diagnoses, journalistic activities, business proposals, sporting game plans, and scientific studies.

The truth or falsity of a given understanding is not necessarily a function of whether, or not, that understanding is reached through a process of reasoning. Moreover, one need not presume that the only way to acquire a true understanding concerning some dimension of reality is through the exercise of reason.

Furthermore, the other facet of Hume's comments in the aforementioned opening sentence of *The Natural History of Religion* that concerns questions seeking to probe the relationship between human nature and religion is rather problematic. Human beings are still trying to piece together the properties of human nature, and, as we proceed to explore those issues, many people continue to attempt to determine whether, religion is something inherent in, and a natural part of, human nature (and, therefore, governed by its own set of natural laws) or something that is imposed upon human beings from without.

In another book – namely, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* – David Hume was interested in exploring whether, or not, the existence of God could be supported by means of factual evidence, reason, and well-structured arguments. One might just as easily ask whether the non-existence of God can be established through the use of factual evidence, reason, and well-structured arguments.

Hume placed natural religion and revealed religion in opposition to one another. He felt that revealed religion took one beyond what could be demonstrated by means of evidence and reasoning in relation to that evidence.

However, by distinguishing between natural and revealed religion, and, thereby, eliminating revealed religion from the realm of the natural, Hume was removing certain kinds of experiential data – namely, that which comes via revelatory or mystical experiences -- from consideration as, possibly, giving expression to phenomena that are entirely natural in character. By making the foregoing point, I am not trying to claim that experiences which are referred to as being revelatory or mystical in nature are necessarily true, but, instead, I am attempting to allude to the possibility that just because we might have difficulty making sense of, thinking about, or proving the truth of those sorts of experiences, this, in and of itself, does not justify removing revealed religion from the realm of the natural.

In short, Hume, as well as Professor Dennett, are making, possibly, the same sort of mistake. More specifically, they both are trying to argue – each in their own way -- that there is line of demarcation that exists between the realm of the natural and the realm of the supernatural, when, perhaps, what one should consider is the possibility that there is no supernatural realm ... only the realm of the natural, and the natural has the properties, qualities, and character it does due to the Presence – not the absence – of God in the here and now.

Immanuel Kant commits – possibly – a similar sort of error when he distinguishes between: Noumena (the reality of a thing itself) and phenomena (the properties and qualities that arise through sensory engagement of reality). Conceivably, phenomena (or, at least, some of them) are, to some extent, a function of noumena, just as what is considered to be the realm of the natural merely gives expression to surface phenomena as a function of the Real.

Professor Dennett appears to believe that because certain dimensions of natural phenomena can be constructively explored through the methods of physics and biology, then, somehow, everything considered to be natural must be capable of being explored by means of those same kinds of methods. In addition, Professor Dennett seems to want to argue that people who believe in God must be able to demonstrate the existence of a supernatural realm, when, the challenge facing him is to demonstrate that whatever is considered to be natural does not – and cannot -- give expression to the Presence of God.

Professor Dennett wants science – as he understands it – to be permitted to be able to critically and rigorously engage what religion does and, in the process, uncover information – or the absence thereof – that might induce people to think about religion and religious claims more rationally, evidentially, and scientifically. However, Professor Dennett feels that the foregoing sort of exploration needs to be done from a neutral perspective ... that is, without harboring any sort of deference toward the realm of the religious.

Let's assume, for the moment, that Professor Dennett is on to something and, therefore, his idea about rigorously scrutinizing religious phenomena in a neutral fashion needs to be pursued. How should we proceed?

During the opening chapter of *Breaking the Spell: Religion As A Natural Phenomenon* (and as noted earlier in the present chapter) Professor Dennett defines religions: "... as social systems whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents whose approval is to be sought." Previously, I critically reflected on the foregoing definition, and raised quite a few questions and problems concerning that kind of a definition.

For example, I suggested that religion is not necessarily a social system. In addition, I indicated that God need not be considered a supernatural agent but might be understood to be Present in some unknown – and, perhaps, unknowable – manner that makes everything considered natural to be possible.

Moreover, I previously put forth the possibility that the purpose of religion is to provide a means of: Seeking the truth, realizing that truth (to the extent possible), and taking whatever truths one discovers and apply them to one's life as best one can. Therefore -- and contrary to Professor Dennett's foregoing definition -- religion is not necessarily a matter of seeking the approval of God but of attempting to grasp the character of the natural laws that give expression to different dimensions of reality -- including one's relationship to Being or Reality – and, thereby, developing a sense of reverence for, and commitment to, truths concerning the Presence of God.

If one accepts Professor Dennett's foregoing, tentative definition of religion – a definition that does not change throughout the aforementioned book: *Breaking The Spell: Religion As a Natural*

Phenomenon -- and, then, one decides to adopt his suggestion that we must begin to study religion empirically, scientifically, and neutrally, one does not begin one's exploration from a neutral starting point. Instead, one will be beginning with a definition that is framed by Professor's definition of religion and its accompanying assumptions ... assumptions that depict religion as being a social system whose members hold beliefs concerning a supernatural agent or agents and which is pursued for the sake of gaining the approval of such a supernatural agent or agents.

By proceeding in the foregoing fashion, Professor Dennett might be exploring the idea of religion according to a manner that he finds convenient. Nonetheless, such an approach does not reflect the understanding that I and many other people have with respect to the issue of religion ... that is, religion is not necessarily a social system, and religion need not involve supernatural agents, and, finally, religion is not necessarily about seeking God's approval but, instead, might be a matter of seeking to realize the truth concerning one's identity and relationship with Being or Reality.

Consequently, Professor Dennett's tentative definition of religion fails to take into consideration a wide array of experiential data and evidential considerations that engage religion in a way that is very different from his approach to things. Whatever Professor Dennett might discover through a process of scientific scrutiny involving religion in his sense, that process of exploration is not likely going to have much relevance to any sense of religion that does not seek to pass itself off as: A social system whose participants believe in a supernatural agent and who spend their time trying to gain the approval of that agent.

Professor Dennett does acknowledge the existence of individuals who pursue what might be called "private religions". According to Professor Dennett, individuals who seek the truth concerning their relationship with God or gods outside the parameters of religion considered as a social system should be referred to as "spiritual people" rather than religious individuals.

The foregoing distinction seems rather arbitrary, if not artificial. Indeed, such a distinction might merely obscure the fact that what Professor Dennett should be studying are those individuals who do not consider religion to be a social system but consider it to be a methodological framework through which to undertake an individual

quest for truth. In other words, perhaps, as pointed out in the previous chapter of the present book, the original sense of religion among early human beings might have given expression to ideas that are far more consonant with individuals who consider religion to be something other than a social system and, therefore, not at all consonant with those who try to force-fit religion into some sort of social framework.

In fact, one might even hypothesize that there could have been a division among early human beings with respect to how to pursue religious issues. On one side of the divide were those who understood religion to be, among other things, a personal quest for the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, whereas on the other side of that conceptual divide were those who believed that religion, whatever else it might be, was a social system that needed to be pursued as a group phenomenon.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, even if -- as far as the aspect of social systems is concerned -- one were to accept the spiritual/religion distinction that is made by Professor Dennett in *Breaking The Spell*, nevertheless, he also wishes to hold on to the idea that religion necessarily involves the notion of the supernatural as well as the idea that religious people do what they do in order to seek the approval of the supernatural realm. Once again, neither of those two ideas necessarily needs to be part of a process for seeking the truth concerning one's relationship with Being or Reality, and, consequently, Professor Dennett's definition of religion continues to be both arbitrary and skewed and, as a result, tends to obscure the possibility of an underlying sense of religion that constitutes a search for the sort of truth that can assist individuals to uncover and realize the nature of one's relationship with Being or Reality.

Professor Dennett considers the "core phenomenon of religion" to be matter of invoking "... gods who are effective agents in real time, and who play a central role in the way the participants think about what they ought to do." (Page 13) What is meant by terms such as: "invoking," "effective agents," and playing "a central role in the way participants think about what they ought to do."

David Hume claimed that one cannot derive 'ought' from 'is'. The correctness of Hume's claim depends entirely on the nature of Being/Reality and whether, or not, what is (i.e., Being, Reality) contains a dimension of ought.

The fact people could be wrong – or have been shown to be wrong – with respect to what they consider the relationship between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ to be does not prove that ‘ought’ and ‘is’ might not be connected in some essential way. Rather, that relationship – if it exists -- might have to be discovered – if it can be -- during one’s quest for the truth concerning one’s relationship with Being/Reality.

If one pursues Professor Dennett’s notion of the “core phenomenon of religion” and, therefore, invokes God, how and why does one go about doing this? If one’s quest is to seek the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality, then the process of invoking might involve one kind of mind/heart set, and if one’s purpose is seek something other than the truth (e.g., group cohesion or seeking to please a supernatural agent or agents) then, the process of invocation might involve an altogether different sort of mind/heart set.

What is the relationship between the individual and Divinity? Do human beings have any responsibility with respect to engaging in the process of invocation?

If one is going to invoke the Divine, then, isn’t there a dimension of the invoking process that requires human beings to try to become receptive to what is being invoked? If one is not prepared to listen to, or be open to, or to be sensitive to the Divine Presence being invoked – assuming, of course, that such a Presence is present, -- then what becomes of the invoking process?

Isn’t there a fundamental ‘ought’ inherent in that which ‘is’? Doesn’t this dimension of ‘ought’ have something to do with being sincere about the nature of one’s quest for the truth ... and wouldn’t this be a duty or obligation irrespective of whether, or not, God existed?

Suppose one invokes the Presence of the Divine, and the nature of that invocation concerns one’s longing to be sincere in one’s search for the truth. Couldn’t one construe the very existence of the foregoing desire to invoke the Presence of God to be an indication of God’s effectiveness concerning an individual’s desire to undertake a quest for the truth in a sincere fashion?

When things go wrong with the moral behavior of allegedly religious people (and people like Professor Dennett are never at a loss to point to many of the things that do go wrong with the moral dimension of so-

called religious behavior), isn't it possible that those individuals who seek to please a supernatural agent within the context of a given religious social system might not, yet, have learned how to be sincere in their quest for truth and, as a result, have not learned how, or in what way, to be sensitive to God's Presence? Isn't it possible that those people do not, yet, know how to gauge the conditions under which Divinity might be willing to be an effective agent with respect to the process of invocation?

Furthermore, how does Professor Dennett propose to measure the degree to which individuals are sincere, or not, with respect to their religious beliefs? How does Professor Dennett propose to measure the extent to which someone is open to, receptive to, or sensitive to the Presence of Divinity?

How does Professor Dennett propose to measure the conditions and circumstances during which God is prepared to be an effective agent with respect to this or that process of invocation? How does Professor Dennett propose to measure the manner or style of effectiveness through which God responds to any given invocation?

There is a refrain in a Rolling Stone song on the *Let It Bleed* album/CD that goes: "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometime you find you get what you need." What if God gives us what we need and not necessarily what we want when we engage in the process of invocation? How do we identify, let alone measure, what we might get in conjunction with a given process of invocation when this takes place in terms of what we need rather than in terms of what we want?

Suppose we set up an experiment to test the efficacy of prayer. We instruct participants to pray for 'x', and, then, we go about tallying how many of the individuals receive 'x' and to what degree this is the case.

If no one in the experiment receives 'x', can one necessarily conclude that either God does not exist, or, alternatively, if God does exist, then, Divinity doesn't answer prayers? Isn't it possible that there could have been a Divine response to the prayer that was other than what the experimenters (or subjects) were looking for, and, therefore, like various kinds of tox-screen, the experiment could not detect what its screening methodology was not set up to recognize or measure?

Isn't it possible that God might respond to invocations of one sort or another according to the manner in which God goes about things and not

necessarily in accordance with how human beings think things should take place? Moreover, by raising the foregoing questions, I am not trying to suggest that this is, necessarily, the way things are but, rather, I am trying to indicate that our understanding of reality is so miniscule that – with the exception of limited contexts involving physics, chemistry, and, to some extent, biology -- we really have no way of reliably establishing what the character of the metrics are through which Reality operates.

One wonders what any of the foregoing has to do with the principles of physics and biology through which Professor Dennett wishes to measure and evaluate the efficacy of such things as prayer or invocation. Indeed, what entitles anyone to insist that the process of exploring the nature of religion must be filtered through principles of physics and biology?

None of the foregoing observations, questions, and the like is intended to suggest that purportedly religious activity should not be subjected to critical reflection or rigorous examination. Rather, the intent underlying such commentary is to indicate that one should not be free to arbitrarily define religion in any way one likes – as Professor Dennett surely does -- or study religion through whatever means one finds consonant with one's interests and inclinations – as Professor Dennett wishes to do. Moreover, if one should decide to proceed in a way that complies with Professor Dennett's approach to religion, then, perhaps, one should be prepared for the possibility that a Professor Dennett-type of analysis might generate results that are arbitrary, skewed, problematic and not necessarily all that illuminating.

In his aforementioned book, Professor Dennett describes a scenario that depicts someone being transported by the beautiful, ecstasy-generating sounds of that individual's favorite music as it is played during a live concert, when, suddenly, the spell of the foregoing kind of experience is rudely broken by the sound of someone's cell phone ringing. Professor Dennett feels that in many ways religion casts a spell over the minds and hearts of people that is not always good and, therefore, perhaps no matter how enjoyable those spells might be for those who are entranced, we need to begin to think about breaking those spells by means of critical reflection, empirical evidence, and scientific inquiry.

Professor Dennett wants to break the sort of spell that induces people to bomb abortion clinics, or persuades them to release sarin gas

into crowded Japanese subway stations, or through which individuals are manipulated into strapping on suicide vests that are intended to slaughter those with whom they disagree. Furthermore, he appears to believe that if the foregoing sorts of individuals had been persuaded to engage in rigorously conducted critical explorations involving science, history, and democracy then, they might have been able to break the influence of the foregoing sorts of spell.

However, if Professor Dennett were permitted to have his way with respect to dealing with the individuals mentioned in the previous paragraph according to his preferences (i.e., engaging them in science, history, and democracy), then, possibly, those individuals might merely become involved in a process through which they were being induced to substitute one kind of spell for another, and, as a result, they might have become inclined – under the influence of that sort of a spell -- to kill millions of people around the world -- through one manner of warfare or another (political, financial, economic, environmental, technological, cultural, medical, or scientific) -- because those millions of people were resistant to the idea of submitting to the West's arbitrary, if not self-serving, ideas about democracy, economics, history and science.

Forms of economics that serve capital rather than the actual needs of people are likely to lead to destructive ends ... except, perhaps, for a few. Forms of democracy that sacrifice people's sovereignty for the sake of those who have found ways to allocate power to themselves by means of a process of "manufacturing consent" among a majority of the people are unlikely to lead to fortuitous results.

Forms of science encouraging, if not enabling, scientists to shirk responsibility with respect to the problematic ramifications of their discoveries (e.g., pesticides, nuclear waste, plastics, pharmaceuticals, toxic chemical compounds, and weapons systems ... to name but a few) are just as destructive, if not more so, than the actions of people who harbor delusional ideas concerning the nature of religion. Forms of history that obfuscate the role which ideologies of all kinds (political, philosophical, economic, legal, scientific, educational, racial, gender-based, and cultural) play in the oppression, if not destruction, of human potentials are more likely to create spells of their own than constitute a viable alternative to the spell cast by various delusions concerning the idea of religion.

The whole tenor of Professor Dennett's book: *Breaking the Spell* is directed toward religion – at least, as he understands the term. However, perhaps the spell that really needs to be broken is anyone's belief – whether religious or otherwise – that tries to indicate that he or she has the right to impose her or his understanding of reality on other people.

In other words, perhaps, the spell that needs to be broken concerns the belief that many, if not most of us have -- irrespective of our religious beliefs (or lack thereof) – that we have realized the truth of things (or have a better understanding of the truth than anyone else does) and, therefore, such an understanding confers on us the right – if not the obligation -- to teach other people about what the nature of the truth supposedly is and, therefore, how everyone should proceed accordingly. Even if one were to permit Professor Dennett's skewed, arbitrary, problematic definition of religion to stand, the problem with which humanity is confronted is not necessarily religious in nature but has to do with the existence of many kinds of delusional stances concerning the process of pursuing the truth and what the nature of the truth is with respect to our relationship with Being/Reality.

Professor Dennett wishes to place religion on the examination table and begin probing the carcass in an attempt to determine what – if anything -- it might be good for and what – if any -- net benefits it might confer on human beings. Leaving aside, for the time being, that the body of religion Professor Dennett wishes to place on the examination table might not be the body that actually needs to be probed empirically and scientifically as far as the idea of religion is concerned, there are other kinds of questions that can be raised in conjunction with Professor Dennett's proposed study.

For example, what if there are potential benefits associated with religion that are tied to what takes place in this world but cannot be properly calculated until after death. More specifically, measurement requires a metric possessing features that are capable of accurately reflecting or capturing the character of some property that is being measured.

If the value or benefit of something – in this case, religion -- is a function of an unknown metric (which depends on whether, or not, God exists, and if God exists, what the nature of the metric is that gives expression to how – of if -- God evaluates what takes place in this world),

then, how does one go about measuring the benefit of religion under those circumstances? Irrespective of whether someone believes in some sense of religion or someone rejects the idea of religion in all senses, nevertheless, neither the person who believes in religion nor the one who rejects religion knows what – if anything -- is waiting for them on the other side of the line that separates death from life, and, therefore, they have no idea what the post-death metric is through which they will be processed.

Maybe, the post-death metric will consist of decomposition, molecular dissipation, and nothingness. Maybe, the post-death metric will consist of something more dynamic ... either of a fortuitous, problematic, or unexpected variety.

Until one knows which of the foregoing metrics is operative – or whether some other possibility might be operative -- one cannot establish what the benefit or value is of anything that we do in this life. One can develop hermeneutical models concerning those possibilities, but until they are verified, that is all they are ... hermeneutical or interpretive models.

If Professor Dennett – or anyone else -- decides to restrict the inquiry concerning the issue of possible benefits that might be associated with religion to events occurring on this side of the line that separates life from death, then, the whole process of setting up some sort of metric through which to measure the presence, or absence, of those benefits often tends to become an exercise in arbitrariness. Unless one is examining the issue of benefit from the perspective of what the truth is concerning the nature of reality and the nature of one's relationship with that reality, then, any such examination is fraught with problems concerning the reliability, value, or significance of that sort of investigation.

Toward the beginning of the third chapter of: *Breaking The Spell: Religion As A Natural Phenomenon*, Professor Dennett states: "It *might* be that the best that can be said for religion is that it helps some people achieve the level of citizenship and morality typically found in brights. If you find that conjecture offensive, you need to adjust your perspective." (Page 55) The term "brights" is Professor Dennett's way of referring to individuals who are nonbelievers when it comes to the issue of God's existence and, yet, nonetheless, are – according to their own manner of

inclination – committed to living lives of integrity with respect to issues of morality, law, politics, science, and so on.

I don't find Professor Dennett's previous conjecture offensive. Instead, it just seems rather muddle-headed ... if not presumptuous since he appears to feel he has a right to tell other people what they need to do if they should happen to take exception with his conjecture in some way.

Professor Dennett begins his foregoing comments by alluding to what might be the best that can be said about religion. As I have noted previously during this chapter, Professor Dennett busies himself early on in his book with framing the discussion that takes place during his philosophical exploration according to his own arbitrary definition concerning what he believes religion involves (i.e., a social system in which participants seek the approval of a supernatural agent or agents), none of which necessarily has anything to do with the idea of religion that involves an individual's quest for the truth concerning his or her relationship with Being/Reality and, therefore, something for which one might have reverence and treat as sacred.

Moreover, Professor Dennett fails to provide one with any sense of what the criteria are for measuring the nature of "best" with respect to religion. Perhaps even more importantly, he does not offer any particulars concerning the methodology that is to be used to determine the concrete details that demonstrate – allegedly -- how "the best that can be said for religion is that it helps some people achieve the level of citizenship and morality typically found in brights."

In addition, Professor Dennett uses a phrase -- namely: "the level of citizenship and morality" -- in the foregoing quotation that is relatively devoid of significance and value. More specifically, he does not provide the reader with a clear understanding of: What is meant by either: "Citizenship," or "morality", or what the criteria are for determining the nature of citizenship and morality; or what justifies the use of those criteria; or what the methods are for measuring the degree of citizenship and morality that are, supposedly, attained by brights versus what is attained by the members of his arbitrarily contrived (defined) category of religion.

Finally, in the foregoing quotation, Professor Dennett introduces the idea of that which can be "typically found in brights" with respect to some amorphous "level of citizenship and morality." I don't remember reading

about any reliable, rigorous, scientific study conducted by Professor Dennett (or anyone else) that definitively establishes what the level of citizenship and morality is in a typical bright or what the qualities and properties are that constitute that kind of 'typicality'.

Professor Dennett indicates: "Perhaps a survey would show that, as a group, atheists and agnostics are more respectful of the law, more sensitive to the needs of others, or more ethical than religious people." (Page 55) Even assuming one could gain clarity concerning how to go about determining which group of people had greater respect for those laws or whether those laws were deserving of respect, and even assuming that one could settle upon the criteria through which to identify what the needs of people were or what constituted being sensitive to those needs, and even assuming that one could agree upon whose sense of ethics was to be used to evaluate people's behavior and the degree to which any given individual complied with that sort of an ethical orientation, the fact is: None of these matters could be settled by means of a survey. One would need to bore down into the nitty-gritty of people's lives and study what surveys often can't discover – namely, what people actually do in their lives as opposed to what they claim they do.

According to Professor Dennett: "Among the questions that we need to consider objectively are whether Islam is more or less effective than Christianity at keeping people off drugs and alcohol (and whether the side-effects in either case are worse than the benefit, whether sexual abuse is more or less a problem among Sikhs than among Mormons, and so forth. You don't get to advertise all the good that your religion does without first subtracting all the harm it does and considering whether some other religion, or no religion at all, does better." (Pages 55-56)

Professor Dennett is approaching the foregoing issues through the filters of his definition of religions that, among other things, gives emphasis to the idea that they constitute social systems. Irrespective of what can, or cannot, be accomplished with respect to matters such as drug use, consumption of alcohol, sexual abuse, and so on when considered in terms of what takes place in a social context consisting of individuals who claim to accept a set of religious beliefs, nonetheless, what a given society does, or does not do, doesn't necessarily have anything to do with whether, or not, what is being professed through means of a religion-tinged vocabulary actually gives expression to the

truth of things concerning the relationship that an individual has with Reality/Being, and, as a result, might have more to say about the shortcomings of people than the quality of the religion to which they profess allegiance.

For example, if a given religion prohibits sexual abuse of others, but, nonetheless, the people who subscribe to that religion fail to comply with that prohibition, is it the religion that has failed the people or is it the people who have failed the religion? Even when one considers the idea of religion within a social context, what matters is individual conduct, for individuals are the ones who are choosing to comply with, or act contrary to, the precepts a given religion.

Questions concerning whether the nature of Being/Reality is such that the truth concerning one's relationship with existence requires one to refrain from engaging in the sexual abuse of other individuals all give expression to one set of issues. Questions that probe whether, or not, a given group of people are more likely, or less likely, to engage in sexual abuse can be considered independently of whether, or not, some religion reflects the truth with respect to those matters, and, therefore, the latter sorts of questions give expression to an entirely different set of issues than the first set of questions do.

If every single practitioner of a given religion failed to comply with the latter's prohibition concerning sexual abuse, what, if anything, does this say about whether, or not, the religion at issue reflects the truth of things concerning the matter of sexual abuse as far as the nature of Being/Reality is concerned? Given certain caveats, isn't the foregoing question similar to asking whether, or not, the truth concerning the force of gravity should be rejected simply because a group of human beings chooses to ignore the reality of that force despite acknowledging the reality of that force?

Of course, since most adults accept the reality of gravitational forces, it is easy to understand how a situation in which a group of people chooses to ignore the presence of this dimension of Being has no bearing on the truth concerning the reality of that kind of force. However, irrespective of whether, or not, a given religion reflects the nature of Being/Reality with respect to the matter of prohibiting sexual abuse, a similar principle appears to be at work as in the gravity example – namely, if a given religion sets forth a prohibition concerning sexual abuse, and,

yet, its adherents do not observe that sort of a prohibition, then, nonetheless, the existence of this sort of behavior has nothing to say about whether or not the underlying prohibition accurately reflects some dimension of Being/Reality ... the two issues are independent of one another.

Consequently, when Professor Dennett talks about objectively studying the good or harm that are purportedly done by different religions, one has to distinguish what people actually do and what a given religion actually says and, in addition, one also needs to keep in mind that there is a potential difference between what a given religion claims concerning the nature of Being/Reality and whether, or not, those claims accurately reflect that nature.

When religions are defined as social systems, as Professor Dennett is inclined to do, then, one might be interested in trying to 'objectively' study whatever good or harm is forthcoming from those systems – provided, of course, that one can come to an agreement on what is meant by the idea of “good” and “harm”. However, those studies have little, or nothing, to offer the kind of approach to religion – toward which I am inclined -- that focuses on an individual’s personal quest to discover the truth about the nature of Being/Reality, together with trying to uncover the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality, as well as whether, or not, one is able to comply with whatever truths might be discovered through that quest.

One might want to spend some time reflecting on whether, or not, it is the responsibility of a given religion to demonstrate efficacy with respect to an individual and, in the process, bring about that person’s compliance with the nature of truth. Or, maybe the responsibility rests with individuals who need to place themselves under an ontological or existential obligation to seek out the truth concerning the nature of Being/Reality and, in the process, attempt to conform to its nature to what ever extent those individuals are able – both epistemologically, as well as morally – to accomplish.

Irrespective of whether, or not, I – to some degree – discover the truth concerning the nature of Being/Reality, and irrespective of whether, or not, I am able – to some degree -- to live in compliance with whatever – if any -- truth is uncovered, those efforts are independent of what anyone else does, or doesn’t do, in relation to the same sort of quest. The

good and harm that come through my mode of engaging that quest is a function of my own choices and not a function of how other people pursue, or comply with, the same sort of general quest.

If other individuals uncover truth or commit errors in a way that is similar to what occurs with me when engaged in a quest for the truth or when trying to act in compliance with that quest, then, in a collective sense, we all serve as loci of manifestation of good and harm, but that good and harm are a function of the process of the engagement dynamics of individuals who make their own individual choices with respect to how to pursue that kind of a process of engagement ... whatever the nature of a religion might be, the system of principles, values, and beliefs to which that religion gives expression does not make the choices that shape the way an individual engages religion.

Professor Dennett chooses to critically probe questions concerning the value, benefit, or good/harm that might arise in conjunction with his skewed sense of religion. As a result, Professor Dennett tends to become bogged down with examining what he considers to be the success or failure of various groups of individuals who have built up some sort of social system concerning the notion of religion, and, in the process, Professor Dennett mistakenly assumes that what happens with those groups can be used as a reliable indicator for drawing conclusions about the nature of religion in general and whether, or not, there are any truths to be discovered through pursuing that sort of undertaking.

If someone pursues a quest to seek the nature of the truth concerning one's relationship with Being/Reality but does so in a problematic way, then, this is not necessarily a reflection on the quest per se. This is a reflection of the way in which that individual has engaged the quest.

If someone interprets the methods, values, beliefs, and principles of the foregoing kind of quest in a problematic way, this is not necessarily a reflection of the quest, per se. Instead, it is a reflection of the problematic hermeneutical stance that is taken by an individual with respect to the manner through which she or he engages that quest.

If many people make the same kind of hermeneutical mistake as the foregoing individual, this is not necessarily a reflection on the quest per se. Rather, it constitutes a reflection of the problematic way in which a

number of people – separately or collectively – have engaged the quest process.

Social systems might arise in conjunction with a given kind of quest for the truth. However, that social system does not necessarily constitute an accurate reflection concerning the nature of the quest with which that kind of a social system supposedly is aligning itself.

The social system is one thing. The quest for truth is a separate matter.

By defining religion – however tentatively – as a social system, Professor Dennett tends to conflate a social system with a quest that must be engaged individually and not collectively. Therefore, Professor Dennett is focusing on the wrong phenomenon.

Professor Dennett is studying the many ways in which individuals go about corrupting, undermining, distorting, altering, and destroying religion understood as a quest for seeking the truth concerning the nature of Reality/Being and one's relationship with Being/Reality. He is investigating the process through which people – individually and collectively – go about generating counterfeit versions of the most basic form of religion ... namely, a search for the truth concerning Being/Reality and a search for how and where one fits in with that which is.

Professor Dennett is exploring how people – both individually and collectively – sometimes seek to exploit the vocabulary of religion in order to acquire power, wealth, fame, or whatever else their egos might desire that is other than the truth concerning the nature of Being/Reality. He is probing the way in which people arrive at conclusions prematurely and problematically by means of twisted and warped processes of reasoning or because their minds and hearts have become pathologically entrained by a set of undue influences (there will be more to be said on this topic in a later chapter) that interferes with their ability to think critically and rigorously with respect to the nature of existence.

However, the one thing that Professor Dennett is not doing – despite the subtitle associated with his book: *Breaking The Spell* -- is exploring religion as the sort of natural phenomenon through which individuals attempt to seek the truth concerning the nature of Being/Reality and, as well, try to determine the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality. He wants to break the spell in relation to all the ways in which people

develop delusional ideas concerning religion – and, I don't object to that sort of a project – but, as well, Professor Dennett appears to want to argue that there is no modality of religion that is not delusional, and, this is where he enters into his own realm of delusional thinking since he seems to believe that by itemizing the sorts of problems that exist with respect to this or that individual's (or group's) way of thinking about, or engaging, religion, then he has shown that every modality of engaging the idea of religion is also delusional in character. Nonetheless, for many of the reasons already pointed out in the first several chapters of the present book, together with the contents of the current chapter (as well as that which will be indicated in subsequent chapters), Professor Dennett is a long way from showing that the nature of Being/Reality is devoid of a Divine Presence that establishes the nature of Being/Reality and, as well, establishes one's place within that context and, therefore, gives expression to a natural phenomenon that can be pursued through an individual's quest that seeks to discover the truth concerning the nature of those natural phenomena and one's relationship with them.

When people like Daniel Dennett, Nicholas Wade, and Richard Dawkins talk about the evolution of religion, they are actually making reference to the devolution or degeneration of religion. That kind of evolution/devolution is about the ways in which people – individually or collectively – have deviated from the original idea of attempting to sincerely and critically engage experience in a manner that permits one to be able to receive whatever truths concerning Being/Reality that one is in a position (existentially, epistemologically, and morally) to access, and possibly, realize, as well as apply to one's life according to one's ability to do so.

There are, indeed, dangerous spells that arise in conjunction with the devolution of religion and which are in need of being broken. Those spells, however, are antithetical to the pursuit of the idea of religion that was outlined in the previous paragraph. Indeed, those spells actually prevent people from finding their way to religion as a natural phenomenon that can be engaged for the purpose of discovering the truth concerning what is encompassed by that sort of natural phenomenon.



Chapter 4: Whence Goodness

Recently, I began reading a book entitled: *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* by Greg M. Epstein who is the Humanist chaplain at Harvard University. The following discussion constitutes something of a critical review in relation to at least the introduction of that work.

Much more might be said concerning the ideas contained in the whole book. Nonetheless, due to time constraints, I have restricted myself to just the issues, themes, and problems that arose in conjunction with the introduction to the aforementioned publication.

I should begin by saying that the reason for critically engaging Chaplain Epstein's book is not because I feel threatened by anything that he says concerning a nonreligious approach to life ... any more than I would feel threatened by the religious ideas of someone with whom I might disagree. The purpose of any exercise in critical reflection should be to try to: Explore possibilities, raise questions, probe problems, clarify issues, and enrich discourse.

Moreover, I don't look at people like Chaplain Epstein as enemies, evildoers, or individuals who are headed for perdition. I can sincerely say that I have no idea what the future holds – in this world or beyond -- for either Chaplain Epstein or myself.

We both are committed to exploring what it means to be a human being. The fact that we have come up with different perspectives concerning that issue and what, if anything, this means in the grander scheme of things entails considerations that are above my pay grade.

At one point during the introduction to his book, Chaplain Epstein notes in passing that according to some opinion polls atheists are among the most reviled groups in America. He might, or might not, take heart to discover that I have come across the results of various opinion polls in which atheists are rated more favorably than Muslims in the United States.

Bragging rights aside concerning the identity of which group resides at the bottom of this or that favorability poll, Chaplain Epstein does say something in the introduction to his book with which I am in agreement. More specifically, he states: "The enemy ... is not faith – the

enemy ... is hate, it is fear, it is ignorance, it is the darker part" that resides in every human being.

According to Chaplain Epstein, among other things, Humanists consider themselves to be "free thinkers, rationalists, skeptics" as well as naturalists. I find this description somewhat mystifying since it seems to imply that in order to be a freethinker, rationalist, skeptic, or naturalist, one must be someone who does not believe in God.

Free thinkers, rationalism, skepticism, and naturalism can be rooted in both a nonreligious or religious context. Everything depends on the intentions underlying, and purposes for which, those cognitive activities are being used.

For example, a naturalist is considered to be someone who believes that everything is a function of some set of natural causes or phenomena and, as well, believes that all references to supernatural and spiritual realities are ill considered if not irrelevant to establishing the truth concerning the nature of existence. Sufis maintain there is no reality but Divinity, and, therefore, Reality constitutes the only sense of naturalism that is possible ... a sense in which it is wrong to distinguish between the natural and the supernatural since the natural gives expression to whatever the nature of reality makes possible.

Moreover, under the right sort of circumstances, even some mystics make use of reason just as Humanists do. However, there are differences in understanding between the two groups concerning the nature of reason, its possible limits, and how to apply reason to any given issue.

As far as the quality of being skeptical is concerned, part of the training of a Sufi is to develop a healthy and constructive skepticism concerning the reliability of the ideas, values, purposes, meanings, intentions, desires, and emotions that arise in one's own consciousness as well as in the phenomenology of other individuals. There are many forces capable of leading one away from the truth – whatever that might turn out to be – and, consequently, one should refine one's capacity for skeptical engagement of oneself and life in order to try to minimize -- as much as this can be accomplished -- the degree of distortion and error in one's understanding of things.

If one wishes to adopt a skeptical stance toward life, then, one needs to be prepared to apply those skeptical inclinations to everything ... including one's own ideas, values, beliefs, and behaviors. To question just the religious ideas of other individuals is to invoke a biased and skewed form of skepticism.

One also must be skeptical with respect to nonreligious ideas as well. In fact, one should be prepared to be skeptical toward skepticism itself because, on occasion, we are able to uncover certain truths, and, therefore, being skeptical about what is true is the sort of hobgoblin of consistency that is characteristic of truly narrow minds.

In my opinion, there is no form of skeptical methodology that is more rigorous than the Sufi mystical path. At the same time, Sufi methodology indicates that skepticism is a means, not an end ... that is, while adopting a skeptical stance toward much that takes places within the phenomenology of lived life is a very important thing to do, nonetheless, within limits, being able to arrive at a correct understanding concerning certain aspects of Being is, as intimated earlier, still possible.

Chaplain Epstein claims that the central issue is not about whether it is possible for someone who does not believe in God to be moral, perform good deeds, or develop strong character traits. He believes the foregoing sorts of possibilities are very real and, furthermore, he believes there are many examples to which one could point in defense of that perspective (and his aforementioned book is filled with those sorts of examples).

He feels the more interesting question is what makes moral behavior, good deeds, and character possible. In other words, how does someone who does not believe in God go about being moral, or having character, or performing good deeds?

The question that Chaplain Epstein is raising is a good one ... perhaps better than he supposes is the case. As a former professor, one of the issues that I had to consider with respect to the efforts of any given student was whether, or not, the assignments handed in by that individual actually constituted his or her own work.

Did the person cheat on a given test? Did that individual plagiarize material from sources that were not properly cited in the notes or bibliography accompanying the main content of the essay or paper?

I didn't start out with an orientation of suspicion when grading exams or papers. However, during the course of reading through what some students handed in, certain things I read might trigger that kind of a concern.

I tried my best to get to know the students through interchanges both within and outside of classes. Many of my classes usually consisted of between 35-40 students, and by the end of the term, I knew all of my students by name, and, as well, I had a sense of what they were, and were not, capable of doing within the context of a given course.

Chaplain Epstein claims that he is interested in the question of how people can be good without God. I am interested in that question as well.

We are not necessarily the architects of our own capacities for: Consciousness, language, reason, logic, memory, intellect, creativity, understanding, or emotion. In fact, for a number of years in both Canada and the United States, I taught a variety of courses in psychology – and, consequently, I was able to develop a fairly informed insight into the epistemological status of the understanding of modern sciences – biological or physical – concerning what makes any of the aforementioned capacities possible or how they came into being.

All manner of hypotheses, theories, and models exist concerning those issues. What is missing is conclusive evidence that any of those ideas are correct, and contrary to the claims of some individuals, science is not even close to resolving the many mysteries that permeate our attempts to understand the origin and nature of either human existence or human capabilities.

If someone has doubts about the tenability of the foregoing claim, she or he might like to take a look at several books which I have written – such as *Evolution Unredacted*, *Quantum Queries*, and *Cosmological Frontiers*. All of the foregoing books go into considerable detail concerning different facets of particle physics, quantum mechanics, cosmology, evolution, and more that are not well-

understood by modern science... and I might add in passing that none of the foregoing discussion pits some form of creationism against some form of secular materialism but sticks to just probing science per se.

So, when someone maintains that human beings exhibit moral behavior, good deeds, and/or quality character absent the presence of God, this triggers something in me that is similar to what used to occur when I was grading the test or term paper of some of my students. Namely, I wonder if the individuals who are making claims about what is possible without God might be committing a form of plagiarism in which they are taking credit for something that is not their own work and are failing to cite the proper sources that make their ideas and actions possible.

Where do the ideas come from that end up being expressed through good deeds or that result in moral behavior of this or that kind? What makes the compassion, love, aspiration, courage, patience, perseverance, and so on possible that permits one to understand, for example, the plight of others and, as a result, want to do something about those sports of situations? Where does the will come from to carry through on the original ideas and intentions? Where do the intellect, memory, understanding, reason, and logic come from that helps to shape the realization of the original intention? Where do the means and opportunities come from that permit one to be in a position to help others? What caused the circumstances of someone to be in a condition of need and why?

Individuals who are inclined in either a nonreligious or a religious manner both tend to want to consider themselves to be the source of good deeds, moral behavior, and quality character traits. However, neither group can prove that they are the primary causal agent for any of the foregoing events ... all they can do is to indicate that on a given occasion a certain individual was the locus of manifestation through which those properties were realized.

Chaplain Epstein notes that thousands of innocent lives are ripped away by hurricanes, earthquakes and other "acts of God". He indicates that an increasing number of people have come to conclude that the world does not have competent moral management and that, consequently, they feel they must become "superintendants" of their own lives and try to resolve the many problems that beset human

beings ... but they wish to do so in a way that can be considered to be constructive and, therefore, described as being “good”.

To contend that because thousands of allegedly innocent lives are destroyed through so-called “acts of God” and, therefore, suggest that God -- if God exists -- is not a competent moral manager is an arbitrary judgment that is based on -- at the very least -- an incomplete understanding concerning the nature of existence. Simply because one doesn’t understand why things are the way they are doesn’t necessarily mean that what occurs is due to incompetent moral management.

Moreover, one wonders why Chaplain Epstein should limit the “acts of God” to events such as earthquakes and hurricanes. If God exists, then, sooner or later, every human being dies through one or another act of God, and we have no better insight into the nature of our individual demise than we have with respect to the deaths of thousands of people via the way of floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, droughts, volcanic activity, and other natural disasters.

Someone dies at a very young age. Or, someone dies through no apparent fault of his or her own. Or, someone dies a slow, agonizing death.

What are we to make of any of this? A lot depends on whether, or not, one has the full story concerning those happenings.

Those who believe that the universe is operating through some form of incompetent moral management believe they have all the facts concerning those situations. One wonders how those individuals would go about proving that they are in possession of all relevant information about any given tragedy or death.

Human beings are notorious backseat drivers. We tend to kibitz about the way another person -- or God -- does things irrespective of whether, or not, we understand what we are talking about. We always tend to give preference to our own take on things and believe that one’s own understanding is the most reliable means for judging life events.

This is the way of the ego. That inclination is at the heart of the dark side of being human that Chaplain Epstein warned his readers

about in the introduction to his book and about which I voiced my agreement earlier in this chapter.

In addition, implying that God – if God exists – is an incompetent moral manager because thousands of innocent lives are lost through “acts of God” -- such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, and the like -- suggests that Chaplain Epstein knows of some absolute form of moral management that is independent of God and through which the actions of any god that would permit the destruction of innocent lives can be evaluated impartially and objectively. If so, one would like to know what the nature of that absolute form of moral management is and what constitutes its source of authoritativeness.

All we really know is that we are not in control of many, if any, life events, and that such knowledge tends to leave us with a sense of helpless frustration. So, there is a tendency within us to adopt the existential stance of most politicians and state: “You know what’s wrong with the world, I’m not in charge.”

There are at least two things that are very evident when it comes to human existence. First, reality has a very stubborn tendency to resist our efforts to make it conform to our likes and dislikes, and, secondly, we are almost completely ignorant about why things are the way they are.

One can be as cynical, skeptical, rationalistic, and freethinking as one likes. Nevertheless, after the dust from all our cognitive activity ends, we tend to be as ignorant about the ultimate nature of reality as we were before engaging in those activities.

Operating out of a condition of ignorance will not shed light on whether, or not, the world is being governed through morally incompetent management. All of our speculations, theories, ideas, models, and conceptual systems concerning how we would do things differently if we were put in charge is so much spitting into the mysterious and unpredictable winds of existence that are buffeting our being.

I am interested in trying to find out what or why a billion nonreligious people believe what they do for the same reason that I am interested in finding out why billions of religious people believe what they do. I am interested in finding out whether someone – or any

person -- is right concerning those beliefs, and I consider this to be the number one issue facing a human being ... to try to determine – to whatever extent this is possible -- the location and character of whatever truths are accessible to human existence.

I don't merely want to have an understanding in which to believe and through which to develop a purpose or be able to fashion a morality of some kind or find some sort of meaning concerning life. I want to know – if this is possible -- which purpose, form of morality, and meaning actually reflects the nature of reality.

This is the problem with which we all grapple and for which we all are seeking answers and for which we all – one day – might, or might not, be held accountable. Are the numerous decisions that we have made along the way and that have affected others in different ways ... are those decisions ones for which we will have regrets if the truth is ever disclosed to us?

The song “My Way” has the line: “Regrets, I’ve had a few ... but, then, again, too few to mention”. These are the words of a person who seems to be looking at life through the filters of his or her own myopic view of the truth of things ... some one who is viewing life by means of the very rose-colored, self-serving glasses through which the ego engages life.

Wisdom begins to appear on the horizons of one's existence when one is prepared to acknowledge the possibility that “My Way” might not be the best way to engage existence. One must be ready to really listen to what reality might be trying to tell us about its nature rather than imposing our own brand of ignorance on to the problems of life.

According to Chaplain Epstein, Humanism “means taking charge of the often lousy world around us and working to shape it into a better place”. This seems to indicate that he knows what “better” means, and if so, then, it tends to leave unanswered the question of what to do when people disagree about what constitutes the nature of “better”. The foregoing issue also faces those who believe in religion ... all too frequently, they assume they know what “better” means and, consequently, often do not critically reflect on the issue of what to do when two senses of “better” collide.

Chaplain Epstein indicates that Humanism “rejects dependence on faith, the supernatural, divine texts, resurrection, reincarnation, or anything else for which we have no evidence.” The issue of rejecting dependence on: Faith, the supernatural, divine texts and so on revolves about the problem of determining what is going to count as evidence and how to interpret that evidence.

Rejecting something as evidence, or citing it as evidence, is a meaningless exercise until one looks at the framework through which something is going to be counted as evidence or rejected as such. Furthermore, one has to ask about the degree of arbitrariness present in that sort of a framework of epistemological or hermeneutical evaluation ... and this is as true for religious believers as it is for nonreligious believers.

Wikipedia describes “**arbitrariness**” as the quality of being “determined by chance, whim, or impulse, and not by necessity, reason, or principle”. However, the foregoing description leaves a question in its wake as the latter makes its way through epistemological waters.

More specifically, one can’t help but raise the following question: How arbitrary is a given person’s notion of “necessity, reason, and principle”? Or, asked in a different way, what is it that makes any given notion of: “necessity, reason, and principle” be something other than arbitrary?

Presumably, the answer to the foregoing questions would revolve about some sort of function concerning the nature of the truth. Any notion of necessity, reason, and principle that does not reflect and is not rooted in the truth is arbitrary. In short, arbitrariness is that which is based on something other than the truth.

Humanists insist that the journey from the womb to the tomb is all that we have ... but they have no evidence to demonstrate the truth of their claim. They – like most of the rest of us – have only a deep, pervasive ignorance concerning those matters, and, yet, they appear to want everyone to proceed as if the Humanist understanding of things is the only necessary, reasoned, principled take on life, and, perhaps not so strangely, the Humanist position really is just a variation on the manner in which many, if not most, religious people proceed as well.

No one wants to admit that he or she is ignorant about almost everything that matters. Consequently, no one wants to address the issue of how do we collectively proceed given that ignorance. How do we pursue and make allowances for what we don't know without getting problematically entangled in each other's lives?

According to Chaplain Epstein, "humanism is a cohesive world movement based on the creation of good lives and communities, without God." Irrespective of whether one wishes to exclude God or include God in our lives and communities, the notion of what constitutes "goodness" is a long-standing problem.

Quite frequently, our ideas concerning "the good" merely reduce down to our likes and dislikes. Therefore, those notions tend to be quite independent of necessity, reason, or principle except to the extent that we like to throw those sorts of words around as we try to persuade one another that our system of likes and dislikes is better than your system of likes and dislikes.

Chaplain Epstein claims that for most people, "religion is not about belief in an all-seeing deity with a baritone voice and a flowing beard. It is about family, tradition, consolation, ethics, memories, music, art, architecture, and much more." The first thing that might be said in conjunction with the first part of the foregoing quotation is that Chaplain Epstein's reductionistic depiction of God is quite argumentative and narrow in scope.

More importantly, I am willing to venture that for many people who have a genuine commitment to the idea of God's existence, their central concern is about a sense of relationship with Divinity via the mind, heart and soul rather than merely being a function of arbitrary images – auditory or visual -- of one kind or another. Even where images are present, I am inclined to feel it is the sense of relationship with Divinity that pervades those images that is of utmost importance rather than the images per se ... that is, the images stand for something beyond the images themselves ... something ineffable and hard to put in words ... it is the dance of one's phenomenology with a mysterious, unseen – but very much sensed – Partner.

Secondly, even if one were to agree with Chaplain Epstein that for many people religion is much more about family, tradition, ethics, memories, music, art, and architecture than anything else, one still

might raise the issue of whether those people have missed the essential point of religion or spirituality. In other words, irrespective of however important family, tradition, memories, and so on might be within a religious context, nonetheless, to restrict spirituality to those considerations tends to obscure the following possibility – namely, that the opportunity for, and the journey toward, realizing one’s essential potential might constitute the primary purpose to which religion and spirituality are seeking to draw our attention.

I am not trying to say that what goes on in the world is unimportant. Rather, in the latter part of the foregoing paragraph, emphasis is being given to the idea that life might be a means to, and occasion for, a process of spiritual development rather than being an end unto itself.

Even if we all engaged the world as a project for pursuing goodness in this life and were successful in agreeing on, and realizing, that project, nonetheless, if the world turns out to exist for something other than, or is transcendent to, Earthly interests, then, however good we make the world, we might have missed the purpose for which life on Earth came into being. Living the ‘good life’ – whatever this might mean – has to reflect and be rooted in the truth of reality’s nature ... we cannot arbitrarily decide what the meaning and purpose of Earthly life are and expect that everyone should submit to that kind of an approach to things ... anymore than we can arbitrarily decide that the purpose and meaning of life should be lived in accordance with some arbitrary theological notion.

Chaplain Epstein claims that we need what can be found or created in a Humanist community namely: “... a place where family, memory, ethical values, and the uplifting of the human spirit can come together with intellectual honesty, and without a god.” I have no doubt that Humanists can come up with ideas concerning goodness and community that have meaning, value, and purpose for them ... but how intellectually honest and defensible any of this might be is another set of issues altogether.

One could agree with the Humanist perspective that the journey from womb to tomb is unique and might only come our way once. However, acknowledging that perspective does not require one to conclude that: “Family, memory, ethical value, and the uplifting of the

human spirit can come together with intellectual honesty without a god.”

Of course, a similar sort of criticism can be leveled at those who find meaning, value, and purpose in this or that theology and, as a result, seek to play their own kind of zero-sum game with anyone who is unwilling to accept their edicts concerning the nature of reality. The commonality that ties all of us together – the people who are committed to some version of religious reality as well as the people who are committed to some nonreligious way of life – is our collective ignorance about so many of the key issues of life ... an ignorance that we often do our best to deny, and a denial that tends to come at great cost to ourselves and the people amongst whom we live.

Despite the many accomplishments of modern science, we still have no demonstrable proof concerning how either the universe or life came into being. In addition, we do not know the how and why underlying the origins of consciousness, logic, reason, insight, memory, creativity, talent, language, and emotion. To claim that science offers the best account of the universe and its many mysteries is to arbitrarily inflate the status of the opinions and speculations of a group of very fallible individuals whose primary modus operandi appears to be its capacity to improve upon – within limits -- some of its many previously incorrect theories concerning the nature of the universe, life, and human potential.

This might be a sound strategy if one had an infinite amount of time to be able to wait for some sort of final answer concerning the nature of reality. Unfortunately, this is not the situation in which we find ourselves since irrespective of whether one is inclined in a religious or nonreligious way, the time we have available to try to solve the mysteries of life appears to be very limited ... and, for unknown reasons, this constraint is much more severe for some individuals than it is for others.

Chaplain Epstein refers to Humanism through the filters of the European term: “lifestance”, and he claims that this term refers to something that is more than a philosophy but is not a religion.” One wonders in what sense a “lifestance” is more than a philosophy but other than a religion.

Such a statement seems to involve little more than playing around with the ambiguities of language and, thereby, making claims that can't be spelled out in clear, defensible terms. To contend that Humanism is a lifestance and, therefore, neither a philosophy nor a religion tends to ignore an obvious question ... namely, if the Humanist lifestance is neither a philosophy nor a religion, then, what is it and from whence does it derive the sort of intellectual and moral authority that would warrant anyone, or everyone, to subscribe to its tenets?

Chaplain Epstein claims that: "Faith in God means believing absolutely in something, with no proof whatsoever. Faith in humanity means believing absolutely in something with a huge amount of proof to the contrary." To claim that people who have faith in God believe in something with no proof whatsoever is an attempt to reduce to nothingness the life experiences of people who believe ... it is an attempt to claim that because Humanists don't recognize something as a proof, then, that something has no probative value ... it is an attempt by Humanists to set themselves up as the arbiters of what is true and what is not true ... and, even more importantly, it is an attempt to try to frame what human experiences have probative value and what human experiences don't have probative value. And, unfortunately, many individuals who believe in religion of one sort or another are often guilty of doing the same sort of thing.

Furthermore, one also would like to know just what is meant by the claim that Humanists have faith in humanity despite a great deal of evidence to indicate that such faith is not warranted. Just what is it in human beings that Humanists have faith in and how and where did this something come into being? Can Humanists prove that whatever dimension of being human in which they have faith came into existence and derived its potential from something other than Divinity?

For Humanists to claim that they want to do whatever they do without the idea of God raises a question ... and it is a question that must also be asked, as well, of anyone who believes in religion of some kind. To what extent are one's beliefs delusional in nature ... that is, to what extent do one's beliefs stray from the truth of things ... for that is what a delusion is ... a belief that is false ... a belief that does not accurately reflect the actual nature of reality.

We all have our values, purposes, meanings, reasons, principles, and moral systems. Yet, we all lack the sort of definitive proof that would permit us to demonstrate to the satisfaction of any other presumably reasonable person that our values, purposes, meanings, reasons, principles, and systems of morality accurately reflect the actual nature of reality.

If there is no afterlife, then, what someone believes in this life has no causal relation to what transpires after we die. Irrespective of what we believe, we disappear into the abyss of non-existence, and that is the end of the matter.

If there is no God, then, talking about the good life is just an exercise in arbitrariness in which one tries to justify – without having any universally defensible basis for doing so – one’s own lonely, desperate need to have a sense of existential value, purpose, and meaning. This remains true independently of whether our definition of the good life is rooted in a religious or non-religious perspective.

However, if there is an afterlife and if there is a God, then what follows? Actually, nothing automatically or necessarily follows.

What becomes critical is discovering the truth – to whatever extent this can be done -- concerning the nature of the afterlife and the existence of God. Truth is not about having theories, hypotheses, speculations, opinions, beliefs, or a lifestance with respect to those matters ... truth is a matter of accurate knowledge and understanding concerning reality.

Unfortunately, most of us are steeped in ignorance when it comes to the truth about the ultimate nature of reality. Even the precision of this or that science or the promises of this or that theology is helpless when it comes to answering what, if anything, existence is all about.

If I wanted to know what energy a certain species of sub-atomic particle might have when it engages in a certain kind of interaction with some other kind of particle, I would ask a quantum physicist. If I wanted to know about the nature of a given religious perspective with which I was unfamiliar, I would ask a theologian who knew about those matters.

However, when it comes to the ultimate nature of existence, scientists, humanists, and theologians are as ignorant as the rest of us

are. Yet, depending on how open to a free-flowing dialog a given scientist, humanist, or theologian might be, I would be prepared to constructively explore with them what our collective options might be in the face of that sort of ignorance and uncertainty.



Chapter 5: Conceptual Viruses

Approximately six years ago, Darrel W. Ray wrote a book entitled: *The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture*. The title is relatively fatuous – that is, silly and pointless -- since one could have substituted a great many words for “God” and “Religion” and said something equally provocative, ambiguous, and argumentative.

For example, the title of Dr. Ray’s book could have been: *‘The Science Virus: How Technical Information Infects Our Lives and Culture’*, or: *‘The Philosophy Virus: How Conceptual Thinking Infects Our Lives and Culture’*, or, perhaps, the title could have been: *‘The Government Virus: How Politics Infects Our Lives and Culture’* and, finally, the title might have been: *‘The Education Virus: How Schooling Infects Our Lives and Culture’*. There are many problems that permeate science, philosophy, politics, and education – as well as religion -- and all these problems often seem to propagate themselves in a viral-like manner that has the potential to destructively affect the lives of millions of people as well as problematically shape the properties of many cultural institutions, and, yet, one is inclined to feel that all those titles tend to cast too broad a net to capture much of value.

The problem is not God and religion, per se, any more than the problem is: Science and technical information, per se, or: Philosophy and thinking, or government and politics, or education and schooling per se. The real problem is what goes on in the minds, hearts, and souls of certain individuals as those activities impact the lives of other people in constructive or destructive ways.

If Dr. Ray, or anyone else, wishes to argue that the manner in which some individuals engage the idea of God and/or religion leads, all too frequently, to considerable harm and tragedy, then those observers won’t get an argument from me concerning those sorts of claims ... any more than they would get an argument from me if those commentators were to make similar critical comments concerning how the manner in which certain people engage science, philosophy, politics and education leads, all too frequently, to considerable harm and tragedy manifesting themselves in the lives of other individuals.

However, Dr. Ray does not appear to be interested in treating his subject matter with some degree of equanimity. Instead, he seems intent on trying to argue that God and religion are inherently evil ...

that they are part of a parasitic disease process that constitutes a clear and present danger to the health of individual human beings as well as civilization in general.

Dr. Ray states that: “Religious dogma, habit, beliefs, or guilt may affect you in ways you may not recognize.” One could just as easily state that: Scientific, philosophical, political and educational “dogma, habit, beliefs, or guilt may affect you in ways you may not recognize.”

According to the aforementioned author, his book has been inspired by the work of, among others, Richard Dawkins who introduced the idea of “viruses of the mind” in relation to issues involving God and religion. Dr. Ray, however, wants to build on the work of Dawkins by illustrating how mental viruses operate in the midst of everyday life ... for instance, he believes that the conceptual virus paradigm can account for the existence of fundamentalism in this or that family member, or can account for why this or that minister, rabbi, imam, priest, guru, Buddhist teacher, and so on engages in sexual abuse of his or her parishioners, or can explain why someone would be willing to blow herself or himself up in a crowded Baghdad market.

I wonder if the paradigm being alluded to by Dr. Ray can explain why individuals who are driven by this or that fanatical view of economics (whether communist, socialist, or capitalistic) are willing to impose devastation upon millions of people in order to satisfy the tenets of their economic dogmas, or explain why scientists insist they have the right to explore and invent whatever they like without having to take responsibility for the destructive ramifications of their discoveries upon the rest of society, or why Western governments feel they have the right to destabilize, if not, ruin, countries around the world in order to advance the agenda of corporations, or why members of Congress would be willing to pass legislation – such as the Patriot Act – that they haven’t even read.

Dr. Ray has received a doctorate in education. Yet, he seems oblivious to how reductionistic, simplistic, and problematic his conceptual virus paradigm is.

Do some people misunderstand and misapply various facets of religion? Sure they do, but this is also true with respect to the way

many people problematically understand and apply: Politics, technology, education, philosophy, science, law, and economics.

One can identify the nature of the common theme running through the issues – religious and otherwise -- confronting human beings by looking in the mirror. The central problem is not God or religion – or any other idea – but, rather, the source of humanity’s difficulties lies within each of us.

Dr. Ray wants to wag his finger – and cluck his tongue -- at God and religion in a disapproving manner. Never for a second does he appear to consider the possibility that his understanding of things might be part of the problem.

Human beings are complex creatures. They are beset with a conflicting array of: Anxieties, fears, doubts, desires, hopes, concerns, jealousies, beliefs, ideas, hatreds, needs, possibilities, uncertainties, likes, dislikes, informational claims, weaknesses, strengths, abilities, interests, talents, physical issues, and opportunities, as well as an array of: Familial, community, institutional, historical, and national influences.

The impact of the foregoing array of themes with respect to shaping and coloring the contours of lived life often play a substantial role in determining how one engages the idea of God and religion ... as well as how one engages the ideas of: Politics, economics, education, society, law, philosophy, and science. Our ideas about God and religion are – to some extent – as much a function of the many forces impinging on us and running through our consciousness (individually and collectively) as the latter forces are a function of the religious filters through which they are processed.

Dr. Ray indicates that: “Some very scary people are preaching hatred and intolerance”, and, he proceeds to quote from a number of religious leaders to support his contention. He says very little, if anything, about how many political, legal, military, educational, financial, media, scientific, and corporate leaders are preaching their own forms of enmity and intolerance to advance agendas that have the same kind of destructive impact on people as will the allegedly religious people to whom Dr. Ray refers.

Supposedly, according to Dr. Ray, one can run experiments that demonstrate how every prophetic religion involves the presence of a god virus that undermines a person's capacity for critical thought. Or, more precisely, according to Dr. Ray, the nature of prophetic religions is such that they enhance an individual's capacity to be able to critique the splinters in the eyes of other religious traditions while remaining blind with respect to the beams in their own spiritual orientation.

Actually, the problem to which Dr. Ray alludes is not restricted to religious circles. It is a problem that is present in any kind of hermeneutical activity that seeks to point out how all other system of ideas are inferior relative to one's own hermeneutical perspective.

Indeed, Dr. Ray occupies himself with pointing out the many failings of this or that religious perspective while he fails to critically analyze his own claims. He describes how religion is capable of commandeering a person's capacity for critical thought, and, yet, any system of thought is capable of doing this if an individual permits it ... and Dr. Ray has permitted a nonreligious hermeneutic to commandeer his own capacity for critical thought.

Dr. Ray claims neurological experiments have demonstrated that spiritual experiences can be generated through electrical and chemical stimulation of the brain. He further argues that Dr. Timothy Leary's experiments with LSD and the use of Peyote by certain Native American peoples have proven that mystical experiences are nothing more than a function of the way the brain reacts to various forms of stimulation.

Actually, Dr. Ray is a tad premature in the manner in which he equates chemical stimulation of the brain with mystical experiences. If someone ingests peyote or LSD, or any number of other possibilities, and, then, experiences some sort of altered state of consciousness, has that person necessarily had a mystical experience?

Doesn't one, first, have to establish a baseline for what constitutes a mystical experience? Doesn't one also have to be able to establish whether it might be possible to have an altered state of consciousness that is not necessarily mystical in nature? ... Or, is any episode of drunken Delirium Tremens in which a person believes he or she is conversing with God or the Devil to count as a mystical experience?

If one likes, one can interpret or filter an altered state of consciousness through spiritual lenses. However, this does not mean that such an experience necessarily reflects, or gives expression to, some truth that exists independently of one's interpretational framework.

Have experiments been done in which the brains of individuals were stimulated in one way or another, and that stimulation resulted in an altered state of consciousness – in other words, an experience or set of experiences that is of a non-ordinary nature? Yes, those sorts of experiments have been conducted, but it is anyone's guess as to what the actual significance of those experiences is.

Some people are less epistemologically cautious than they should be when they label chemically based experiences as being mystical or spiritual in nature. Other individuals – such as Dr. Ray – are less epistemologically cautious than they should be when they try to equate chemically based experiences with the possibility of mystical events.

According to Dr. Ray, once an individual undergoes a conversion experience, then having a rational discussion about the irrational dimensions of that orientation becomes next to impossible to accomplish. While acknowledging the possibility that the experience of religious conversion might not be what the person undergoing that kind of an experience believes is the case – namely, that she or he has come in direct contact with absolute reality in some sense – nonetheless, similar problems arise in conjunction with almost any experience or set of experiences that have a profound impact on a person's ideas about reality.

In other words, once a person commits to a particular point of view, that individual often becomes quite defensive about, and resistant to, anyone beginning to raise questions concerning the rational tenability of this or that aspect of that sort of a commitment. One could substitute politics, science, philosophy, economics, psychology, athletics, law, drugs, sex, or sociology for religion, and the individual who has undergone some sort of associated conversion experience will tend to become uneasy when someone comes along and begins to suggest that the basis of one's commitments to this or that perspective – religious or nonreligious -- seem rather irrational.

Among many other things, Dr. Ray seems to fail to grasp the possibility that requiring human experience and reality to answer to the tenets of rationality is, itself, a possibly irrational perspective. After all, we don't know what the nature of reality is or what makes such a reality possible, so why automatically assume that reality can be fully and properly parsed or probed by the principles of rationality.

Moreover, people's definition of what constitutes rationality often tends to be little more than a reflection of their own beliefs concerning the nature of reality. Indeed, quite frequently for many individuals, anything that strays from one's adopted perspective is considered, *ipso facto*, to be irrational in nature.

We often ask ourselves how someone could possibly believe this or that idea or how someone possibly could consider a given belief to be rational. Yet, the obstacles to achieving such an understanding are, all too frequently, a function of the structure, limits, and properties of our own beliefs and might have little, or nothing, to do with degree of rationality or irrationality of someone else's point of view.

In his book: *The God Virus*, Dr. Ray describes a journey that took him from: (1) Growing up in a fundamentalist, religious environment; (2) attending a religiously based undergraduate program, and (3) obtaining some advanced degrees at institutions that were shaped, to some extent, by a certain religious perspective. He further indicates that he converted from a religious perspective to an agnostic position when he was in his 30s, before becoming a full-fledged atheist by the time he was 40.

Isn't it possible that Dr. Ray has allowed his own life journey to shape his ideas about religious and nonreligious issues? Isn't it possible that Dr. Ray has permitted his own conversion to atheism to filter, color, and shape the way he looks at religion? Isn't it possible that Dr. Ray's commitment to an atheistic orientation renders him emotionally, conceptually, and evidentially resistant to any possibility suggesting that the basis of his atheism might not be as sound as he supposes?

Isn't it possible that someone might come along and critically examine Dr. Ray's process of going from religious belief to, first, agnosticism, and, then, atheism, and, in the process, point out the many irrationalities that might characterize that sort of a journey and

conversion process? Isn't it possible that Dr. Ray might become defensive when various decisions made during his life journey are exposed to critical examination and the point made that however well-considered he feels his decisions were concerning this or that religious tradition, nonetheless, there might be many things that Dr. Ray failed to consider adequately during his decision process?

I've gone through my own experiences of spiritual abuse and, therefore, to a degree, I do understand many of the issues that surround and permeate the sorts of life experiences encountered by someone like Dr. Ray during his journey from religious belief to atheism. However, just because my experience with one, allegedly, religious group might have been problematic, this doesn't make all talk of religion and God necessarily irrational or resistant to being probed – to whatever extent this is possible -- through rational forms of analysis.

In many ways, the content of Dr. Ray's book seems to indicate that he went in search of experiential data that was consistent with his conversion to atheism, just as many people often go in search of experiential data that is consistent with their conversion to this or that religious perspective. Dr. Ray considers his conversion process to be an entirely rational endeavor, and one that makes sense to him ... just as those who undergo a religious conversion feel that everything they are thinking about, experiencing, and feeling with respect to their lives carries its own sense of justified meaning and purpose.

As indicated previously, within the pages of: *The God Virus: How Religion Infects our Lives and Culture*, Dr. Ray doesn't appear to engage in a process of questioning his own ideas, theories, claims, beliefs, and values to the same extent – if at all – that he goes about doing with respect to an array of religious ideas, theories, claims, beliefs, and values. His discussions seem skewed by a set of nonreligious values and principles that he does not apply to his own perspective in any sort of rigorously critical manner.

There is much that can be justifiably criticized in relation to the manner in which various people engage religion. However, there also is much that can be justifiably criticized in the manner through which nonreligious people engage existence as well.

The issue should not be whether, or not, something is religious or nonreligious. The issue should be: To what extent does that something give expression to the truth, and how does one go about trying to determine what is, and is not, true ... to whatever extent this can be done.

Dr. Ray argues that: "Virtually all religions rely upon early childhood indoctrination as the prime infection strategy. Other infectious strategies include proselytizing ... providing educational opportunities to religious institutions," and so on. Almost all parents seek to instill their values and beliefs – whether religious or nonreligious – in their children, and, therefore, indoctrination of one kind or another is not an activity that is restricted to just religious families.

Dr. Ray's book: *The God Virus: How Religion Infects our Lives and Culture* gives expression to a process of proselytizing in which he seeks to persuade his readers to adopt his point of view and abandon anything that hints of religious commitment or to reinforce a nonreligious point of view. Furthermore many nonreligious people attempt to shape the minds and hearts of other human beings through educational opportunities just as religious people do.

It is foolish for Dr. Ray to criticize the religiously inclined with respect to their tactics of indoctrination, proselytizing, and using educational opportunities to infect people with the virus of religiosity. What Dr. Ray is doing in his book is foolish because the discussion in that book ignores the fact that he, himself, is engaged in a similar sort of activity since he seeks to infect people with his own nonreligious ideas, feelings, and beliefs ... although, quite likely, he would not agree that he is engaged in those activities because he believes he is stressing the importance of reason, critical reflection, science, and so on ... and, yet, all the while he is busily engaged in creating, arguing for, and informing people about his own version of the viral process.

At one point in his book, Dr. Ray states: "When a religion infects a person (a "host" in biological terms), it immediately begins creating antibodies against competing viruses." As a result, according to Dr. Ray, people rarely switch to a religion that is different from the one into which they were initiated as children.

I grew up in a Christian environment. I went to Sunday school on a regular basis, and I was fairly active in the denominational church that I attended.

Growing up, I think I had relatively brief contact with one boy who was Jewish and whose family lived in our town for a short while before moving on, and, as well, I had limited contact with a boy that belonged to the Church of the Latter Day Saints. I was the best friend of the son of my next-door neighbor, and I never knew whether my friend had any religious beliefs or attended any kind of religious institution.

The topic never came up. I never asked him about those sorts of matters, nor did he broach those topics with me.

I knew little, or nothing, about Islam during my formative years. Perhaps, the closest I came to Islam was through some of the movies that featured characters drawn from the 1001 Tales of the Arabian Nights.

I started university with the idea of becoming a minister. Although John Harvard founded the university I attended and did so for purposes of providing young men with an opportunity for acquiring a sound, but religiously oriented form of higher education, Harvard is hardly an institution that seeks to indoctrinate people into becoming Christians, nor do they proselytize Christianity, but, instead, like any good, liberal college, they offer an array of different points of view – both religious and nonreligious.

Neither my parents, nor the people in my immediate neighborhood, nor my grammar school, nor my Sunday school, nor any of the sermons that I attended indoctrinated me to reject: Judaism, the Church of the Latter Day Saints, or my next-door friend who turned out to be an atheist.

My father believed in God, but he was not someone who attended church. However, he supported my mother in whatever way he could ... which included, among other things, showing up, for Christmas Eve services, and driving my mother to and from the church to which she belonged for whatever events or activities might be taking place in connection with her commitment to that congregation.

The foregoing religious differences between my mother and father were on obvious display within many aspects of family life. However, those differences were never discussed ... at least not in my presence.

I accompanied my mother to church. My older brother did not attend church.

I can't remember any occasion when I was growing up during which I voiced the question: How come I have to go to church, but my older brother does not? Everyone within the family seemed to go in his or her own preferred direction when it came to religious orientation.

Many of my friends – who lived in another part of the town in which I grew up -- were Catholic. I was not.

My mother let me hang out with those kids. She also permitted me to attend mass with them on several occasions.

I had no idea about the religious affiliation of any of the people in my immediate neighborhood. All I knew is that they didn't attend the same church that I did.

The first Muslim that I knowingly met was an inmate at a private psychiatric facility where I was working between my third and fourth year of university. Since he pretty much kept to himself, I never really talked with him.

I knew next to nothing about Islam when I came in contact with the person who would become my spiritual guide. I had read a few Western takes on the Sufi path, but these books were often caught up with talking about spiritual powers and mystical visions, so, Islam, itself, got lost in the shuffle.

I have no doubt – especially today – that there are many families, neighborhoods, places of worship, and schools that take a dim view of anything other than their own brand of spirituality (and this holds true across spiritual traditions). Nevertheless, I also know there are many families, neighborhoods, places of worship, and schools that seek to promote interfaith dialog, tolerance, harmony, and spiritual cooperation.

I know the latter statement is true because I grew up under those sorts of conditions. Furthermore, I don't think I am the only person to go through such a set of life circumstances because there have been millions of people who grew up within the context of one religious

tradition and, then, at some point in their life converted to another, seemingly quite different spiritual tradition.

If the processes of indoctrination and proselytizing were as complete and pervasive as Dr. Ray tries to suggest in his book, I don't believe there would have been as much movement across spiritual lines as has occurred during the last 50-60 years. One also might keep in mind that among those who appear to have become most strident in their attempts to indoctrinate and proselytize others are people such as: Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Darrel Ray, and the recently deceased Christopher Hitchens who claim that they only are attempting to defend their own view of things through their talks and writings but who often do so with a great deal of unnecessary and unhelpful negativity toward anything of a religious nature.

It is like what politicians do in relation to negative advertising. More specifically, since those politicians can't convincingly show that what they believe is true or constitutes a viable solution to social problems, then they often adopt a strategy of trying to paint their opponents (in this case religious believers) as: Hypocrites, irrational fools, indoctrinated parasites, and delusional mental cases.

Some people seem to believe that techniques of negative advertising concerning those who are religiously inclined prove that atheism is right. After all, if one can point out errors and inconsistencies in the thinking and writing of this or that religiously inclined individual, then, surely this constitutes a form of proof that supports the claims of atheists.

Nothing could be further from the truth. If atheists want to win the day, so to speak, then, they must advance arguments that conclusively demonstrate that God does not exist, and atheists can't do this ... all they can do is point out possible errors and mistakes in the thinking and writing of this or that religiously oriented individual.

Many atheists point to the discoveries of science as indicating that we live in a natural world that operates in accordance with the principles that have been uncovered by science. However, if one pursues those matters with any degree of rigorous detail, then neither: Evolution, physics nor neurobiology is capable of tenably accounting for the origins of the universe, life, consciousness, intelligence,

memory, reason/logic, language, creativity, or talent without generating an array of problems and unanswered questions.

At best the aforementioned sort of negative advertising might, or might not, constitute a legitimate criticism involving the beliefs of a particular person. At worst, those tactics do little more than demonstrate to an array of people that nonreligious individuals who become preoccupied with techniques of negative advertising and propaganda are really not all that different from the hateful, bigoted, fundamentalists – of whatever spiritual orientation -- whom they love to quote and, then, rail against.

If someone believes that atheism constitutes a true reflection of reality, then, that person should state the case for atheism. Becoming bogged down in a campaign of negative advertising against this or that religiously inclined individual does nothing to constructively advance the cause of atheists.

If someone wishes to be an atheist, that is her or his choice. If someone wishes to be a Christian, Taoist, Jew, Druid, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, or adopt some form of Native Spirituality, then that is a person's choice.

I am not God, and I have no idea how any of this will work out for others or myself. God – assuming Divinity exists and I do assume this -- can accept or reject anyone Divinity likes ... or, so, I am inclined to believe.

Exploring issues of rationality, consistency, evidence, science, and the like is one thing. However, starting a process of exploration with biases about what constitutes rationality, consistency, evidence, and science is another matter altogether ... and this remains true irrespective of whether those biases are religious or nonreligious in nature.

Early on in *The God Virus*, Dr. Ray outlines a thought experiment that he feels demonstrates the manner in which the god virus leaves the skill of critical thinking intact in relation to other religions but disables critical thinking about one's own religion." (page 19) In his thought experiment he wants the reader to imagine talking with a deeply devoted Christian friend who is a well-educated, knowledgeable individual, and during the course of that discussion,

the reader and his or her Christian friend agree that, among other things, Muhammad (peace be upon him) claimed to have talked with God and that he claimed that all other prophets are false.

Even if one wishes to operate from a perspective in which one considers Islam to be false and one wishes to believe that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was delusional when it came to religious issues, one should get the facts of one's thought experiment right ... something that Dr. Ray can't seem to accomplish in the present case. For example, contrary to Dr. Ray's thought experiment, Muhammad (peace be upon him) never claimed that all other prophets are false or claimed that he talked with God, and Dr. Ray cannot put forth any evidence that those sorts of claims were ever made by Muhammad (peace be upon him).

If one likes, one can choose to believe that Muhammad (peace be upon him) wrote the Qur'an rather than believe that God, somehow, placed the contents of that book in the mind, heart, and soul of Muhammad (peace be upon him), but, irrespective of what one believes in the foregoing respect, nonetheless, nowhere in the Qur'an – a book that Muhammad (peace be upon him) supposedly wrote according to the belief systems of some individuals (such as Dr. Ray) -- does the claim appear that God talked with Muhammad (peace be upon him) or that Muhammad (peace be upon him) claimed that all other prophets were false. In fact in the latter instance a number of individuals are mentioned in the Qur'an (e.g., Abraham, Lot, Joseph, Isaac, David, Moses, and Jesus ... peace be upon them all) that are recognized within either Christianity or Judaism (or, sometimes, both), and the Qur'an describes those individuals as being spiritually authentic individuals.

On a few occasions, Muhammad (peace be upon him) talked about the experience of revelation. Sometimes he talked about how the experience of revelation occurred in the presence of Archangel Gabriel (peace be upon him), and on other occasions he talked about how the experience of revelation was preceded by the ringing of bells or, sometimes, he indicated that he felt a tremendous pressure or weight upon him during the process of revelation, but he never said that God spoke with him ... rather, the descriptions were about the experience of revelation.

The contents of the Qur'an appeared in the consciousness of Muhammad (peace be upon him). The source of those contents might be a matter of dispute, and the process through which those contents appeared in his consciousness might be the subject of disagreement among various individuals, but the contents, themselves, are not at issue, and those contents do not state that Muhammad (peace be upon him) claimed other prophets were false or that God spoke with him.

During the course of Dr. Ray's thought experiment that is being outlined here, Dr. Ray asks the reader to imagine that she or he agrees with the Christian friend that: "Muslims did not choose their religion, they were born into it." This facet of the imagined thought experiment is factually incorrect ... and not just in a small way.

I was not born into Islam, but, instead, I chose it (or, maybe, it chose me). There are millions of other individuals like me in this respect, and, therefore, the foregoing dimension of the thought experiment (i.e., that Muslims do not choose their religion but are born into it) is incorrect in millions of instances.

In fact, the aspect of the thought experiment that is being described in these pages is even questionable when it comes to Dr. Ray's own experience. He was born into a fundamentalist Christian family/community, and, yet, he managed to break free from those sorts of forces and chose to move in a different conceptual direction, and millions of other individuals have managed to do so as well ... indicating that people are born into many kinds of viral environments - both religious and nonreligious -- but still manage to overcome whatever kind of conceptual viral infection might have infected them and - for better or worse - become, to varying degrees, their own person.

What is the point of devising a thought experiment that is contrafactual in so many respects? One might suppose that if a thought experiment is going to be effective, then its central assumptions, precepts and themes should be relatively problem free, and this does not appear to be the case as far as Dr. Ray's current thought experiment is concerned.

Of course, Dr. Ray might wish to argue that the foregoing issues are irrelevant to the real heart of the thought experiment that he is asking his readers to imagine because the point he purportedly wishes

to make is what happens when the reader produces a transcript of the foregoing conversation with his or her Christian friend in which the name Jesus (peace be upon him) appears wherever Muhammad (peace be upon him) appeared in the original discussion, and the reader is instructed to carefully observe the reaction of his or her Christian friend as the latter individual reads through the altered transcript and realizes that, now, his or her own religion is being critiqued as being delusional, absurd, and so on.

According to Dr. Ray, if the reader's Christian friend becomes defensive, argumentative, and the like when reading the revised transcript of the earlier discussion, then, from Dr. Ray's point of view, such a defensive, argumentative reaction serves to provide evidence concerning the manner in which the god virus impacts someone's capacity to think critically. More specifically, according to Dr. Ray, while the god virus does not undermine one's capacity for critical thinking with respect to the religions of other individuals, nonetheless, that virus "... disables critical thinking about one's own religion." (page 19)

Actually, the entire thought experiment being introduced by Dr. Ray displays an absence of critical thinking. In addition to the sort of factually challenged aspects already noted, Dr. Ray's thought experiment suffers from several other difficulties.

For example, he wants the reader to imagine talking to a Christian friend and agreeing that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was delusional in his thinking and, consequently, was someone who made ludicrous claims ... such as flying to Jerusalem and to heaven on a horse. If we leave aside such issues as: (1) the steed in question (Buraq) was horse-like rather than necessarily being a horse and, as well, (2) that the ascent to the heavens was described as being conducted through a separate means of transport, one can raise a further question - namely, how does Dr. Ray, his reader, or the imaginary friend know that the mysterious journey being described by Muhammad (peace be upon him) didn't take place?

Dr. Ray appears to presume that if something sounds ludicrous and absurd to him, or his reader, or his imagined Christian friend, then that 'something' must, in fact, be ludicrous or absurd. There is no evidence that is put forth by Dr. Ray to demonstrate the ludicrous,

absurd nature of the aforementioned journey to Jerusalem and heaven ... the only 'evidence' that is put forward involves nothing more than Dr. Ray's claims of absurdity concerning such a possibility, and, therefore, one wonders why one automatically should accept Dr. Ray's version of reality rather than that of Muhammad (peace be upon him)?

According to Dr. Ray, a conceptual virus exists that permits an individual to see the presumed errors afflicting other conceptual frameworks while, simultaneously, interfering with that same individual's ability to exercise the faculty of critical thinking with respect to her or his own belief system. If what Dr. Ray says in this respect is true, then a good case can be made that indicates how he might be suffering from just that kind of a conceptual virus because Dr. Ray seems unconcerned with the fact that he has absolutely no evidence to demonstrate that his ideas about Muhammad (or Jesus ... peace be upon them both) are correct and, yet, he uncritically seeks to leverage his presumptions in this regard as a means of framing his thought experiment.

By making the foregoing observations, I am not trying to show what the truth of the matter is. Rather, I am merely pointing out that Dr. Ray is approaching various issues – in the present case, a thought experiment -- without ever critically reflecting on his own judgments concerning the issues being discussed.

The fact that Dr. Ray considers something to be absurd, ludicrous, or delusional does not, in and of itself, necessarily make that 'something' absurd, ludicrous or delusional. The fact that other individuals might agree with Dr. Ray in conjunction with those matters does not, in and of itself, automatically render something absurd, ludicrous, or delusional.

We are more than 1400 years removed from the time of Muhammad (peace be upon him). Did Muhammad (peace be upon him) experience the things he claimed to have experienced ... such as, revelation, the trip to Jerusalem, an ascent through the heavens, and so on?

Human beings today accept the idea that jet planes are real (even if most of us do not understand the technical intricacies that make that sort of a phenomenon possible), but we know little, or nothing, about whether – as was claimed some 1400 years, or so, ago – a mystical

steed existed that, allegedly, was capable of transporting someone from Mecca to Jerusalem, and back, in a single night. How does one go about figuring out the likelihood that there might be modalities of reality that are as far removed – if not more so -- from the understanding of modern human beings as a knowledge of jets is removed from the understanding of people who lived during the time of Muhammad (peace be upon him)?

When I was a junior in high school, the high school basketball team, of which I was a member, played a group of former players who previously had graduated from our school. It was known as the ‘Old Timers Game’.

The game was intended to be all in good fun and served as a way of raising money for the school. The games – when they were held – usually attracted several hundred people from the community.

The atmosphere of the Old Timer’s games was a little like that which used to hover about the games that used to be held between the Harlem Globetrotters and the Washington Generals. In other words, there were a variety of pranks mixed in amidst some stretches of serious basketball.

During the game that I am describing, there came a time when the high school team called a timeout, and during this interim period, one of the pranks dreamed up by the Old Timers was to ‘surreptitiously’ place a rebound rim inside of the basket at which the high school team was shooting.

Of course, everybody, including the high school players, was in on the prank. Therefore, things were not as surreptitious as was being acted out by the ‘crafty’ Old Timers in conjunction with the ‘clueless’ high school players.

The whole idea of a rebound rim is to provide players with an opportunity to improve their rebounding skills. When that kind of a rim is put in place, then, unless one is doing a layup – and even then -- scoring a basket becomes very, very, very difficult.

When the time out ended, the high school team had possession. The ball was inbounded to me, and while being guarded, I drove near to a corner point where the baseline meets the out-of-bounce line that runs down the length of the floor, and I took a right-handed hook shot.

The ball arced through the air, and, eventually, reached, and, then, went through, the rebound rim that had been placed inside the basket's rim. Since I played in an era when there was no three-point line, I only got two points for my effort ... plus a lot of looks of disbelief and head-shaking from the Old Timers.

The shot took place some 55-years ago. Many of the people in the crowd on that occasion – as well as players on both sides of the game -- have since passed on into the unknown. So, I'm not sure one could track down anyone who might have been at that game (whether fan or player) who remembers what transpired on that occasion. (There were no local papers or television stations to report on things or record them for posterity).

So, the question is this: Did things happen at that game in the way I have described them? Did I sink an all-but-seemingly-impossible basketball shot?

Someone could, of course, perform an experiment and have different people come to a given basketball venue and, without anyone being extended an opportunity to practice the shot (and I assure you that I had never taken a hook shot from the corner), offer each of them a chance to sink a corner hook shot with a rebound rim in place. In fact, if one liked and could afford it, one might even invite some professional players to take the shot under the foregoing conditions.

Would anybody sink that shot? Despite the fact I have seen people such as LeBron James sink, in succession, a number of court length shots, and, as well, I have seen other players (past and present) do various incredible feats of basketball magic, I wonder if any of the participants in the imaginary experiment would be able to repeat my high school shot.

I am one-for-one in that category. More than half a century ago, I decided to retire with a perfect record intact, but, of course, I have more than a few doubts about whether – had I continued taking shots under similar circumstances – if I ever would have been able to duplicate that shot -- even if I spent the rest of my life trying to replicate it.

Let's assume, for the sake of argument, thousands of people – both pro and amateur -- take the 'Whitehouse, rebound rim, corner hook

shot challenge,' but no one is able to make the shot with the one chance that she or he is given. Does this constitute evidence that I'm telling a tall tale?

What if someone did a series of intricate calculations concerning angles, trajectories, velocities, areas, volumes, and so on and, thereby, demonstrated that, under certain circumstances, a corner hook shot could go through a rebound rim placed inside a basket rim. Or, much more simply, what if someone merely placed a basketball on a rebound rim and showed that a properly inflated basketball could fit through the hole of the latter device.

Would the foregoing sorts of demonstrations serve as evidence that my foregoing story was true? Well, those calculations and tests might show that a ball actually could fit the rebound rim, but that information would not constitute evidence that my story was true ... only that under just the right conditions what I claimed took place was consistent with those considerations.

The issue is not about probabilities ... although I am fairly certain that the shot in question is highly improbable. The issue is this: If someone does not know me, and if someone is not in a position to be able to examine (or even find) eyewitness testimony concerning my hook shot claim, and even if someone does decide to conduct some actual experiments concerning the possibility of that kind of a shot, then, how should a person reasonably engage my foregoing claim? Or, what if one were not in a position to run any experiments (as would be the case with respect to the aforementioned mystical steed of 1400 years ago) concerning the possibility of whether, or not, a basketball could fit through a rebound rim, and, as a result, one only had my claim to reflect upon?

Nothing really rests on whether, or not, my story is true. I am not claiming - although some might wish to do so - that my shot proved God's existence or that it proved God did not exist.

However, what if a great deal was at stake with respect to whether or not I was telling the truth? What if I were a key witness in some sort of trial where someone's life or freedom was at stake, and the defense or prosecution knew about my basketball story, and, therefore, might wish to attack my credibility by arguing that the same person who was testifying on behalf of the defense (or prosecution) was someone who

was claiming that he had made a hook shot from the corner despite a rebound rim having been placed inside a basket's rim? ... Members of the jury (says the defense of prosecution) I ask you whether, or not, such a witness can be believed.

I have no evidence – other than the reported claims made by Muhammad (peace be upon him) – capable of “demonstrating” that the aforementioned events (revelation, the night journey to Jerusalem, etc.) happened in the way Muhammad (peace be upon him) indicates. Dr. Ray has no evidence – other than his own beliefs concerning those matters – capable of “demonstrating” that the aforementioned events described by Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not occur in the way indicated.

I choose to believe Muhammad (peace be upon him), and I choose to consider, but, ultimately, reject what Dr. Ray has to offer in this regard. Could the thinking underlying my choices harbor certain kinds of fragile, fault lines that might slip and, thereby, lead to my understanding of things falling apart under various kinds of evidential consideration?

Yes, I am willing to acknowledge the possibility that some sort of potential error or problem might be lurking in, and around, my thinking with respect to those matters, as well as – possibly -- lurking in, and about, the choices that are associated with such thinking. Consequently, I am constantly reflecting on what I believe and whether, or not, those beliefs give expression to the best sort of understanding I can generate concerning my relationship with Being/Reality.

However, I don't see much, if any, evidence in Dr. Ray's thought experiment that demonstrates his willingness to acknowledge that he might be wrong about his own presumptions concerning those matters. He is like someone who might listen to my corner hook shot story and decides to reject what I am saying because he feels – without any real evidence – that what I am saying lacks credibility as far as his understanding of the way reality works is concerned.

In other words, Dr. Ray seems incapable of critically reflecting on his own presumptions concerning religion and, as a result, he appears to be reluctant to stare into the abyss of existence and wonder if he might have gotten things wrong. Of course, in fairness to Dr. Ray, there

were times in his 30s and 40s when he did stare into the abyss of existence and came to the conclusion that he had gotten things wrong with respect to any number of religious issues.

Nevertheless, now that Dr. Ray has gone through his dark nights of the soul and, as a result, decided to abandon his earlier religious quest, he seems to be of the opinion that nonreligious approaches to reasoning, critical reflection, and science are off-limits when it comes to the issue of questioning the tenability of those perspectives. Yet, anyone who has bothered to read the first three volumes of the *Final Jeopardy* series -- along with the previous 150 pages of the present volume in that series -- will understand that as many questions can be raised about the idea of a nonreligious perspective as can be raised in relation to a religious perspective ... and, consequently, matters are not necessarily as straightforward as Dr. Ray would have his readers believe.

To whatever extent the foregoing observation is correct, then, Dr. Ray would seem to have succumbed to the ravages of a nonreligious strain of the sort of virus that he is exploring in his book. This is because -- as a result of his nonreligious orientation -- he appears to be unwilling to engage -- or, perhaps, is incapable of engaging -- his own nonreligious ideas with the same degree of critical rigor as he seeks to do in relation to those perspectives with which he disagrees.

For instance, at a certain point during the first chapter of Dr. Ray's book: *The God Virus*, the author states: "What has been called 'mystical' for centuries can now be reproduced in Dr. Blanke's laboratory with electrical probes of the brain." (page 20) The researcher whom Dr. Ray is mentioning is Dr. Olaf Blanke of the Ecole Polytechnique in Lusanne, Switzerland.

Dr. Ray is very vague about the nature of the alleged mystical experiences that -- by merely using electrical stimulation -- have been reproduced in the laboratory. Moreover, Dr. Ray provides no account of what he means by the idea of a mystical experience, and, therefore, we are not in any position to know, whether or not, the experiences to which he is alluding actually constitute mystical events or merely give expression to anomalous states of consciousness that some people -- for arbitrary reasons -- consider to be of a mystical nature.

Should one consider the experiences that gave expression to the Qur'an to be of a mystical nature? Does the sense of enlightenment that the Buddha (may God be pleased with him) is reported to have experienced beneath the Bodhi tree constitute a mystical experience?

What about the Meccan experiences of ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) that, apparently, were so experientially rich that it took thousands of pages for ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) to be able to describe just the surface content of those experiences (and which, for the most part, did not even touch at all upon the modes of understanding that accompanied those surface contents)? Did those descriptions refer to mystical experiences or were they the utterances of a charlatan or someone whose brain had been stimulated, in some unknown fashion, to undergo some form of an anomalous state of consciousness that was due to nothing more than -- as Dr. Ray, would have us believe -- the brain seeking to resolve conflicting modalities of information?

When Jalalu-'d-din Rumi (may God be pleased with him) supposedly went into whirling states of ecstasy during which lines of poetry would come to him that would become part of the Mathnawi, was he undergoing mystical experiences? And what about the possible mystical states of those being alluded to when a friend of my spiritual guide once said words to the effect that there have been so many individuals like Rumi (may God be pleased with him) who have never uttered a word?

For the most part, mystics don't speak about their experiences (my teacher certainly didn't). Therefore, one has to wonder about the reliability of Dr. Ray's claims on behalf of Dr. Blanke's laboratory studies when it comes to considering the issue of whether, or not, what was observed in Dr. Blanke's laboratory actually constituted mystical experiences in any substantive sense.

Even in those cases when individuals have said something concerning allegedly mystical experiences (such as in the case of the Buddha, ibn al-'Arabi, and Rumi ... may God be pleased with them all), I doubt very much that any of the foregoing kinds of experiences were generated through the aforementioned laboratory studies of Dr. Olaf Blanke. After all, if the sort of experiences that were undergone by Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Buddha, ibn al-'Arabi, Rumi

(may God be pleased with them all) and many others were capable of being replicated in the laboratory, one might have anticipated that any number of works similar to the Qur'an, the Mathnawi, the Eight Fold Way, and al Futuhat al-Makkiya (*The Meccan Openings*) might have been produced through means of the experimental studies in the laboratory of Dr. Blanke, but as far as I know, this just has not been the case.

Instead, Dr. Blanke busied himself with inducing certain kinds of feelings, images, colors, forms, sounds, and thoughts that had been reported by someone, somewhere and arbitrarily labeled as being mystical in nature. Whatever was going on in the foregoing laboratory might have had more to do with anomalous and altered states of consciousness that had been misconstrued and mislabeled as constituting genuine mystical states than those studies were engaged in an investigation into actual mystical states and experiences.

All of the foregoing possibilities lead to the following question. How does one know whether a given experience is mystical or not?

This question is a critical one. After all, if an allegedly, mystical experience (or set of those kinds of experiences) gives rise to an understanding that is delusional or pathological in nature because the original experience or experiences did not constitute genuine openings, insights, or revelations concerning deeper levels of truth, then anyone who seeks to comply with that sort of an understanding is very likely, sooner or later, to encounter problems of one kind or another due to the inauthentic nature of the experiences in which that understanding is rooted.

One can introduce further complexities into the foregoing scenario by raising another issue. How does one know whether the problems and difficulties that arise in one's life are a function of an understanding that is delusional or pathological in some way or just due to the sort of challenges that come into everyone's life and give expression to an array of difficulties that need to be addressed and, if possible, overcome by means of one's coping strategy (be it religious or nonreligious) for engaging life ... or, perhaps some combination of the two?



Chapter 6: Suffering

Back in the late 1960s, I saw a movie entitled: *The Shoes of the Fisherman*. Although the film spends much of its time exploring how the main character, Kiril Lakota (played by Anthony Quinn), becomes Pope after being freed from several decades of imprisonment in a Siberian Gulag where, among other things, he had been subjected to what is now euphemistically referred to as “enhanced interrogation” by Piotr Ilyich Kamenev (played by Sir Lawrence Olivier) who goes on to become Premier of the Soviet Union and, then, due to an ironic twist of fate, feels compelled to seek the assistance of the newly anointed Pope in order to try to prevent a looming war with China that is being fueled by poverty and hunger caused by trade sanctions that have been put in place by the United States.

The Shoes of the Fisherman is as good a way as any through which to begin a chapter whose subject matter concerns suffering. For example, as noted above, during several decades of his life, the Kiril Lakota character has suffered through the ordeal of a Gulag, including considerable torture. His friend, Father Telemond, suffers because his ideas are being called into question, and, as a result, Church officials place a gag order on him that he accepts and, yet, at the same time, deeply grieves.

A Pope dies. Father Telemond dies.

Millions of Chinese nationals are experiencing famine. A major war is bearing down on humanity.

Of course, one doesn’t have to resort to fiction in order to address the issue of suffering. All around us in the midst of everyday life, people are born into, live with, and die while suffering.

One of the multiple story lines within the movie concerns the character, Father David Telemond, played by Oskar Werner, who becomes a friend of the man who would become Pope Kiril I. Father Telemond has been writing books that, from the perspective of those who have authority within the church, give expression to ideas that might represent a threat to the faith of Catholics, and at a certain point in the movie, Father Telemond is brought before a council of religious inquiry concerning things he has said and written.

During the interrogation, one of his inquisitors, Cardinal Leone -- played by Leo McKern -- poses the following question to Father Telemond:

“Who is Jesus?” Father Telemond launches into an answer concerning the question, but before he has had much time to respond, news arrives that the current Pope (played by Sir John Gielgud) has collapsed, and, therefore, the meeting is adjourned.

The Father Telemond character is someone who is attempting to pursue questions that he believes are important to each of us. He wants to know if there is: “...any sense in beauty and ugliness, in terror and suffering and in daily death, which makes up the pattern of existence,” and these are the same sorts of issues that -- irrespective of whether they are approached from a religious or nonreligious perspective -- have been pursued by many, if not most, of us.

The Kiril Lakota character from *The Shoes of the Fisherman* reflects many of the qualities that nearly three billion people (both Christian and Muslim) believe were displayed by Jesus (peace be upon him). Among other things, Kiril has endured great suffering, and, yet, his suffering has not undermined his faith ... in fact, that suffering might even have deepened his faith.

Indeed, despite his years of imprisonment, and despite his experiences of torture, Kiril Lakota continues to exhibit qualities of: Devotion, compassion, simplicity, humility, kindness, honesty, spiritual depth, nobility, strength, forgiveness, friendship, courage, tolerance, charitableness, sincerity, and concern for humanity ... all of which are considered to be the sort of qualities that were displayed by Jesus (peace be upon him) ... the model that Kiril Lakota seeks to emulate.

Whether, or not, one believes that a historical Jesus (peace be upon him) existed, there is something within most of us that tends to be activated when we encounter – in films, literature, or real life -- individuals who are able to demonstrate the foregoing sorts of moral excellence in the midst of suffering. Within human beings, there appears to be a sensitivity – whether innate or learned or both – concerning the issue of suffering as well as the aforementioned qualities of moral excellence ... especially when the two become entangled in one way or another

As a Muslim I believe in Jesus (peace be upon him). I do not necessarily share all of the beliefs that many Christians have concerning him, but, nonetheless, I have love for him due to, among other things, the moral excellence he exhibited -- both during everyday life, as well as

during periods of suffering, and, as a result, I am, and have been, moved in essential ways by that example.

The sorts of qualities that were reflected in Jesus (peace be upon him) and the Kiril Lakota character in *The Shoes of the Fisherman* are the same kinds of qualities that I feel are reflected in the character of Muhammad (peace be upon him). They also are the sorts of qualities that I considered to be emanating through the character of many of the great spiritual luminaries of different religious traditions ... from: Black Elk of the Oglala Lakota, to: Milarepa of Tibet, along with Sri Ramana Maharshi of India, Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi of Algeria, and so on.

There are some individuals who use the issue of suffering in an attempt to place God on the horns of a dilemma. More specifically, such people argue that the existence of suffering either demonstrates that: (1) God -- if Divinity exists -- is powerless to stop suffering and, therefore, is not the omnipotent Being that many people suppose and, as a result, perhaps does not deserve our praise and prayers, or, alternatively -- and, perhaps, more problematically -- (2) God actually has the capacity to stop suffering but chooses not to do so, and, consequently, such a God is not worth worshipping ... and, therefore, irrespective of whether, or not, God exists, God is not deserving of human devotion, prayers, resources, concern, or efforts.

Let's reflect on the foregoing dilemma a little more closely. For instance, let's assume that God exists in some sense and that He, She, or It is powerless to do anything about suffering.

If someone is my friend but that friend is powerless to stop my suffering, should I discontinue considering that individual as being my friend simply because he or she can't help me or is not capable of ending my suffering. If I love my friend -- and, perhaps, like most relationships involving love, I might not understand why I feel love for that friend -- should I try to jettison my love for that person simply because he or she can't do what I want him or her to do with respect to my suffering?

Suppose my friend is the quiet sort. In other words, he or she never really says anything to me but just seems to be present as I spew forth my sorrows, pain, doubts, and frustrations. Should my opinion of my friend be altered by the fact that I know that he or she can't do anything for me and, as well, that she or he is not likely to say anything in response to my existential complaints?

What if my friendship with a given individual is based on the question: What can you do for me? Is this much of a friendship?

If I strike up a friendship with someone because I have been led to believe by others that the person is a powerful, rich king of some kind and, then, it turns out, that the individual is a powerless pauper, and, yet, in the meantime, I find that I enjoy being in that person's presence, should I, nonetheless, re-think things and entertain the possibility that I might want to drop this individual as a friend? Is this what the nature of so-called friendship involves: namely, exercises in self-serving arrangements?

If someone is willing to listen to me, have empathy for my troubles, be present with me, and care about what happens to me – even if there is nothing such an individual can do to alleviate my difficulties, then, perhaps, such a situation offers me more than anything for which I might reasonably hope. There are only a very few people who have made appearances in my life that have exhibited the foregoing qualities, and I have considered myself to be very fortunate to have had those people in my life ... even if only for a limited period of time.

Of course, there are those who might wish to interject at this point that all of the foregoing considerations are beside the point. Either, on the one hand, God does not exist, and, therefore, there is no Divinity present who will listen to what I have to say and be capable of befriending me, or, on the other hand, God does exist in some sense, but is incapable of alleviating my suffering, and, therefore, is not worth any consideration.

However, quite independently of whether, or not, God is capable of alleviating my suffering, that issue has no bearing on whether, or not, God exists and is either capable of engaging me or being engaged by me in other ways. Nonreligious people are likely to treat the idea of God's existence in the foregoing sense as being delusional in nature, but they really have no proof that this is the case ... like me, all they have is their heartfelt sense of things, and, perhaps, all that can be said is: Someone is wrong with respect to his or her take on things.

From a mystical point of view, worship is a process of becoming engaged in realizing and appreciating the truth of Being/Reality. The deeper my understanding or degree of realization concerning the nature of Being/Reality becomes, then, the deeper is my modality of worship.

If God exists but God can't do anything for my suffering, why should such a possibility get in the way of my attempt to seek to understand the Reality of Divinity as best as I am able to do according to the truth – whatever it might turn out to be – to which Divinity gives expression in relation to me? This is like saying: If gravity can't do anything to alleviate my suffering, then, I shouldn't try to find out what I can about that dimension of Reality and value it for what it is.

If God exists in some sense but can't alleviate my suffering, then I have discovered something important about the nature of existence. If God exists, in some sense, and can, but won't, alleviate my suffering in some instances or in all cases, then, I also have discovered something important concerning the nature of existence.

If God exists in some sense but does not have the capacity to alleviate my suffering, this still leaves open many other questions concerning the nature of my relationship, if any, with Divinity. If God exists in some sense and has the capacity to alleviate my suffering but chooses not to do so, then, this also leaves open many other questions concerning the possible nature of my relationship, if any, with Divinity.

As omnipresent as suffering seems to be, the reality is that for many – if not most -- of us, suffering is mixed in with intermittent periods of happiness, enjoyment, pleasure, joy, fun, contentment, pleasantness, and the like. If God has given me the capacity for both suffering and happiness, should one not factor into consideration the positive potential of life as well as its more painful possibilities before trying to reach some sort of conclusion about what it all means or why suffering exists and what it might mean if God had the capacity to alleviate suffering but does not do so?

If we wish to complain about the possibility that God could do something with respect to the alleviation of suffering but chooses not to, should we not also complain about the possibility that God has the capacity to interfere with the experience of pleasure/enjoyment, but chooses not to do so? Is the existence of suffering a matter of morality and ethical considerations (based on what?) or is it merely a matter of what we like and dislike?

What if suffering – like pleasure and enjoyment – were a means to an end rather than an end in itself? What if suffering – like pleasure and enjoyment – were merely different facets of one and the same journey or

opportunity that one has to complete before the significance and value of whatever degree of suffering (as well as pleasure and enjoyment) that characterizes such a journey becomes fully understood?

For instance, suppose an employer (athletic coach, teacher, doctor, talent manager, literary agent, spiritual guide, etc.) were to come along and say something to the effect of: "I can help you to work toward realizing your potential, but given what I know about the manner in which the universe operates, I know of no way you will be able to realize that potential except through hard work, pain, difficulty, and suffering. Furthermore, it is entirely possible that if 'you' decide to take me up on my offer, nevertheless, you might not succeed because there is much that depends on what you do, or don't do, as well as how you do it, and, therefore, while I can provide you with the opportunity to realize your potential, nonetheless, I am – for the most part – unwilling (or unable) to control how you go about making your choices or unwilling (or unable) to alleviate whatever suffering you might encounter during your attempt to realize your potential.

How does one weigh the possibility of realizing one's artistic, literary, athletic, commercial, educational, physical, and/or spiritual potential against the possibility of suffering? How does one weigh the value of the opportunity that is being given against the possibility that the one who is offering the opportunity might be unwilling (or unable) to make things easier for one by alleviating any suffering that happens to occur in conjunction with the existential challenge before one?

Every sense of real (rather than pseudo or false) accomplishment contains within it the presence of elements of suffering, difficulty, pain, obstacles, and the like. Oftentimes, the greater the suffering and difficulty that is associated with some given undertaking, the greater is the sense of accomplishment associated with that project.

People who might not have accomplished anything except to survive great suffering often serve as deep sources of inspiration for other human beings and help the latter individuals to carry on amidst the ordinary slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that populate so-called ordinary existence. When the foregoing sort of survival-in-the-face-of-tremendous-suffering is wedded together with the generation of some great work of: Art, literature, humanitarianism, science, inventiveness, commerce, philosophy, peacemaking, courage, nobility, or religion, there are very few

hearts that do not stir with a deep sense of marvel and awe with respect to such stories ... a response that might be absent if not for the presence of the role that suffering serves in such circumstances.

Everything that makes hearts weep with anguish and sorrow concerning human existence is rooted in the presence or possibility of suffering. Everything that makes hearts resonate with a deep sense of gratitude for being able to experience life circumstances involving human accomplishment – whether those accomplishments are little or great -- exists because of the presence and possibility of suffering.

Of course, one might wish to ask: Why can't existence be such that it is devoid of the presence or threat of suffering? Why can't we get whatever we want, whenever we want, without having to deal with the issue of suffering?

We might as well ask: Why does gravity work the way it does rather than in some other fashion? Why do consciousness, intelligence, language, emotion, talent, and so on have the properties they do rather than some other set of properties?

Perhaps suffering -- like gravity, consciousness, creativity, and so on -- gives expression to a dimension of natural law in the universe. Should we suppose that the phenomenon of suffering is different, somehow, from the phenomena of gravity or consciousness as far as being expressions of the way the universe operates is concerned, and irrespective of what one's personal feelings might be concerning whether, or not, one likes the way in which the universe works, or whether, or not, one might be able to do better -- if we actually could grasp what the nature of "better is -- if one had the chance to do so?

One has to deal with the way the universe is rather than how we might hope it would be if only we were in charge. We develop coping strategies because we come to learn -- if we are fortunate enough to do so -- that the universe is other than we might wish it to be, and if we fail to develop such coping strategies, then, suffering is likely to come flowing into our lives.

There are several other considerations that bear upon the issue of what to make of a God who is capable of alleviating suffering but does not do so. One such consideration is the following: Since empirical evidence does exist which is capable of demonstrating that suffering appears to be:

Prevented in some instances, alleviated in many other cases, and even ceases to exist in still further situations, can one necessarily conclude that God has the capacity to alleviate suffering but chooses not to? Wouldn't it be more accurate to say that God – if Divinity exists – might be willing and able to prevent or alleviate suffering in some cases but not necessarily in all cases, and, therefore, the question becomes: Why is suffering prevented or alleviated only in some cases and not in others?

Some individuals might want to run with the foregoing idea and try to argue that suffering is rained down upon the wicked and that an absence of suffering is a sign of God's favor or a sign that God is pleased with those whom who are not touched by suffering. Yet, on the one hand, I can't think of a single instance of great luminaries in any spiritual tradition who did not have to undergo suffering of one kind or another and that such suffering often appeared to play a constructive developmental role in the greatness of those luminaries, while, on the other hand, I can think of any number of historical figures who appeared to be, for the most part, dispensers of suffering for other human beings rather than recipients of such suffering, and this hardly seemed to be because those people were paragons of virtue and goodness.

Suffering need not be about who is naughty and who is nice. Suffering is present in everyone's life and, as such, it might constitute an important dimension of the developmental process in the sense that much depends on what one discovers during the process of learning how to deal with adversity and suffering.

If God exists and if God is able to alleviate suffering but does not always do so, then is it possible that there could be some sort of constructive value that might be derived during the course of suffering, and, therefore, depending on what constructive opportunities are present in any given set of circumstances, there might be times when suffering is permitted to continue whereas there are other occasions when suffering is lessened or removed altogether? One might not know why an athletic coach causes one to suffer during practice, but the wisdom of the coach's actions could become apparent during actual game situations, or one might not know why a music teacher is so demanding until, one day, one begins to perform with considerable artistry.

Naturally, an athletic coach or music teacher who lacks respect for her or his charges, or lacks kindness, forgiveness, compassion, love, and

the like with respect to the way in which the coach or teacher engages his or her students is likely to cause unnecessary suffering. Under those circumstances, one might define unnecessary suffering as that which has nothing to do with serving the purpose of acquiring competence or excellence with respect to athletics or music.

Is God causing people unnecessary suffering when, despite Divinity's capacity to alter things, God chooses not to step in and prevent, alleviate, or stop suffering? If one does not understand the nature of Being/Reality, one is hardly in a position to know what constitutes necessary and unnecessary suffering.

Unless one is a masochist, one does not enjoy suffering. Unless one is a sadist, one does not enjoy causing suffering if the latter can be avoided.

Some people are inclined to make a judgment that if God exists and if God has the capacity do prevent, alleviate, or stop suffering, but chooses not to do so, then this makes God vile, reprehensible, and unworthy of worship. Such a judgment seems to be somewhat premature since there are many things that we don't know about the nature of Being/Reality.

Is suffering unnecessary? Does it serve a constructive purpose? If so, what is the nature of that purpose? Could the same purposes be served without suffering?

Most human beings cannot answer the foregoing questions in any definitive fashion or with any degree of authentic certainty (rather than merely strong opinion). There is a great deal of evidence indicating that human beings are suffering and have suffered throughout history, but the nature of the significance of that suffering remains a matter of some disagreement ... disagreements that give rise to any number of hermeneutical takes concerning the meaning of the available data.

An interesting issue that bubbles to the surface with respect to the theme of suffering is the following one. People are very concerned about their own suffering, but I haven't heard too many individuals wonder about whether, or not, God experiences our suffering every bit as painfully as we do.

After all, if God exists and if God were omniscient, then, Divinity must know the precise degree of not only human suffering but, as well, God would know the full extent of whatever suffering exists in the entire realm of Being/Reality. Given the foregoing possibility, what if human beings

had the capacity – at least to some extent -- to alleviate some of the suffering God endures but chose not to do so?

What fiduciary responsibilities, if any, do human beings have with respect to Being/Reality? Many of us – despite our ignorance about such matters -- are quite ready to criticize Divinity with respect to how we think Being/Reality ought to be conducted, but, despite our considerable knowledge concerning just how much suffering we introduce into the world, we often tend to shy away from rigorously questioning our own possible role with respect to the presence of suffering.

If God created us with the capacity to create suffering, then, obviously, God is the One Who, in principle, made suffering possible. On the other hand, if God also fashioned us with the capacity to alleviate suffering as well as provided us with the capacity to choose whether, or not, to do so, then, if we choose to do nothing to prevent, alleviate, or stop suffering, then, while God is the One Who, in principle, made certain kinds of suffering possible, nonetheless, human beings are the ones who failed to prevent such a possibility from becoming a reality or failed to lessen it when we had the capacity to do so.

I think both religious and nonreligious people are inclined to believe that human beings possess some degree of responsibility for the manner in which we exercise choice with respect to whether, or not, suffering is prevented, alleviated, or stopped. However, many differences arise concerning what one considers the nature of the source (e.g., Evolution versus God, or some combination of the two) for such a capability to be, as well as what one considers the precise nature of that capacity to be and what implications this carries for living life.

Even if one grants that: God exists, and God has the capacity to prevent, alleviate, or stop suffering, but God chooses not to do so, one is not in the sort of evidential position that would enable one to draw any reliable conclusions concerning such a set of circumstances. One would have to be able to grasp the entire nature of Being/Reality – both with respect to God and human beings -- before one might have anything of value to say concerning such matters ... and this includes what significance can be assigned to the possibility that God could prevent, alleviate, or stop suffering but, on different occasions, chooses not to do so.

In the face of such unknowns, some people have concluded: Given the almost ubiquitous presence of suffering in the world, God, if Divinity

exists, could not possibly have anyone's best interests in mind and is akin to some sort of mean, evil genius. Other individuals, despite having witnessed the ravages of suffering up close and personal, have developed different degrees of trust with respect to the possibility that God might have something constructive in mind when it comes to the issue of suffering ... obviously, there are many, mysterious twists and turns when it comes to the nuances of acquiring or losing trust with respect to the foregoing matters.

In 2008 Harper Collins published a work written by Bart D. Ehrman. The book was titled: *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question – Why We Suffer*.

What follows is a critical exploration concerning some of the contents of Professor Ehrman's book. The following comments are not intended to either defend or criticize what the Bible has to say, or not say, about the issue of suffering, but, rather, my intention is to critically examine the nature of Professor Ehrman's perspective – to whatever extent this can be determined -- concerning the issue of suffering, and this is not always easy to do because so much of what Professor Ehrman has to say in this regard is entangled in his critique of the Bible when it comes to the issue of suffering.

The first chapter of Professor Ehrman's book begins: "If there is an all-powerful and loving God in this world, why is there so much pain and unspeakable suffering. The problem of suffering has haunted me for a very long time. ... Ultimately, it was the reason I lost my faith." (Page 1)

Perhaps, given the foregoing considerations, the title of the foregoing book should have been: *Ehrman's Problem: How I Failed to Answer My Most Important Question – Why Suffering Exists*. I suppose it is easier to blame God or the Bible for failing to provide an answer concerning the issue of suffering rather than to accept responsibility for failing to be open to the possibility that one might not be as knowledgeable and insightful concerning such matters as one might have thought one was and, as a result, failed to engage the issue of suffering in as heuristically a manner as could have been the case had one gone about things differently.

For instance, what is meant by the idea of a "loving God?" Whose definition of love is one going to use?

Should we take our cues from human notions of love ... however limited, skewed, and narrowly conceived those might be? Should we suppose that human love is pretty much the same thing as Divine love, and even if this were the case can anyone really claim that she or he understands the nature of human love?

People are willing to sacrifice their own lives to serve what they believe to be the best interests of whom and what they love. However, in this respect, aren't we a bit like lemmings that are willing to take the plunge over the cliff without necessarily having any real insight into why we do what we do?

If one takes a course or reads a book/article that explores the philosophy of mind, one might come across the idea that what transpires in the consciousness of a squirrel, spider, or any other non-human living entity is likely to be totally alien to human beings. One cannot assume that spiders or squirrels experience consciousness in a manner that is similar to human beings

Consequently, why should one suppose that what takes place in the consciousness of Divinity is likely to be any less alien. In fact, in the case of Divinity, one is inclined to suspect that Divine consciousness might be beyond our capacity to understand?

When Gary Kasparov accepted a second challenge to play chess against a sophisticated computer program (he had won an earlier challenge), there came a point during the process when, apparently, he became frustrated and requested access to the coding that directed the play of the computer so that he could develop some sense of, or feeling for, what was going on when the program generated moves. For proprietary reasons, his request was denied, and, therefore, Kasparov had to do the best he could without having any real appreciation for how his opponent approached the game of chess.

Our relationship with God tends to resonate with Gary Kasparov's situation vis-à-vis IBM's Deep Blue program. One can develop any number of theories concerning how things work, but, when one comes right down to it, we really have no idea what is transpiring in God's mind or awareness with respect to the why's and how's of any given move made by Divinity in relation to the chess board of life.

Consequently, when one raises the issue of an “all-loving God”, one has to consider the possibility that the strategies God employs in order to give expression to moves of love might not be capable of being understood or appreciated by human beings any more than Kasparov was able to understand how Deep Blue made its moves. Similarly, Professor Ehrman’s inability to reconcile the presence of suffering with the idea of a loving God tends to mean little more than that he neither understands the nature of suffering nor does he understand what being all-loving means to God.

Early on the book: *God’s Problem*, Professor Ehrman states: “I realized that I could no longer reconcile the claims of faith with the facts of life. In particular, I could no longer explain how there can be a good and all-powerful God actively involved in this world, given the state of things. For many people who inhabit this planet, life is a cesspool of misery and suffering. I came to a point where I simply could not believe that there is a good and kindly disposed Ruler who is in charge of it.” (Page 3)

There is truth in what Professor Ehrman says during the foregoing quote. He says: “I could no longer reconcile,” and “I could no longer explain,” and “I ... could not believe.” I accept that Professor Ehrman is telling the truth concerning such matters, but how is this God’s problem?

Professor Ehrman seems to be saying something along the following lines. Because I (i.e., Professor Ehrman) am unable to account for why Divinity goes about things in the way that Divinity does, and because what takes place in the world does not conform to my ideas about what is good and how God should go about giving expression to such goodness, then, I am unwilling to believe that God is good.

The foregoing situation is somewhat akin to a child saying that because other kids aren’t willing to play in accordance with the way the child feels things should take place, then, the child is going to take his bat and ball and go home. The act of going home in a huff often tends to say more about the individual than it says anything about the actual nature of the situation from which the individual departed.

‘Goodness,’ like the term: “all-loving, is one of those words that many of us feel we understand to some degree. Apparently, Professor Ehrman believes in the saying of the ancient Greek philosopher, Protagoras that “man is the measure of all things” and, as a result, Professor Ehrman has

come to the conclusion that God doesn't measure up to the professor's human way of understanding things.

While I agree with the author of *God's Problem* that life is "a cesspool of misery and suffering" for many people in the world, I feel that a great deal of that cesspool has been created through human hands and, as such, constitutes a human problem rather than God's problem. To be sure, there are events (such as earthquakes, volcanoes, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, mudslides, and certain illnesses) that seem to be beyond the capacity of human beings to do anything about (unless one raises questions such as: Why do so many human beings often choose to live in areas that are known to be frequented by such natural disasters) and, yet, poverty, pollution, wars, iatrogenic diseases, inadequate health care, corrupt politics, drunk drivers, domestic abuse, drug and sex trafficking, corporate greed, imperialistic/colonial powers, as well as various forms of financial and economic exploitation cause more death and suffering each and every year than do so-called natural disasters.

Before pointing a finger at God, perhaps, we ought to consider the role that human beings play with respect to a great deal of the suffering and misery that exists in the world. Perhaps if we were able to eliminate the human contribution to the world's suffering, then although we still might anguish over the fact that some people would suffer as a result of becoming entangled in problematic natural events, nonetheless, the misery index of the world would likely be far, far, far below what is now the case.

The problem of suffering wouldn't be fully resolved if human beings stopped being a major producer of suffering. However, in many ways, such a state of affairs might help place the issue of suffering in a more manageable, more focused context.

Of course, an all-powerful, all-loving, and all-knowing God could control human beings so that they couldn't cause the suffering they do. Nevertheless, for whatever reason, human beings also seem to be equipped with at least some degree of free will or capacity to choose, and, perhaps, the potential for good that might come out of a responsible use of free will outweighs the potential for suffering that might arise due to an abuse of the capacity for free will.

The truth of the matter is that we have no reliable, non-arbitrary metric for evaluating such matters. We don't know how to gauge the

value of events except as a function of our biases concerning the nature of Being/Reality.

Presumably, an all-knowing and all-loving God understands there are upsides and downsides to the existence of free will in human beings. One might also assume that such a God could see the constructive and destructive potential entailed by the presence of free will or choice, and, yet, according to the beliefs of some, God went ahead with the whole creation thing anyway.

What was God thinking? We are ignorant about those possibilities, and, therefore, perhaps we should concentrate on what we might have some degree of control over – namely, resolving the problematic ways in which human beings go about generating the cesspool of misery and suffering that exists in the world.

Unfortunately, when we focus on trying to remove human sources of suffering from the equation of life, we often end up generating even more misery and suffering. Nonreligious people have their way of trying to engage those issues and religious people often go about trying to resolve the same matters in a different fashion, and because everyone believes that she or he, alone, understands the nature of Being/Reality, then despite the best of intentions being present (hopefully), nevertheless, the amount of misery and suffering existing in the world just seems to give expression to a human growth industry.

In *God's Problem*, Professor Ehrman mentions a Christmas Eve service that he attended at an Anglican church near Cambridge, England with his wife, Sarah, and her brother, Simon. At the time, Professor Ehrman and Simon were agnostic, but Sarah was a committed Christian and to please someone they both loved, the two men decided to accompany her to the service.

During the proceedings, a prayer was given by a layperson. The prayer contained the following lines: "You came into our darkness and made a difference. Come into our darkness again."

The prayer brought tears of frustration to the eyes of Professor Ehrman. He wondered why doesn't, and hasn't, God come into our darkness again? Why does existential darkness seem to be so omnipresent?

Every time a person feels a sense of: Love, compassion, kindness, courage, sincerity, nobility, gratitude, friendship, generosity, humility, hope, patience, forgiveness, and/or tolerance, one has to consider the possibility that, perhaps, God has come into that person's darkness and, in the process, has brightened things up through the properties of the light emanating from those qualities. By looking only for the big spiritual event – such as, say, the life of Jesus (peace be upon him) -- Professor Ehrman seems to have missed all the ways in which Divinity might be present in our everyday lives.

Each time human beings: Think, reason, imagine, remember, create, speak, reflect, question, feel, act, move, and so on, perhaps one should consider the possibility that human beings are able to do so because God has created the potential for those lights to enter into the darkness of our lives in different ways. If we wish to blame God for the darkness to which suffering and misery give expression, then, perhaps, we should be willing to acknowledge the possibility that God also created the means to dispel that darkness and, consequently, we really have no one but ourselves to blame when we permit darkness to continue to dominate our lives.

Professor Ehrman asks: "If God intervened to deliver the armies of Israel from its enemies, why doesn't he intervene now when the armies of sadistic tyrants savagely attack and destroy entire villages, towns, and even countries?" Professor Ehrman appears to want God to bear all the responsibility for coming into his life and sweep the darkness away.

However, doesn't Professor Ehrman have a responsibility to discover the ways in which he can actively participate in any given project concerning the removal of darkness? Why wait on some grand expression of Divine intervention when God might well have provided human beings with everything they need to deal with the suffering inherent in life.

Waiting for God to intervene and solve our problems does nothing but help to prolong our difficulties. Perhaps, we have been given some degree of free will, along with an array of resources (such as awareness, intelligence, emotion, language, movement, creativity, talent, and so on), in order to determine what we will do with what we have been given.

Professor Ehrman lives in a country – namely, the United States – that has tyrannized, and is continuing to tyrannize, the world and – directly or indirectly -- entered into places like Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Palestine, Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and

numerous other countries in Africa, Asia, and South America to “savagely attack and destroy entire villages, towns, and even countries.” Perhaps, the darkness that Professor Ehrman sees here is merely the tain of a man-made mirror that God is asking him to: Look into, reflect upon, and try to come up with things that Professor Ehrman could learn to do for himself rather than relying on a system in which everything that is done must come by way of God’s intervening in such affairs.

Professor Ehrman asks why are “young children kidnapped, raped, and murdered?” Maybe, he also should ask why the human beings who commit such acts are, themselves, kidnapped and raped by a set of economic, political, community, educational, and cultural forces that fail those individuals in such fundamental ways? Or, maybe he should ask why there aren’t more resources being invested in preventing those tragedies rather than being wasted on endless wars and corporate welfare?

Another question that bothers Professor Ehrman is this: “Why are babies still born with birth defects?” What should also bother him are the many ways in which: Oil spills, non-renewable sources of energy, depleted uranium, fracking, radiation from Fukushima, chemtrails, and tons of toxic chemicals and heavy metals that are being dumped into the environment have been demonstrated, again and again, to have causative roles in the incidence of birth defects, as well as other diseases in human beings.

He also wants to know: “Why there are droughts that leave millions starving?” Or, why one child – a mere child – should have to die every five seconds of hunger?

Supposedly (and the story might be apocryphal) the U2 lead singer, Bono, once addressed a crowd concerning the issue of world hunger and at one point during his comments, he snapped his fingers again and again and, then, said words to the effect that every time I snap my fingers, another child dies. Someone from the audience wondered out loud if Bono might stop snapping his fingers.

Now, of course, when Bono snapped his fingers, he was not causing children to die. Indeed, he was trying to do what he could do alleviate hunger, but the fact is that human beings do have a great deal to do with why there is hunger in the world, and, therefore, when Professor Ehrman asks his questions about starving children, he might also ask why the haves are so unwilling to share with the have-nots?

The problem is not a matter of there being too little food in the world or there being too limited a capacity for producing the food that is needed to feed the hungry. The problem is that human beings keep placing economic, financial, political, corporate, and other kinds of obstacles in the way of ensuring that everybody has access to food.

None of the foregoing issues give expression to 'God's Problem' but, instead, they highlight the pathetic nature of the 'Human Problem'. We have the capacity – whether through God or by means of evolution – to solve the foregoing problems, but we don't do so, and Professor Ehrman seems to want to blame God for this state of affairs.

Professor Ehrman indicates that his book: "... is not really meant to explain just what we should be doing. ...This book is designed to help us think, not about the solution, but about the problem. And the problem I am addressing is the question of why. Why – at the deep, thoughtful level -- is their such pain and misery in the world? I'm not asking the scientific question of why mosquitoes and parasites attack the human body and make it ill, but the theological and religious question of how we can explain the suffering in the world if ... a good and loving God is in charge." (Page 200)

Let me reframe the foregoing issue. More specifically, if, for the moment, we shelve the issue involving the considerable role that human beings play in generating much of the pain and suffering of the world, perhaps, the following question needs to be asked: Why shouldn't there be pain and suffering in the world?

Back during the days when Professor Ehrman actually did believe in God's existence, I'm wondering whether, or not, he ever asked himself what he had done to deserve life or any of the obvious blessings that were bestowed on him in the way of intelligence, home, family, money, community, education, and the like. If he didn't do anything to deserve what is good in his life, then how is it any different that despite not necessarily having done anything to deserve suffering (anymore than he did anything to deserve life), nonetheless, he gets to experience it.

We might all have fantasies about how great existence would be if only this or that facet of life were somehow different. Gee, why couldn't we arrange things so that life occurs without suffering and difficulty, and given that this is not the way things are, then, it must be the case that our ideas concerning a world without suffering and difficulty are, obviously, so

much superior to what an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God has been able to devise ... the very same God Who gave us the capacity to think such thoughts and knew that we would think them before we even came into worldly existence.

Toward the end of Professor Ehrman's book, *God's Problem*, he spends some time exploring Dostoyevsky's great novel: *The Brothers Karamazov*. During my freshman year of university, this work was on the reading list for a Humanities course I was taking.

When I read the foregoing novel, it completely enthralled me. It raised so many interesting questions about God, religion, and life.

One of the Karamazov brothers, Ivan, is a skeptic. Although he doesn't necessarily disbelieve in God's existence, nevertheless, Ivan is unhappy with what he feels God has done in conjunction with the world.

As a result, Ivan can't imagine any scenario that God could put forth that would be capable of justifying the existence of suffering in the world. Ivan indicates that even if God were to reveal why everything in the world is the way it that it is, as far as Ivan is concerned such an account or explanation would not be able to remove the stain and stench of suffering that exists in the world.

Ivan has framed the problem of suffering in terms of his ignorance and the limits of his imagination. Consequently, since Ivan can't imagine what God could possibly have to say that would justify the existence of suffering, we never have an opportunity to reflect on what God actually might have to say on the matter.

Ivan's skeptical challenge is rhetorical in nature. It is intended to have an emotional and intellectual effect upon a listener without ever having to produce anything of substantive value.

Ivan's rhetorical challenge is like -- sort of -- someone saying that he or she can't imagine what Michael Jordan or LeBron James could possibly say which would convince a person that either of the aforementioned basketball players would be able to beat that individual in a game of one-on-one basketball. Such a challenge is relatively safe from being exposed for what it is (although we might have our suspicions concerning the matter) so long as the individual never actually has to play against either Michael Jordan or LeBron James.

Similarly, Ivan Karamazov never actually plays against God. Ivan just says that he can't imagine what God could possibly say that would change his mind concerning the issue of suffering.

One can accept the idea that Ivan is totally unable to imagine what God might be able to say with respect to the issue of suffering that would be capable of changing Ivan's mind concerning that subject. Nevertheless, that has nothing to do with whether, or not, God actually has something to offer that is capable not only of making us forget all about whatever suffering we had to endure but also had the sort of value that would be considered by human beings to constitute more than a fair exchange for such suffering.

On page 9 of: *God's Problem*, Professor Ehrman mentions the term 'Theodicy' which was first introduced by Gottfried Leibniz during an essay that attempted to provide a perspective that might help to reconcile the existence of suffering with the existence of a God that, allegedly, was all-powerful and wanted nothing but the best for creation. Professor Ehrman indicates that the word "theodicy" is rooted in two Greek roots that join the idea of God with the idea of justice and, in the process, raises questions concerning whether, or not, God can be considered to be just and righteous as long as suffering exists in the world.

As was the case with the previously noted terms: "Love" and "goodness, the ideas of "justice" and "righteousness" are subject to considerable amorphousness in the hands of human beings. Human beings often consider the nature of justice and righteousness to be functions of arbitrary ways of parsing the universe in the service of some given ideology, belief system, or set of assumptions.

If God exists, is Divinity: Loving, good, just, and righteous? Obviously, a great deal depends on what is meant by any of the foregoing terms, and, as well, the issue of suffering must be understood in the context of those meanings.

If God exists, then the nature of Divine Being/Reality is what it is with respect to issues of love, goodness, justice, and righteousness. Moreover, the role that suffering will assume within such a context will have to be filtered through the nature of Divinity and the universe's relationship with Divine Being/Reality.

One can only answer the question at the heart of theodicy if one understands the nature of Divinity and Divinity's relationship with the universe. To whatever extent any given human being does not know the nature of Divinity or the nature of Divinity's relationship with the universe, then, this constitutes a 'human problem' and not 'God's problem'.

Professor Ehrman's idea of religion seems to involve some kind of a welfare system whose recipients have a right to complain to management whenever a check fails to show up to subsidize a person's ideas about how the universe should work. Apparently, all we need to do is lean back in our lounge chair, kick up our feet, sip on a mint julep, and direct God to intervene in this or that way.

Perhaps life is more comparable to boot camp than a welfare system. For example, when we appear at Camp Life, we are provided with existence, intelligence, emotions, language, memory, and various other capacities with which to clothe our being and, then, we must roll up our sleeves and get down in the muck in order to learn how to use those abilities to solve the challenges that will be thrown at us during boot camp.

Perhaps, life is not intended to coddle individuals. Instead, life might be a process that is intended to put people through an array of trials in order to bring to fruition whatever potential is present.

Life is a set of challenging opportunities that consists of many, many problems. Most of those problems entail suffering of one kind or another

On the one hand, nobody gets out of life without suffering. On the other hand, one either uses that suffering constructively and, in the process, works toward becoming a more fully realized individual, or one wastes one's life by pursuing this or that ego-driven fantasy and/or by trying to escape suffering.

Conceivably, human beings are constitutionally unable to develop skills, competence, maturity, insight, courage, nobility, patience, humility, perseverance, honesty, kindness, wisdom, charitableness, forgiveness, compassion, love, identity, and so on if our character is not tempered on the anvil of suffering. An all-powerful and all-loving God undoubtedly could have given human beings all of the foregoing qualities in a fully realized condition without any human being ever having to encounter one

second of suffering, and, yet, apparently, that was not what God seemed to have in mind, and while one could spend one's days wondering why God chose to require human beings to do things the hard way rather than the easy way, perhaps, what one needs to do is realize that this is the way things are, and, consequently, one needs to find a way to work with what is rather than pine for what we would like things to be and trust that at some point – if we persevere sufficiently well and successfully – we might come to understand how suffering could be reconciled with an all-loving God.

Maybe the love that is being shown to human beings is a form of tough-love. Maybe, an all-knowing God understands the upside and downside of the potential that has been lovingly given to human beings and, as well, has lovingly arranged things to provide human beings with opportunities through which to bring forth the fruits of that potential, and out of love, God might have given us the capacity to choose whether we will engage that potential and the nature of Being/Reality in a constructive or problematic way.

Parents love their children. Nonetheless, they expect that, over time, those children will learn to develop a sense of discipline, responsibility, character, and purpose during the course of life and, consequently, parents often will place their children in situations – of varying degrees of difficulty -- that are intended to provide their children with the opportunity to acquire the sort of capabilities and qualities that might help the latter individuals succeed in life.

Challenges, difficulties, and suffering are present in life irrespective of its length. Success is not necessarily a function of anything but how one engages the circumstances of life given whatever potential and opportunities one has with which to work, and none of us knows what is in store, if anything, for doing what we can to meet the challenges, difficulties, and suffering of those circumstances.

Having a long life is not necessarily a good thing. Having a short life is not necessarily a bad thing.

Having an easy life is not necessarily a good thing. Having a difficult life is not necessarily a bad thing.

Everything depends on the nature of Being/Reality. Therefore, until we actually grasp the character of that nature, then, any complaints we

might have about what we believe the nature of the universe to be are entirely premature.

When I was around 7-8 years old, I went skiing with some friends of mine. The skis I used were steel-edged downhill skis but we had built a jump on the slope of an old logging road, and I was intending – foolishly as it turns out – to use the downhill skis for purposes of ski jumping.

The weather conditions had turned the jump we had built into a mound of ice. In addition, those conditions turned the entire path leading down to the jump into ice-crusting snow.

The logging road was not wide. There were trees on either side of the landing area.

With more bravado than sense, I offered to make the first jump in order to test whether, or not, things might be safe enough for everyone else. So, down I went.

How I managed to stay upright long enough to reach the jump remains one of life's great mysteries. I reached the jump and accelerated high into the air fueled by the presence of ice and steel-edged skis.

While in the air, I hit a tree. I came straight down and, somehow, was able to land on both skis ... but, unfortunately, one of my skis -- with my foot still in its harness -- was pointed in one direction while my other ski -- with my second foot still in the harness -- was pointed pretty much in the opposite direction.

My leg was not broken, but it was severely wrenched. I walked half a mile, or so, on that leg through snow in order to get home ... crying all the way.

A lot of suffering was entailed by that incident – both during it and in its aftermath. However, I was, for the most part, the architect of my own difficulties.

Did I learn things from that suffering? Yes, I did.

Could I have learned the same sorts of things without going through such suffering? Possibly -- but not necessarily – since one of the things that I learned is that people who claim they are friends will not necessarily come to one's aid when one is in trouble.

The foregoing suffering – along with the suffering from a host of other incidents and physical problems from my childhood – glows only

very weakly in my memory. I rarely think about those events, and, yet, in various ways, they all helped to shape the nature of my development.

For the most part, the foregoing sort of suffering is but a small dot in the rearview mirror of my life. The value that arose through such suffering remains

Let's put the foregoing skiing incident to one side and consider something else. I was born with my two feet pointed inward toward one another.

For a time, doctors didn't think (and this was more than 65 years ago) I would be able to walk, let alone play athletics. Yet, despite -- among other things -- having to wear, for a time, my shoes on the wrong feet to try to help correct their inward curvature, I went on to become a pretty good basketball player in high school.

Although the inward curvature issue gradually disappeared by the time I was 4-5, a new problem showed up in high school. Huge silver dollar-sized blisters would form on the ball of each foot when I began to play basketball, and they would stay with me throughout the season.

Nothing I did was able to prevent the blisters from appearing or was capable of healing them once they showed up. For 5-6 months during several years of high school, the balls of my feet were a raw mess.

Having an opportunity to play basketball more than compensated for whatever degree of difficulty or suffering was present due to the blistering problem. This became part of the basketball playing process.

If I wanted to engage in basketball, then, I had to put up with the foregoing downside of that process. While playing basketball might have been easier and less painful to do without the blisters, nevertheless, the experience would not have been the same, and, as a result, I wouldn't have had the chance to learn about myself in the way that I did.

The foregoing set of circumstances is, of course, nothing compared to the difficulties and suffering with which some people have to deal. Indeed, there are many individuals who not only have endured a great deal of suffering and difficulty in their lives but have gone on to accomplish great things despite their difficulties.

Every one of those stories gives expression to the potential of the human spirit. An important component in inspiration of this kind is that

suffering and difficulty are present, and without the latter properties, those stories are likely to be considerably less inspiring.

For most -- but not all of us -- suffering and difficulty tend to diminish in their intensity if not disappear altogether as time goes by. However, the sense of accomplishment that is generated through overcoming that suffering and difficulty tends to live on.

I had to go through 17 years of difficulty to obtain my doctorate. One of the major reasons for the delay had to do with the fact that I was a Muslim who was part of a community group that was doing battle with the provincial government of Ontario concerning an array of issues, and, in addition, I was part of a student group that brought forth evidence that one of the professors at the university I was attending had committed plagiarism in conjunction with several articles he had written for a book of readings concerning Islam.

The government took exception with my activities. One of the ways they did so was channeled through some of the professors and administrators who were at the university I attended.

To make a very long story much shorter, a number of people within my academic department and elsewhere in the university took steps that interfered with my ability to obtain a degree. It took me 17 years to find a Northwest Passage through the frozen obstacles that had been strewn in my path by those individuals.

I remember prior to my dissertation defense that several professors in my department (who were not on the orals committee) indicated to me that given the circumstances surrounding my situation it was highly unlikely that I would be able to pass my orals. They claimed that other students had been in such a situation, and they all had failed.

After I returned from the oral examination, I was asked by several of those same professors what the outcome had been. When I told them I passed 7-0, their jaws dropped in disbelief.

Seeing that look of shock on their faces was nearly worth the 17 years that were required to bring it forth. Despite their best efforts, they had not been able to accomplish their mission, and this was a source of tremendous joy for me.

To be sure, due to the considerable time delay involved in the obtaining of my doctoral degree, the likelihood of my being hired by many

universities, let alone be able to receive tenure anywhere in academia were fairly slim. Nonetheless, a degree had been obtained, and all things considered, this was a far better outcome than if I had to endure 17 years of difficulty and come away without a degree.

I learned a great many very valuable things about myself and other people during the foregoing 17 years. I don't think I would have learned those things if the accompanying difficulties and suffering had been absent from my life.

Let's move on to another issue. What wages, if any, are attached to the process of suffering?

Consider a person who has to endure a variety of difficulties and suffering while working for someone. While one is working, and prior to being paid, a worker's mind and heart might well be dominated with any number of grievances concerning the process of work, but when the paycheck arrives, however, and that worker is able to purchase food, shelter, and clothing with it, as well as to look after her or his family in other ways with that money, then, a worker's perspective might change to some degree.

Naturally, after one gets paid one can reflect, if one wishes, on whether, or not, the difficulty and suffering associated with work is worth the compensation one receives in exchange for such efforts. There are different ways of evaluating the relationship between the process of being paid and the suffering that is entailed by the work for which one is being paid.

The same is true with respect to life in general. However, until one knows what, if any, compensation is forthcoming with respect to the kind and amount of suffering that is present in one's life, one is not in any position to be able to say whether, or not, such compensation is a fair exchange for whatever difficulties one has had to endure.

In addition, there are some individuals – among both believers and nonbelievers – who are of the opinion that even if there is no additional compensation forthcoming in conjunction with the suffering associated with life, nevertheless, being able to have had the opportunity to experience existence -- despite all its ups and downs -- is worth the price of admission with respect to whatever suffering and difficulty have had to

be endured. Obviously, each person will critically reflect on this issue in her or his own way.

Apparently, Professor Ehrman, like Ivan Karamazov, doesn't trust God to be able to come up with a satisfactory answer for why things are the way they are. There are others -- and I include myself among them -- who have a basic sense of trust concerning Divinity such that when all is said and done, everything in existence -- including the presence of suffering -- will make sense as the work of a loving God.

This is not a blind faith. Instead, it is a trust that has been hammered on an anvil involving various kinds of suffering that has produced valuable tools of learning through which to engage life.

I have seen how suffering has constructively impacted my own life. I also have seen how suffering has constructively impacted the lives of many other individuals.

I don't enjoy suffering, and, where possible, I try to do whatever I can to prevent it happening to me or to others. Alas, we cannot always escape suffering.

Irrespective of whether suffering is of an avoidable (hopefully) or unavoidable kind, I have come to understand that suffering harbors potential value. Just as the actions of a physician might bring about a certain amount of suffering in order to work toward a condition involving less suffering or no suffering at all, so too, sometimes the advent of different kinds of suffering leads to conditions that have made constructive use of such suffering and helped lead to a variety of benefits that -- absent the suffering -- might not otherwise have emerged.

Suffering has the capacity to generate goodness if it is understood to give expression to constructive opportunities concerning life. Suffering offers an opportunity to learn about oneself and life, and it offers an opportunity to acquire various qualities of character in order to cope with such suffering, and it offers an opportunity through which to overcome obstacles and experience the accomplishment of having done so, and it offers an opportunity to lend whatever assistance one can to those who are enveloped in suffering.

Conceivably, one of the ramifications of human misdeeds is to serve as a fertilizer of sorts that provides people with an opportunity to learn, develop, grow, overcome, and so on ... just as manure -- despite its smell

and status as waste material – helps plants to grow. Nonetheless, I also believe that human beings have a fiduciary responsibility in relation to the presence of suffering wherever we might find it – within or without – that requires us to act in a way that does not add to the amount of suffering that already exists in the world and actually helps to prevent, alleviate, or stop such suffering.

Suffering is one of the great challenges of life, and overcoming suffering is one of the great victories of life. I feel confident – which is a function of faith tempered by experience -- that God has something good and loving in mind by placing this challenge in our midst, but, nonetheless, suffering remains a human problem rather than God's problem.

The problem of suffering is being posed to human beings. We need to solve it.

God does not need to solve the problem of suffering. Indeed, I suspect that God already understands the nature and purpose of suffering quite well.

Chapter 7: People Are Not Great

In the previous chapter, I indicated that Bart Ehrman – or his publishers – misnamed his book: *God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question – Why We Suffer* (when, perhaps, it should have been: *Ehrman’s Problem: How I Failed to Answer My Most Important Question – Why We Suffer*). Similarly, I feel that Christopher Hitchens – or his publishers – have misnamed his book: *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, when a more accurate title might have been: *People are not Great: How Human Beings Poison Everything*.

Mr. Hitchens doesn’t believe in God, so, his argument can’t be with God (and, presumably, this is why the word “god” in the title of his book is not capitalized). Moreover, since (as was discussed in Chapter 2 of this volume of *Final Jeopardy*) a very good case can be made that, in essence, religion is merely the search to discover the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality, then religion, per se, is not what poisons everything ... rather, what poisons everything are the ways in which human beings befoul the aforementioned process of exploration.

For instance, early on in Chapter One of his book, Mr. Hitchens raises a series of questions such as: “Why, if god was the creator of all things, were we suppose to ‘praise’ him so incessantly for doing what came to him naturally?” Or, “If Jesus could heal a blind person he happened to meet, then why not heal blindness? Or, “With all of this continual prayer, why no result?”

Mr. Hitchens seems to believe that the logical force of the foregoing questions is so penetrating that they cannot be answered in any adequate fashion. Apparently, all one has to do is raise those questions and that is the end of the matter.

Indeed, he claims that: “... no religion can meet them [i.e., the foregoing questions] with any satisfactory answer.” Sometimes Mr. Hitchens seems to have difficulty differentiating between: On the one hand, what actually might be satisfactory and, on the other hand, what he finds to be satisfactory and, as a result, he often seems to assume that the nature of what is satisfactory in the way of answers must always be a function of his likes and dislike.

Perhaps one of the reasons for praising God incessantly might have nothing to do with what God does naturally but has to do with the idea

that our very existence might be made possible by Divinity. If so, why not give unceasing praise to the One Who gave us existence and all the opportunities existence entails? ... It's called gratitude.

One could also point out that God has no need of such praises. The ones who need to engage in the exercise of continuously praising God are the ones who are the beneficiaries of Divine largesse since when people cease praising God, they often get self-inflated notions about their own sense of importance in the scheme of things.

Furthermore, if one takes as a given that: Jesus (peace be upon him) healed one blind person but did not cure all blindness, then, perhaps the reason why he did not cure all blindness is because that was not his mandate. Perhaps Jesus (peace be upon him) wanted to show people that certain things were possible but, nevertheless, people needed to learn how to struggle to realize the truth concerning the nature of Being/Reality in order to be opened up to the Reality underlying those possibilities ... and, consequently, curing blindness completely or solving everyone's problems would not necessarily be in the long-term, spiritual, developmental interests of people.

Finally, although Mr. Hitchens seems to believe it is a fact that there is no result forthcoming from prayer, I guess I missed the part where he provided the evidence demonstrating the truth of his claim. Billions of people offer up prayers every day, and, I am pretty sure that neither Mr. Hitchens nor anyone else has shown that none of those prayers have ever had any answer.

Suppose, I pray for a thousand dollars, and that amount of money is not forthcoming. Can one say that the prayer has generated no results?

How would one measure this? If one doesn't know what to count as a result, then how does one say, one way or another, that the prayer either did, or did not, have a result?

For example, what if God decided that \$1,000 would not be forthcoming as a result of my prayer, but, instead, something else would be sent my way in response to that prayer (such as a gratuitous hug, kiss, or chocolate chip cookie from my wife) because at that particular point in my life, maybe, I needed that kiss or hug (or chocolate chip cookie) more than I needed a \$1,000? Are the events in our lives purely random, or could there be different reasons why they occur ... including the possibility

that some of them might constitute results from someone's prayer (mine or those of others)?

Another possibility might be along the lines of the following scenario. I pray for something, and what I pray for is not granted, but God is keeping tabs on my unrequited prayers and intends to convert those unanswered prayers into something beneficial at a later time ... whether in this life or the next.

Mr. Hitchens likely would consider all of the foregoing possibilities to be nothing more than the desperate rationalizations of someone who believes in God. However, he can't demonstrate that his own ideas and questions concerning such issues might not also just be the desperate rationalizations of someone who decided not to believe in God.

He refers to his headmaster, who led daily religious services and prayers, as being "a bit of a sadist". He also briefly mentions the repugnant scandal of child sexual abuse that has been committed by so many priests and covered up by still others.

Religion did not cause the headmaster to be a bit of a sadist, nor did religion cause priests to sexually molest children or induce other church officials to try to hide those acts from the general public. What caused those people to act as they did was no one but the individuals themselves.

Their acts were due to human failure. Their failure involved abandoning the search for truth – the actual nature of religion – and, in the process -- permitting their own desires, interests, ideas, inclinations, and understandings to distort, corrupt, and undermine that search.

When Mr. Hitchens describes atheists, he claims: "... we respect free inquiry, open-mindedness, and the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. We do not hold our convictions dogmatically." This seems to resonate with considerable self-serving hyperbole since Mr. Hitchens does not respect free inquiry, open-mindedness, and the pursuit of ideas for their own sake when it comes to seeking the truth because he operates out of a perspective that is dogmatically set against the idea of acknowledging the possibility that God exists, and, yet, he cannot put forth any evidence that demonstrates that God does not exist.

To be sure, he can raise all manner of questions concerning God that tend to say more about what Mr. Hitchens does not know than what he does know, and, as well, he can put forth all manner of evidence

concerning the failings of human beings when it comes to the challenge of realizing the truth and/or acting in accordance with that truth, but he has nothing of substantive value to say about whether, or not, God exists.

Mr. Hitchens states that atheists "... find that the serious ethical dilemmas are better handled by Shakespeare and Tolstoy and Schiller and Dostoyevsky and George Eliot than in the mythical morality tales of the holy books." Unfortunately, Mr. Hitchens never provides any viable defense concerning what properties are to constitute the criteria for determining what is meant by the phrase: "better handled" or what justifies the use of such criteria when making those sorts of ethical determinations.

On page 6 of: *god is not Great*, Mr. Hitchens argues: "We know with certainty that an ethical life can be lived without religion. And we know for a fact that the corollary holds true – that religion has caused innumerable people not just to conduct themselves no better than others, but to award themselves permission to behave in ways that would make a brothel-keeper or an ethnic cleanser to raise an eyebrow." One wonders if the "certainty" to which Mr. Hitchens is referring toward the beginning of the foregoing quote is akin to the "certainty" of theologians who espouse this or that hermeneutical system and, as a result, feel justified in imposing their version of an ethical life on whomever they please.

Moreover, the issue is not whether one can lead an ethical life without religion, but whether, or not, one can lead an ethical life without the truth. In fact, if an ethical life is not rooted in truth – whatever that turns out to be -- then, just what is the point of leading such a life? By raising this issue, I am not trying to argue that anyone who seeks to make this or that claim on behalf of religion is giving expression to the truth, but rather, I am seeking to place nonreligious and religious claims on the same footing, and, therefore, just because someone comes up with a theory of ethics concerning how to live life without religion, doing so does not necessarily mean that such a theory has anything more to do with truth than this or that theological offering has.

As noted above, Mr. Hitchens claims that: "We know with certainty that an ethical life can be lived without religion," but a few pages later he stipulates: "The person who is certain, and who claims divine warrant for his certainty, belongs now to the infancy of our species." (Page 11) Why should only the individual who "claims divine warrant for his certainty" be

subject to criticism? Why shouldn't critical reflection be directed toward anyone who claims certainty for his or her beliefs?

While I would agree that different kinds of theologies, hermeneutical systems, worldviews, and paradigms have been arranged in ways that induce human beings to commit all manner of atrocities, I am not convinced that it is religion -- which I understand to constitute a search for the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality -- that can be identified as having caused human beings to commit reprehensible acts.

The responsibility of searching for the truth rests with the individual. Whatever mistakes, errors, misbehavior, distortion, or forms of corruption that are permitted by that individual to enter into the search process is the fault of the individual and not necessarily a function of the search process per se.

According to Mr. Hitchens, "religion is mad-made" (Page 10) In one sense, I would agree with him that it is often associated with made-made components, but in another sense I would disagree with him on this point.

If religion is the process of seeking the truth, then, the result of such a search might only give expression to what a human being claims the truth to be, but those claims could, in fact, be incorrect. To whatever extent the search for truth leads to falsehood, then, the result of such a search is man-made.

On the other hand, reality is not man-made. Consequently, to whatever extent one's search for the truth concerning the nature of Being/Reality is capable of helping one to grasp the nature of Being/Reality, then, the results of such a search are not man-made.

Toward the end of Chapter One in *god is not Great*, Mr. Hitchens indicates that he wants to be left alone but that "religion is ultimately incapable of doing" this. He goes on to say: "As I write these words, and as you read them, people of faith are in their different ways planning your and my destruction.

In the foregoing quotes, Mr. Hitchens conflates 'people of faith' with religion, but the fusion is problematic. Having faith in something is not necessarily the same thing as being willing to seek the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

When faith undermines, corrupts, or impedes the search for truth, then such faith has nothing to do with religion. Indeed, not all forms of faith are compatible with the truth, and, consequently, contrary to Mr. Hitchens claim at the end of Chapter One that: “Religion poisons everything,” what actually poisons everything are human activities that obfuscate, corrupt, distort, undermine, or derail the search for truth ... and this remains as true for what Mr. Hitchens does, or doesn’t do, with respect to the issue of seeking truth, as it does in relation to the sorts of people of faith against whom he loves to rail.

Although I am a person of faith, at no point in my life did I ever contemplate trying to destroy Mr. Hitchens. While his claim concerning people of faith and the plotting of his destruction might be true in some cases, it is factually untrue in my case ... and I suspect that it is factually untrue in millions of other cases as well.

Mr. Hitchens indicates toward the end of the first chapter of his book: *god is not Great*, that for a variety of reasons, even if he could, he is not interested in prohibiting religion and that over the years he has extended considerable courtesy to people of faith when he considered such behavior to be the appropriate sort of thing to do. However, he wonders if people of faith will grant him any degree of reciprocity.

On numerous occasions, I have watched his television appearances (e.g., exchanging views with Chris Matthews on MSNBC), and I have read one of his books – namely, *god is not Great*. When he spoke about this or that topic, I didn’t pick up the nearest object and throw it through the television screen, nor did I try to rip it up and throw it into the garbage. Rather, I extended the same courtesy to him that I would attempt to offer to anyone – be they religious or nonreligious ... that is, I am prepared to let someone voice her or his opinion, and, then, I proceed to do what I do with everyone – be they religious or nonreligious ... I critically engage what they have to say and try to determine how, if at all, what they have to say fits into my search for the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality.

Toward the beginning of Chapter Two in *god is not Great*, Mr. Hitchens states: “I imagine that you can perform a feat of which I am incapable, in other words, that you can picture an infinitely benign and all-powerful creator ...” He, then, asks one to further imagine that “... if you

obey the rules and commandments that he [God] has lovingly prescribed, you will qualify for an eternity of bliss and repose.” (Page 15)

To begin with, what Mr. Hitchens imagines that I can image is incorrect. More specifically, I can't imagine an infinite anything -- whether benign and all-powerful, or otherwise -- although I might be willing to accept the idea that such a Being could exist.

Secondly, when Mr. Hitchens states a hypothetical -- such as, “if you obey the rules and commandments that” God “has lovingly prescribed,” then, I wonder what the nature of the rules and commandments are to which he is referring. I also wonder what the criteria are that determine whether, or not, I have actually obeyed those commandments, and I also wonder about how God will evaluate those matters

Suppose one of the commandments is to say prayers at a certain time of the day. Suppose another of the commandments is to be charitable toward members of my family and toward humanity in general.

If I choose to become engaged in an act of charity at the time I am supposed to be praying, how will things be scored? Will some points be deducted for missing the prayer while other points will be awarded for being charitable?

Will the act of charity be considered a form of a prayer and, therefore, conceivably, I might not have violated the commandment concerning prayers? Should I be concerned about whether prayers or charity is likely to be associated with a greater number of points, and, then, proceed to work out some sort of a cost-reward calculus that might allow me to figure out what to do in different situations?

Moreover, perhaps I should explore the possibility that what God is trying to induce me to do has to do with principles rather than rules. For example, if I am urged to do unto others what I would want others to do unto me, there are an indefinite number of ways that I might be able to satisfy that principle, but if everything is a matter of rules, then, presumably, the nature of those rules are quite specific with respect to what I should and shouldn't do and, as such, there is no room for nuanced understandings concerning those rules.

Finally, I might also want to reflect on whether what God is counseling me to do is a matter of commandments or a matter of an advisory or strong recommendation. If I am told not to walk off a cliff

because I will come under the influence of gravity, and this is likely to lead to damaging consequences for me, is this a commandment or an advisory?

Irrespective of whether the foregoing counsel constitutes a commandment or an advisory, the result is likely to be the same – namely, I am likely to come to regret not listening to whatever warning has been given with respect to the cliff. Whether -- because I have chosen to disregard a warning -- there will be additional penalties above and beyond my immediate injuries is a separate issue.

If, as a result of my disregarding a Divine warning, I come to learn a difficult lesson and, as a result, change my behavior in the future with respect to such matters, one might wonder if I will still be held accountable for the mistake that led to such constructive learning? Does life consist of a set of Divine rules and commandments, or does life consist of a set of opportunities and advisories that various people engage in different ways that, ultimately, might turn out to be largely constructive in nature or largely problematic in character?

Furthermore, I also might wonder about the relationship between, on the one hand, seeking to comply with Divine advisories and, on the other hand, the package consisting of an “eternity of bliss and repose”. For instance, what if it were the case that the degree to which I would be able to enjoy or participate in “an eternity of bliss and repose” was a direct function of the manner in which I engaged Divine advisories during the course of Earthly life?

What if complying with Divine advisories was like a conditioning program that was designed to help a person acquire the sort of spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical shape that would enhance a person’s capacity to deal with, enjoy, and/or benefit from whatever might be coming ... in this life or the next? What if the issue is not about being rewarded for obedience, per se, but, instead, is about whether, or not, one develops a range of qualities that extend far beyond the issue of obedience and that would enhance one’s sensitivities toward, appreciation for, understanding of, and capacity to participate in “an eternity of bliss and repose?”

Mr. Hitchens claims that he does have a sincere question to ask with respect to the foregoing matters. More specifically, he wants to know why such a belief (in other words, that one will be rewarded with “an eternity

of bliss and repose” in exchange for obedience to the rules and commandments of God) doesn’t make its adherents happy?

In some ways, the answer to the question being raised by Mr. Hitchens seems fairly obvious. If one is not quite certain about: Just how much one is being asked to do, or how one should go about doing such things, or the nature of the intention through which such things should be done, and, in addition, if one is not certain about how what one does will be evaluated, then, the if-then hypothetical being proposed by Mr. Hitchens is likely to be the source of considerable anxiety rather than happiness.

Life gives expression to a huge set of possibilities. If one accepts the idea that there are, as well, huge responsibilities associated with those possibilities, then while the upside of life might promise great bliss and ease, the prospect that one might not be able to live up to one’s responsibilities could appear to be quite daunting, and, therefore, tend to constitute a drain on any happiness one might like to feel toward what could happen if one is successful in one’s endeavors.

As Mr. Hitchens is very well aware – or, at least, was likely aware when he was alive -- there are people and institutions that are in the business of seeking to exploit the sorts of doubts, worries, concerns, and uncertainties that are being alluded to in the previous paragraph. Such hucksters often bark: ‘Obey me (or my interpretation of things), and all your worries will disappear.’

While the foregoing sorts of worries might well disappear if one accepts the gambit of a spiritual charlatan, nonetheless, the underlying issue of whether, or not, the truth is being spoken remains. Being happy about one’s imagined prospects concerning “an eternity of bliss and repose” might be doing nothing more than giving expression to a delusion ... not necessarily because the possibility for eternal life does not exist but simply because a person might have listened to the wrong person with respect to how to go about realizing that possibility.

Mr. Hitchens contends that religion cannot: “... be content with its own marvelous claims and sublime assurances. It *must* seek to interfere with the lives of nonbelievers, or heretics, or adherents of other faiths. It may speak about the bliss of the next world, but it wants power in this one.” (Page 17) He italicizes the word “must” in the foregoing quote because he seems to be of the opinion that there is some kind of

imperative inherent in religion that impels it toward interfering in the lives of anyone who might take issue with religion.

Undoubtedly, there are many *people* who believe they have the right to interfere in the lives of anyone who disagrees with them. Nonetheless, I fail to see how religion – considered as a search for the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality – “must” do what Mr. Hitchens claims.

Religion is not about desiring or acquiring power. In fact, desires concerning, and attempts to acquire, power tend to corrupt, interfere with, and impede a person’s search for truth.

Mr. Hitchens describes how a certain archbishop who officiated at his wedding: “... later became an enthusiastic cheerleader and fund-raiser for his fellow Orthodox Serbian mass murderers Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic ...” who pursued ethnic cleansing all across Bosnia. While individuals who have deluded themselves concerning the nature of the truth (and what this allegedly entitles them to do with respect to people who operate out of different belief systems) have – again and again throughout history – committed all manner of atrocities in relation to an array of people, towns, countries, and nations, what Mr. Hitchens is demonstrating is only that people are, indeed, terrible ... he has not shown that a search for truth concerning one’s relationship with Being/Reality invariable leads to such atrocities.

Presumably, when Mr. Hitchens was alive, he was seeking the truth concerning the nature of his relationship with Being/Reality. Of course, he didn’t consider such a venture to be religious in nature, but he really wasn’t doing anything differently from what I have been attempting to do for most of my life ... he just reached conclusions concerning certain issues than were different from mine ... although I do tend to agree with him that there have been many people throughout history who have permitted their search for the truth to be corrupted in any number of ways and, as a result, have gone on to develop delusional belief systems that have led them to commit – without justification -- all manner of atrocities involving other human beings.

Mr. Hitchens has concluded that religion is the culprit responsible for such horrific acts. I take issue with his conclusion because I believe that responsibility for such acts needs to be placed squarely in the minds and

hearts of people who have allowed their search for the truth to be corrupted by delusional and problematic belief systems.

Mr. Hitchens mentions, in passing, a query that was directed his way by Dennis Prager, a religious broadcaster, during a panel session. Mr. Prager wanted to know if Mr. Hitchens would feel safer or less safe if Mr. Hitchens saw a large group of men approaching that he knew had just come out of some sort of religious gathering. Mr. Hitchens replied: “Just to stay with the letter ‘B’, I have actually had that experience in Belfast, Beirut, Bombay, Belgrade, Bethlehem, and Baghdad. In each case I can say absolutely, and give my reasons, why I would feel immediately threatened ...” (Page 18)

I wonder why Mr. Prager framed his question only in terms of males. I also wonder what Mr. Hitchens might have said if he had been asked whether he would have felt safer, or less safe, if the group of people who were approaching him were women, or women and children, or women and men.

In any event, Mr. Hitchens uses the next 10 pages, or so, of *god is not Great* to run through a litany of tragedies associated with his list of killer ‘B’s’ that he blames on religion. For example, he describes how in Belfast he: “... interviewed people whose relatives and friends have been kidnapped and killed or tortured by rival religious death squads ...” (Page 18) Moreover, he provides a summary of how a Catholic militia known as the Phalange colluded with a Jewish general, Ariel Sharon, to massacre Palestinian men, women, and children at the refugee camps located at Sabra and Chatila within Beirut.

In addition, he provides an overview of how tens of thousands of Orthodox Christians were, with the Vatican’s support, cleansed in the 1940s by Nazi-collaborating Roman Catholics in Yugoslavia, whose capital was Belgrade. Then, 50 years later, gangs of bigoted Orthodox Christians, along with some extremist Roman Catholic groups, sought to cleanse Bosnia of Muslims.

Finally, he provides information concerning how Sunni Muslims and Shi’a Muslims took turns slaughtering one another in Baghdad. Mr. Hitchens concluded his ten-page discussion with: “Once again, religion had poisoned everything.”

Actually, religion hasn't done anything. The spreaders of poison were human beings who were caught up in their own: Ignorance, arrogance, hatreds, ambitions, biases, insensitivities, confusions, desires, jealousies, lusts, stupidities, lies, and delusions.

Irrespective of whether people consider themselves to be religious or nonreligious, if they behave in the foregoing manner – or in similar ways -- they are giving expression to overwhelming evidence that strongly indicates that they have abandoned any search for the truth. They are people who believe they already are in possession of the truth, and this delusion induces them to frame everything they do as being in service of the truth despite the fact that the reprehensible character of their very actions belies all of their claims in this regard ... or, perhaps, they don't even care about the truth and seek to satisfy whatever desire, impulse, or lust arises within them.

Such individuals possess twisted, truncated lives that are devoid of the qualities of character that are needed to search for the truth. That is, their lives are devoid of the sort of: Honesty, understanding, compassion, humility, patience, nobility, forgiveness, sincerity, selflessness, tolerance, love, charitableness, objectivity, questioning, courage, openness to critical self-reflection, and so on that will be called upon, again and again, during the difficult struggle to seek the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

Religion has not poisoned everything. Everything becomes poisoned when people abandon the search for the sort of truth to which real religion gives expression.

I don't have a problem with Mr. Hitchens pointing out the numerous hypocrisies, delusions, errors, mistakes, and shortcomings of people who claim to be devoted to religion but whose actions indicate otherwise. Indeed, by making those problems public, then attention is being directed to the fact that something has seriously gone amiss in the lives of those people.

However, exposing the foregoing sorts of problems – no matter how many times Mr. Hitchens pursues such issues – does nothing to demonstrate that religion – considered as a search for the truth concerning one's relationship with Being/Reality – is a fountain of poison. Indeed, all that Mr. Hitchens really achieves – and this is not an inconsiderable accomplishment – is to document the ugliness of what

happens when people do abandon the search for truth and, as a result, become immersed in their own biases, ambitions, desires, and delusions.

Unfortunately, Mr. Hitchens apparently fails to see how he, himself, is guilty of committing the very kind of error about which he is critical in relation to others. More specifically, he assumes that he knows what the truth is concerning God's existence, and, as a result, he has permitted his biases, lack of objectivity, ignorance, delusions, as well as his likes and dislikes in this regard to interfere with his ability to keep an open mind about the idea of God's existence ... an issue that is quite independent of the mistakes people make, or the errors they commit, when problematically engaged in a search for the truth concerning that issue.

According to Mr. Hitchens: "Religion comes from the period of human prehistory where nobody – not even the mighty Democritus who concluded that all matter was made from atoms – had the smallest idea what was going on. It comes from the bawling and fearful infancy of our species, and is a babyish attempt to meet our inescapable demand for knowledge (as well as for comfort, reassurance, and other infantile needs). Today the least educated of my children knows much more about the natural order than any of the founders of religion." (Page 64)

While the least educated of Mr. Hitchens' children might know any number of pieces of information that were unknown during the early years of religion, I'm not sure that they either understand all that much about the natural order or know more than any of the founders of religion did concerning such matters.

No one in the world of modernity (including Mr. Hitchens' children) can account – without generating a host of unanswered questions -- for the origins of: The universe, life, consciousness, intelligence, language, emotion, creativity, talent, or memory. No one today knows why an array of constants (for example, the speed of light, gravitational attraction, quarks, the mass of an electron, and the quantum) have the values they do. No one today knows why there is so much more matter in the universe than antimatter. No one in the world today understands why neutrons disintegrate but protons do not appear to do so. No one knows what sets the half-life of radioactive substances. No one knows how a genetic code originated that uses ribonucleic and deoxyribonucleic acids to generate amino acids.

So, just what is it that the least educated of Mr. Hitchens' children know concerning the natural order that the luminaries of religion did not? To be sure, the former individuals likely have access to a plethora of information, but just as surely they have no idea how to piece it all together to provide a coherent, complete, and problem-free account of how the universe and its contents originated or why such things exist at all.

Furthermore, Mr. Hitchens has absolutely no idea what individuals such as: Muhammad, Jesus, Solomon, and Abraham (peace be upon them all) knew about the natural order. However, there are many indications that all of those individuals were more interested in the deeper realms of the natural order than they were interested in the surface sorts of physical phenomena with which Mr. Hitchens appears to be preoccupied ... or, perhaps, Mr. Hitchens wishes to argue – without any substantive evidence to support his point of view -- that only the realm of the physical exists.

Mr. Hitchens asserts that: “All attempts to reconcile faith with science and reason are consigned to failure and ridicule ...” (Pages 64-65) He makes such a claim despite possessing very little understanding, if any, about how the nature of the physical world makes reason and science possible.

He uses the vocabulary of reason, but he has no understanding of the underlying nature of the dynamics that subsidize reason. He talks about the power of science, but he seems to be in denial about the many things that science cannot explain – and, perhaps, will never be able to explain -- concerning the nature of the universe.

Mr. Hitchens appears to assume that he understands everything there is to know about faith since he considers it to be nothing more than a delusional belief system. Yet, he seems to be unwilling to consider the possibility that there might be different levels of faith and that some species of faith might actually be capable of giving expression to modalities of knowing and understanding ... and the reason he is unwilling to consider such possibilities is not because he has proof that what he believes is an accurate description of what is possible in the universe but because this is what his assumptions demand from the universe.

At one point in *god is not Great*, Mr. Hitchens relates an anecdote concerning an exchange between Pierre-Simon Laplace and Napoleon

Bonaparte (the same exchange that is recounted during the main introduction to the present volume of *Final Jeopardy*). Bonaparte had paged through some portion of the five volume *Celestial Mechanics* that had been written and asked why God seemed to play no role in Laplace's account of the universe, and Laplace is reported to have responded that he (i.e., Laplace) had no need of such a hypothesis.

The potential absurdity of Laplace's reply becomes glaringly evident when one realizes that Laplace had no explanation for what made consciousness, intelligence, reason, memory, understanding, or language possible ... the very capacities that enabled him to write the aforementioned five volumes. Laplace's response to Bonaparte was as superficial as was his account of the universe because while Laplace's work had a great deal to say about how to go about solving all kinds of physical and mathematical problems, it had nothing to say about how any of what he was describing was possible.

At the very least, Laplace was premature with respect to the sentiments expressed through his reply to Bonaparte (as is Mr. Hitchens premature with respect to this conclusions concerning the significance of that interchange). Although the idea of God might have had no role to play with respect to a scientific system that was focused on providing human beings with the conceptual tools needed to solve certain kinds of problems concerning the gravitational dynamics of interacting bodies, nonetheless, Laplace was not in the sort of epistemological position that would entitle him to claim that God had nothing to do with Laplace's existence, or with the generation of his conceptual system, or with the universe that he sought to describe through his system of celestial mechanics.

Mr. Hitchens notes how: "...even the religious will speak with embarrassment of the time when theologians would dispute over futile propositions with fanatical intensity: measuring the length of angels' wings, for example, or debating how many such mythical creatures could dance on the head of a pin." Nonetheless, theology actually has nothing to do with religion.

Theology concerns the attempt of various people to develop conceptual systems concerning the nature of God -- as well as the nature of various allegedly spiritual issues -- but such systems consist of nothing more than the hermeneutical take of people concerning various

ideational possibilities concerning God that often are pursued to serve the assumptions and biases of people with respect to those matters. Consequently, theologians tend to be engaged in a process of arbitrary cogitations that are closed off from any considerations that might subject those proceedings to critical reflection or questions such as whether, or not, anyone actually had experience with – for instance -- angels so that they would be in a position to speak knowledgeably about those matters.

If one wishes to seek the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, then, one has to make the requisite sorts of efforts that might be capable of generating something substantively valuable when it comes to such a search. In this respect, one of the very first things one has to do is to learn about the many ways in which what takes place within a human being can impede, undermine, corrupt, distort, or derail the search for truth ... in other words before becoming entangled in a series of arbitrary, speculative explorations concerning the nature of things about which one has no direct, first-hand experience (i.e., theology), one needs to engage in an experientially-based process of cleaning and calibrating the internal instruments (including reason) that are to be used during one's search for the truth.

There are a variety of methods through which to engage a process of cleaning and calibrating one's internal faculties. Some of these include: Seclusion, fasting, and various forms of remembrance (such as chanting), but they are all designed to assist an individual to discover some valuable lessons concerning the nature of the forces and dynamics that are operative within human beings.

For various reasons, Mr. Hitchens appears to want to conflate and confuse all manner of things with religion (such as theology or the idea that religion poisons everything), and, in doing so, he provides considerable evidence to indicate that he doesn't possess any real understanding of religion in its essential sense (i.e., seeking the truth about the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality), but, rather, he has created a straw dog that he calls by the name of "religion" and spends a great deal of time (e.g., his book, television appearances) flogging his creation in order to induce it to heel to his arbitrary commands.

Chapter nine of Mr. Hitchens' book is entitled: *The Koran Is Borrowed from Both Jewish and Christian Myths*. He commits two errors within the space of ten words.

First, he does not appear to know the difference between the Arabic letters Kaf and Qaf. As a result, he mistakenly transliterates Qaf with a 'K' and not a 'Q' ... a mistake that is committed by many people in the English-speaking world

Secondly, The Qur'an didn't borrow anything from either Judaism or Christianity. Describing events that also are talked about within the Jewish and Christian traditions is not so much a matter of borrowing as it is a matter of the same themes being recounted through different traditions.

Suppose Christian, Ariel, and Myriam all talk about Jesus (peace be upon him). Are they necessarily borrowing from one another, or are they just talking about the same individual from their own perspectives and according to their own understandings?

Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all mention prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage, and bearing witness as being important practices. Do they do this because they are borrowing from one another or because they all might have been given a similar set of practices to observe and, then, proceeded to clothe those practices in the garments of their own spiritual traditions?

According to Mr. Hitchens, " ... the Jews are the first recipients of the message." However, there were a number of prophets (e.g., Adam) who existed prior to the rise of Judaism

Muslims, Jews, and Christians all consider individuals such as Adam, Noah, Lot, and Abraham (peace be upon them) to be part of their spiritual tradition. However, one cannot necessarily suppose that Jews were the first group of people to receive – or believe they received – Divine instructions.

There are spiritual texts – such as the Upanishads or Vedas (approximately 3,500 B.C.) – that predate the Torah (approximately 3,000 B.C.). Moreover, who knows what spiritual traditions might have existed prior to the rise of Judaism but were never written down?

Indeed, the Qur'an indicates there were many prophets who have been sent, some of whom (about 25, or so) the Qur'an mentions, and some of whom are not mentioned by name in the Qur'an. Traditionally, Muslims believe that some 120,000 prophets have been raised up since the inception of human kind.

Mr. Hitchens states: “ ... many authorities agree that the Koran is only intelligible in that tongue [i.e., Arabic], which is itself subject to innumerable idiomatic and regional inflections. This would leave us, on the face of it, with the absurd and potentially dangerous conclusion that god was a monoglot.” (Page 124)

The “only absurd and potentially dangerous” dimension to the foregoing is the manner in which Mr. Hitchens likes to frame things. The Qur’an clearly indicates that the recitation is given in the Arabic tongue so that its contents would be easier to access with respect to the people to whom it was initially sent, but the Qur’an also makes clear that in order to understand what is being said in its recitations, one needed taqwa or piety – that is, one’s heart, spirit, and/or soul must be in the sort of spiritually receptive condition that is capable of being opened up to what is being said in the Qur’an without distorting that which is being communicated.

If understanding the Qur’an were only a matter of language, then, the entire Arab world would have understood what was being communicated to them. Unfortunately, a very good argument can be put forth that within several generations of the passing away of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the teachings of the Qur’an began to be misunderstood by an increasing number of people.

All one has to do is take a look at the condition of the Arab world today (as well as the condition of those parts of the world that are under the influence of Arab-speaking individuals) in order to understand that somewhere during the unfolding of their history that the hearts of many of the inhabitants of the Arab-speaking world (especially its leaders) failed to acquire the necessary taqwa, or piety, to be open to what the Qur’an actually was saying. Yes, over the centuries, Western powers have sought, for their own self-serving ends, to introduce all manner of chaos and destruction into the Arab world, but, at the same time, Arabs have done all manner of spiritual damage to themselves -- both individually and collectively -- because, for various reasons, all too many of them were unwilling to acquire the taqwa or piety that is necessary to be in a position to be able to be opened up to what the Qur’an has to offer.

The words of the Qur’an are intended to resonate with the heart of human beings. However, if an individual’s heart lacks the minimally

requisite degree of taqwa, or piety, then, real, learning cannot take place, and, as a result, spiritual growth becomes stunted.

One doesn't have to know a great deal of Arabic in order to be opened up to the teachings of the Qur'an. If one seeks to sincerely observe such practices as: Prayers, fasts, charitableness, bearing witness, zikr (remembrance), seclusion, service to others, developing character traits (e.g., patience, humility, gratitude, etc.), as well as struggling to overcome the inclinations of one's ego, then, many of the teachings of the Qur'an are funneled into the heart because the individual is exhibiting taqwa ... or a pious receptivity to what the Qur'an has to offer.

No one can undertake the foregoing struggle for another person. Responsibility rests with the individual.

Those Muslims clerics, imams, educators, and other officials who seek to induce people to abandon the foregoing sort of responsibility and, instead, become obedient followers of this, or that, theological rendering of Islam should be avoided. The real leaders among Muslims are those individuals who dedicate their lives to enabling individuals to work toward realizing their own spiritual sovereignty, and, therefore, their own unique relationship with Divinity.

Mr. Hitchens talks about how both Christians and Jews have been able to bring about reformations that have helped individuals in those communities to break free from the conceptual spells cast by the clerical class. He goes on to argue: "Only in Islam has there been no reformation, and to this day any vernacular version of the Koran must still be printed with an Arabic parallel text. This ought to arouse suspicion even in the slowest mind." (Page 125)

I must have the slowest of minds since what Mr. Hitchens says in conjunction with the idea that "any vernacular version of the Koran must still be printed with an Arabic parallel text" does not arouse any suspicion within me. More specifically, aside from questioning the use of the word "must" in the foregoing quotation, what is wrong with having a rendering of the Qur'an in one's native language that will provide one with the gist of what is being said in the original text while, simultaneously, being able to have the Arabic text available for reference purposes if one wishes to determine if there might be nuances in the original text that are missing from one's translated rendering of the Arabic Qur'an.

Furthermore, Mr. Hitchens is simply factually incorrect when he says that there has been no element of reformation among Muslims concerning the tendency of clerics to try to impose their (i.e., the clerics) theological ideas onto the Qur'an. From the very inception of Islam there has been a mystical dimension inherent in Islam that has endeavored to teach various Muslim communities down through history that the clerical understanding of Islam is -- in many, many respects -- problematic and often quite erroneous.

Mr. Hitchens seems to acknowledge the foregoing point when, toward the end of his chapter on Islam, he states: "It is often said that Islam differs from other monotheisms in not having had a 'reformation'. This is both correct and incorrect. There are versions of Islam -- most notably the Sufi, much detested by the devout -- which are principally spiritual rather than literal and which have taken on some accretions from other faiths." (Page 136)

So, at one point (Page 125, previously quoted), Mr. Hitchens argues that "Only in Islam has there been no reformation ...", and, now (page 136, see above) he is indicating that it is both correct and incorrect to say that there has been no element of reformation within Islam. Through a very fleeting reference, he alludes to the idea that the Sufi mystical tradition has given expression to some form of reformation but appears to believe that this is only because the Sufi dimension of Islam was borrowed from other faiths.

Mr. Hitchens does not specify what the accretions are to which he is alluding, and he offers no proof that the Sufi path has "taken on some accretions from other faiths." Furthermore, although he distinguishes between spiritual (Sufi) and literal (clerical) approaches to Islam, Mr. Hitchens fails to elaborate on just what he has in mind when he makes those distinctions.

He also claims that the Sufi approach to Islam is "much detested by the devout." However, once again, Mr. Hitchens provides no evidence to support his assertion.

What does it mean to be devout? There is a potentially important distinction between, on the one hand, a process of steadfastly and sincerely persevering in one's search for the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, and, on the other hand, a process

that consists largely of a blind, unreflective, and rigid adherence to some theological perspective.

There are many people within the Muslim community who are considered by others to be 'devout' that are inclined toward, and have been deeply influenced by, the Sufi approach to Islam. At the same time, there are many others within the Muslim community who consider themselves to be devout and, yet, busy themselves with killing, jailing, and persecuting those who disagree with such "devout" individuals.

According to Mr. Hitchens: "'Reformation' has meant, for Jews and Christians, a minimal willingness to reconsider holy writ as if it were (as Salman Rushdie so daringly proposed in his turn) something that can be subjected to literary and textual scrutiny." (Page 136) Leaving aside the issue of why one should feel any sense of obligation to adhere to the manner in which Christians and Jews have engaged the idea of "reformation", one really has no idea what Mr. Hitchens means when he talks about the idea of subjecting the Qur'an to "literary and textual scrutiny."

What are the criteria and principles that govern such scrutiny? What justifies using those criteria and principles?

How does one determine what the truth is with respect to that scrutiny? Irrespective of whether one believes that the Qur'an came from Muhammad (peace be upon him) or that it gives expression to Divine guidance, how does one establish what was originally meant by what was said.

Seemingly, what Mr. Hitchens has in mind when he talks about the notion of "literary and textual scrutiny" is that people should be free to impose on the Qur'an whatever arbitrary ideas they might have concerning the contents of the Qur'an. For instance, Mr. Hitchens says of the Qur'an that: "No serious scholarship has been made to catalog the discrepancies between its various editions and manuscripts," (Page 137), and, consequently, he fails to understand that the Qur'an is first, and foremost, an oral communication, not a written one.

Consequently, there are no "discrepancies between its various editions and manuscripts" because no such editions and manuscripts exist when it comes to the actual Qur'an. One can attend prayers in virtually any mosque in the world, and although one will encounter different styles

of recitation (known as Qira'at), people will be in agreement on whether, or not, the contents of the Qur'an have been accurately reproduced during any given instance of recitation, and, in fact, people in the congregation will correct the person leading the prayers if the latter does not accurately reflect the contents of the Qur'an during recitation of, or from, this or that Surah (Chapter) of the Qur'an.

Furthermore, it is ludicrous for Mr. Hitchens to try to argue that there has never been any form of textual scrutiny with respect to the Qur'an. As Quranic verses emerged over a period of 23 years and, as well, continuing on until the present day, hundreds of millions of Muslims have struggled to try to understand the meanings of the Qur'an, and each of those individuals has engaged the Qur'an according to his or her circumstances and spiritual condition.

Mr. Hitchens contends that: "... faith is helping to choke free inquiry and the emancipating consequences that it might bring." (Page 137) Faith can carry an individual in one of two possible directions with respect to the Qur'an.

More specifically, faith can orient itself in a manner that is receptive to misunderstandings concerning the Qur'an, or faith can orient itself in a manner that is receptive and open to what the Qur'an is actually saying. Contrary to what Mr. Hitchens' claims, everyone is free to inquire into the nature of the Qur'an in whatever way she or he likes, but each of us has responsibility for the nature of the dynamic that arises in conjunction with one's manner of engaging the Qur'an.

At one point in *god is not Great*, Mr. Hitchens claims: "Not only did Islam begin by condemning all doubters to eternal fire, but it still claims the right to do so in almost all of its dominions, and still preaches that these same dominions can and must be extended by war." (Page 125)

Mr. Hitchens is factually incorrect when he says that Islam began "by condemning all doubters to eternal fire." The very first revelation involving the Qur'an was the following:

"Read in the name of your Lord Who created.

He created man from a clot.

Read and your Lord is Most Honorable,

Who taught with the pen,

Taught man what he knew not.” (Surah 96, verses 1-5)

There is more to the foregoing Surah, but it came forth at a later date, and, therefore, as the foregoing verses clearly indicate, Islam did not begin “by condemning all doubters to eternal fire.”

Furthermore, as a general principle, Islam doesn’t condemn doubters to eternal fire. What happens to people is up to God, and Divinity does whatever Divinity wishes ... including forgiving people (and this includes doubters) their mistakes.

In addition, a distinction has to be made between the issuing of an advisory and what happens if someone should ignore such an advisory. To warn someone that if she or he jumps off a cliff, then, that person is likely to meet with disaster is one thing. However, issuing such an advisory does not constitute, in and of itself, a condemnation of anyone who might be struggling with whether, or not, to heed that advice.

What people do with their lives is up to them. To inform people about the possible consequences that might ensue from their acts is not a process of condemnation but a reference to the sort of choice an individual has before him or her.

Finally, the Qur’an indicates that: “There is no compulsion in religion” (Surah 2, 256). Consequently, anyone who believes that he or she has the right to forcibly impose Islam on people through acts of war (or other kinds of aggression) apparently didn’t understand the nature of the foregoing ‘memo’ about not compelling people with respect to the teachings of Islam, and, therefore, Mr. Hitchens is quite wrong when, in the previous quote, he attempts to indicate how Islam preaches that religion: “... can and must be extended by war.”

Mr. Hitchens seems to be so keen on thinking the worst of Islam and inducing others to do so as well, that, he never bothers to actually sit down and open his heart to what is being communicated. The irony of this situation is that Mr. Hitchens becomes entangled in the very problem that befuddles so many misguided Muslims (the very ones that Mr. Hitchens criticizes with considerable justification) – namely, when they seek to impose problematical renderings of the Qur’an on other individuals, they have failed to engage the Qur’an with any degree of taqwa, or piety, and, therefore, their hearts are deaf to what is being communicated.

On page 126 of: *god is not Great*, Mr. Hitchens states: "I have tried my best with this religion [i.e., Islam]. He, then, goes on to indicate that he has attended many Muslim gatherings, including Friday prayers, in different parts of the Muslim world.

In addition, he mentions how, at some point, he obtained a copy of Marmaduke Pickthall's translation of the Qur'an. Presumably, he read much -- perhaps all -- of that book.

He also indicates that he acknowledges the historical reality that an individual named "Muhammad" lived during the late sixth century and early seventh century. In this respect he goes on to say: "The accounts that relate his deeds and words were assembled many years later and are hopelessly corrupted into incoherence by self-interest, rumor, and illiteracy." (Page 127)

Mr. Hitchens is both incorrect, as well as correct, when he indicates that accounts concerning the sayings and deeds of Muhammad (peace be upon him) were only assembled many years after he passed away. While it is true that quite some time after the Prophet passed away, there were various projects that were undertaken by certain individuals in an effort to try to determine what the Prophet is likely to have said and done when in the world, nonetheless, during the life of the Prophet, there also were various members of the community who wrote down what the Prophet said and did under different circumstances while he was on Earth.

Nonetheless, there came a point in time when the Prophet instructed people to destroy whatever they might have written down concerning the Prophet's own actions and words (as opposed to revelation), and – as Mr. Hitchens points out in the foregoing quote – perhaps, one of the reasons for issuing such instructions might have been due to the likelihood that, over time, what the Prophet said and did would be subject to considerable distortion, corruption, and misunderstanding.

Despite claiming to have tried his best with respect to trying to understand Islam, Mr. Hitchens proceeds to proclaim that: "... Islam when examined is not much more than a rather obvious and ill-arranged set of plagiarisms, helping itself from earlier books and traditions ..." (Page 129) Mr. Hitchens offers no evidence to back up his proclamations and, thereby, factually demonstrate how the more than 6,000 verses of the Qur'an were lifted from this or that earlier text.

Apparently, Mr. Hitchens assumes that if there are similar stories that appear in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic texts or traditions, then, this constitutes evidence that someone has committed plagiarism. He fails to consider an obvious possibility – although one that he will reject because of his own biases – namely, that the reason the stories are similar is because they came from the same source ... that is, God.

In any event, Mr. Hitchens has little, or no, knowledge of Arabic. He does not speak or read Aramaic. As far as I know, he is not a Hebraic scholar or an expert concerning the different languages through which the Bible has been filtered, and, therefore, one would like to know the precise nature of the evidence that supposedly substantiates his claim that the Qur'an is merely an "obvious and ill-arranged set of plagiarisms"?

One also wonders on what basis Mr. Hitchens is claiming that the Qur'an is "ill-arranged." Just because he doesn't understand the nature of the Qur'an's structure doesn't mean that it does not have an ordered character, and, to suppose that if he doesn't grasp the logic of something, then, it must be "ill-arranged" seems to be both presumptuous and arrogant.

Speaking of presumption and arrogance, Mr. Hitchens argues that Islam: "... makes immense claims for itself, invoking prostrate submission or 'surrender, as a maxim to its adherents, and demands deference and respect from nonbelievers into the bargain. There is nothing – absolutely nothing – in its teachings that can even begin to justify such arrogance and presumption." (Page 129)

When Mr. Hitchens stipulates that: "There is nothing – absolutely nothing -- in its teachings that even begin to justify such arrogance and presumption," this sounds like someone who is insisting that he knows what the absolute truth is, and, as well, that he understands everything that could possibly constitute justification for any given claim. If there is anything that bespeaks presumption and arrogance it is Mr. Hitchens own words.

The Qur'an claims that it gives expression to the truth. Before one can verify such a claim, one has to have insight into, understanding of, and experience concerning the contents of the Qur'an, and, quite frankly, I see very little evidence in what Mr. Hitchens writes that he has any insight into, or understanding of, its contents.

He appears to believe that all he has to do is give an interpretive rendering with respect to what he thinks the Qur'an is saying and, ipso facto, his understanding of things is unassailable. In doing this, he makes the same sort of mistake as is committed by all too many Muslims.

If one is not prepared to open one's heart to the truth, then, one cannot possibly understand that to which one has closed oneself, any more than a person who does not open himself or herself to the truth that is given expression through some set of scientific facts will be able to understand the nature of what that person is seeking to deny. Mr. Hitchens, of course, denies that Islam gives expression to the truth, and, certainly, he is entitled to his point of view, but having a point of view does not, in and of itself, render one's opinions true.

Furthermore, contrary to what Mr. Hitchens claims in the foregoing quote, neither the Qur'an nor Islam demands deference and respect from nonbelievers anymore than science demands deference and respect from those who might not believe in what it has to say about any given topic. People are free to deny whatever the Qur'an says or whatever science says, but such denials carry a potential risk – namely, if (and I emphasize "if") someone rejects something that turns out to be true, then, they do so to their own potential detriment.

To be sure – and most unfortunately, -- there are an unknown number of ignorant Muslims who will seek to insist that everyone must submit to Islam and who will try to argue that if such "nonbelievers" do not, then, force needs to be used in order to bring about such submission. However, while those Muslims can say whatever they like about the meaning of the Qur'an, it is the truth that will adjudicate all such issues rather than the speculative opinions of people concerning what they believe the truth entails.

I can't do anything about the ignorance of various Muslims other than to write the books I do, hoping that those individuals might stop and sincerely listen to what is being said. Similarly, I can't do anything about the ignorance of people such as Christopher Hitchens when it comes to Islam except to write the books I do, hoping that those individuals will suspend their preconceptions, biases, and mistaken understandings concerning the nature of Islam for a long enough period of time to provide themselves with the sort of opportunity through which they might become open to what is being said here.

Chapter 8: The Moral Landscape

According to Sam Harris in his book: *The Moral Landscape*, values are reducible to issues that address questions about the: “well-being of conscious creatures” (Page 1). Moreover, since values “translate into facts that can be scientifically understood” (Page 1), then science has the capacity to determine human values, and, as a result, the problem of how we ought to think about various issues involving meaning, purpose, and morality can be shown -- in Dr. Harris’ view -- to be functionally dependent on the processes of science.

Dr. Harris contends that just as science has established the universal criteria for diagnosing and treating physical maladies – e.g., typhus is typhus no matter where it occurs -- the criteria for determining what constitutes appropriate values also can be established through scientific research. More specifically, he maintains that neurobiology – which encompasses the organization, structure, and functional character of brain processes -- holds the key to coming to understand the principles and properties of well-being in relation to conscious creatures such as human beings.

The greater our knowledge about, and understanding of, brain processes, the more well-established will be our vantage point for grasping what Dr. Harris considers to be a central precept of existence. More specifically, there are right and wrong, better and worse, answers to questions about value, and such answers will be found through science and not through religion.

On page 2 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris states: “Human well-being depends on events in this world and on states of the human brain.” Furthermore, he wishes to argue that since one can determine the facts of those ‘events’ and ‘states’, then the nature of well-being becomes a matter of determining the relevant facts of ‘dependency’ with respect to those ‘events’ and ‘states.’

While Dr. Harris does not necessarily believe all moral issues will give rise to determinate answers about which everyone will agree – there are, after all, differences of opinion among scientists about a variety of issues – nonetheless, he does wish to maintain that all matters of value are necessarily constrained by facts and the degree to which this is so today will steadily increase into the future as more facts about the nature of reality are uncovered. In addition, Dr. Harris feels that even though we

might not be able to answer a given value issue at the present time, this does not mean there is not a determinate answer to such an issue since whatever the character of the circumstances might be -- and quite irrespective of whether, or not, we know or understand that character -- there is an ontological reality to those circumstances, and, according to Dr. Harris, this means there are ontological facts that constrain what can be correctly said about those circumstances.

Before continuing on to explore the topography of Dr. Harris' moral landscape more closely, there are a few points that are worth mentioning in relation to the foregoing overview of Dr. Harris' perspective. First, all facts are theory-laden, and among other things, this means that one does not find "facts" lying about on the ground, ready to pick up and store away in some sort of scientific archive.

"Facts" are representations of certain facets of experience. Those representations might, or might not, reflect the actual character of that which is being represented.

"Facts" often have to be cobbled together to construct a theory, worldview, or framework concerning the nature of reality. The glue that holds those facts together tends to be interpretation -- which is a way of trying to make sense of how a set of facts might fit together in a coherent manner ... and there might be more than one modality of interpretation that is consistent with a given set of "facts."

Hypotheses arise as attempts to link facts with one another in particular ways. Hypotheses often arise as proposals for generating further experiences (in the form of research and/or experiments) that not only add to the data set of possible facts but, as well, hopefully provide a certain coherency among, and confirmation with respect to, such facts.

"Facts" are rooted in assumptions about the nature of experience. "Facts" also are a function of methodological strategies for generating "facts" ... strategies that tend to be theory-laden in their own right.

Do the foregoing comments mean that "facts" are arbitrary constructions? Not necessarily.

Can there be agreement among a group of people about what the 'facts' of a situation are? Yes, there can be.

Must one suppose that “facts” are cultural artifacts that are unrelated to realities independent of such cultural influences? Not necessarily.

Nevertheless, determining the “facts” of a given set of circumstances is often not a straightforward process. Among other things, this ‘not straightforward’ aspect of “facts” means there might be, and often are, arbitrary dimensions entangled with “facts,” and, as well, notwithstanding the ‘fact’ that a group of people have reached agreement upon what the facts of a given situation are, the agreement, in and of itself, does not mean that the facts that have been agreed upon correctly reflect the actual nature of the circumstances to which those “facts” allude. Furthermore, while “facts” might, on any given occasion, transcend specific cultures, being able to distinguish the ‘real’ from the ‘cultural’ tends to be a problematic undertaking.

Truth is not a function of facts. Rather, the best facts are well-conceived descriptions – and, sometimes, explanations – concerning the alleged character of the truth in relation to some given dimension of experience.

I agree with Dr. Harris that there is an objective reality. I also agree with him that despite the existence of such an objective reality, human beings might not always be in a position to determine what the nature of that objective reality is, and, consequently, human ignorance might prevail when it comes to trying to provide answers concerning what the nature of reality is on any given occasion.

Is Dr. Harris correct when he claims that: “human well-being depends on events in this world and on states in the human brain”? To answer this question, one must come to an understanding not only of the nature of the ‘dependency’ to which he refers, but one also must come to terms with the idea of “well-being.”

In what way does well-being depend on events in the world? In what way does well-being depend on states in the brain?

What, if anything, do states in the brain have to do with events in the world? What does Dr. Harris mean by the idea of “well-being,” and how does one establish what the “facts” are concerning such a condition of well-being?

Is Dr. Harris right when he argues that values: “translate into facts that can be scientifically understood”? The answer to this question depends, in part, on the nature of the translation process that links values and facts, and, therefore, one needs to carefully examine the translation program being advocated by Dr. Harris with respect to the alleged link between values and facts.

Is Dr. Harris on a sound footing when he asserts that neurobiology holds the key to understanding how well-being is entirely a matter of properly understanding what goes on in the human brain and the manner in which some brain states are more conducive to well-being than are other brain states? The answer to this question depends, to a great extent, on whether, or not, neurobiology really provides any sort of essential insight into the nature of, on the one hand: consciousness, thinking, logic, language, understanding, and/or values and, on the other hand, the issue of well-being.

Dr. Harris believes that morality is an “undeveloped branch of science” (Page 4). However, by using the term “undeveloped,” Dr. Harris seems to imply that currently morality is not a branch of science, but, in the future he believes that the emergence of certain kinds of “facts” will help to establish morality as a branch of science.

According to Dr. Harris, as we come to learn how “facts” concerning ideas, beliefs, or intentions arise in the brain, and, in addition, as we come to develop a better understanding in relation to the “facts” that are discovered about how those thoughts are translated into behaviors via various processes of the brain, and, finally, as we gradually develop an appreciation for the “facts” that will be established with respect to how such behaviors are received by and leave their imprint on other conscious beings, we should arrive at a point in which we will see that “facts” about thoughts, behaviors, and their impact on other human beings will form a ‘fact-based’ science to which morality gives expression. What Dr. Harris is attempting to do in *The Moral Landscape* is to propose a theory about how “facts” – both present and future ones – will cohere and, thereby, demonstrate that moral issues not only belong under the purview of science, but, more specifically, are best understood as a function of neurobiological processes.

However, let’s backtrack a bit and reflect, for a moment, on certain aspects of the foregoing theory. For instance, let us ask the question: Do

thoughts, ideas, and intentions arise in the brain? What are the facts here?

The facts are as follows: No one knows what consciousness is or how it arises; no one knows how ideas are generated; no one knows how reason or logic are possible; no one knows how purpose, meaning, or insight arise, and no one knows how or why language works in the way it does.

Collectively, we experience consciousness, thought, reason, logic, purpose, meaning, insight, and language. Collectively, most of us spend a considerable portion of our lives learning how to use these givens of experience, but when physical life comes to an end, few, if any, of us are much the wiser about what is going on with respect to any of the aforementioned phenomena or how any of them are possible.

It is as if we have inherited, in a yet to be determined way, various “tools” – namely, consciousness, thought, reason, logic, insight and so on - that we can learn (on our own, and/or be taught by others) how to use. However, those “tools” have proven to be relatively impenetrable when it comes to figuring out how such “tools” actually work or what makes them possible. Attempts at reverse engineering in relation to these “tools” or “instruments” have been fraught with a variety of problems.

Among other things, we have difficulty pointing to anything in particular as being the causal mechanisms through which such “tools” or “instruments” operate. In other words, we can examine, for example, the thoughts that are generated by such “tools” but not the means through which those “tools” generate specific thoughts.

When scientists look at neurons (certain kinds of specialized brain cells – there are a number of different kinds of neurons), dendrites (which are branch-like processes of a neuron that receive extra-neuronal information and deliver that information to the body of the neuron of which it is a part), axons (which are the portion of a neuron through which electrical impulses are generated that, among other things, activate the release of neurotransmitters that are stored in the tips of those axons), synapses (the space between a given axon and associated dendrites of other neurons), and the neurotransmitters (the chemical messengers that are linked in, as of yet, unknown ways to the electrical impulses that occur within neurons), one can determine that various kinds of circuits (or neuronal/synaptic networks) are established that link dendrites, axons,

electrical signals, neurotransmitters and synapses together in certain ways, but there is absolutely no indication of how, or if, any of this complex brain activity generates consciousness, reason, logic, insight, understanding, interpretation, creativity, or language.

When I taught psychology, one of the concepts with which many of my students seemed to have a fair amount of difficulty understanding was the difference between correlation and causation. To say that two events or objects are correlated -- to some degree -- across a set of experiences says nothing about the precise character of the linkage, if any, among such events or objects.

In general, there are four possibilities from which to choose. More specifically, if 'A' and 'B' are correlated -- or observed to occur together (or in relative close proximity either temporally, spatially or both) across a series of experiences -- it is possible that: (1) A causes B, or (2) B causes A, or (3) A and B are caused by some unknown factor 'C', or (4) a variety of "factors" are interacting in a complex dynamic such that A and B might occur in conjunction with one another but are not necessarily causally related to each other (that is: A does not cause B, and B does not cause A, and A and B are not necessarily caused by some third factor C).

The stronger the positive or negative correlation between two events or objects is, the more likely it is -- but this is not a certainty -- that one is encountering some sort of causal relationship in relation to those events or objects. However, even if causality of some kind links those events and/or objects, one cannot necessarily determine the direction of causality or the source of the causation on the basis of correlation alone. Further research is needed in order to try to determine the precise character of the relationship of those events or objects.

For instance, just because certain thoughts or intentions are correlated with certain kinds of brain events, one cannot automatically suppose that the thoughts and intentions are caused by those brain states. Conceivably, but in some unknown way, thoughts and intentions are causing brain states rather than being caused by those states. Furthermore, it also is possible that something else -- which might be neither a thought nor a brain state -- is causing both the thoughts and the brain states to occur together.

Perhaps an analogy, of sorts, might help to clarify some of the foregoing ideas. For example, let's think a little about how a television set works.

More specifically, the program images – let's suppose there is a *Star Trek* episode running -- that appear on a television screen are not generated by the television set for which the screen serves as a medium through which programs are made visible to a viewer. To be sure, the various components and circuits that make up a television set must be in working condition in order for the *Star Trek* program to be viewable, but if a television set is not connected in some manner with the towers, satellites, cables, and stations that transmit certain kinds of electromagnetic signals, then no program images will appear on the screen of my television set -- and for the purposes of the present discussion, I will set aside possibilities such as DVD, Blu-Ray, or TiVo that are capable of generating images in a different, but related, manner.

If my television set breaks down, I can call in a repairperson or take the set to a repair specialist. Oftentimes when one turns the matter over to a technician, one provides a brief description of the problem(s) – e.g., no picture, or no sound, or there seems to be something wrong with the color scheme, and so on.

The technician has a variety of diagnostic tools that will help identify which circuits and/or components might be dysfunctional. However, irrespective of what the problem might be, television stations and towers have continued to transmit program signals even as my television set has been unable to receive any of that electronic data.

There is a strong positive correlation between a properly functioning television set and *Star Trek* images appearing on the screen of my set, but, strictly speaking, the television set does not cause the content of the *Star Trek* images. Instead, the television helps make the visible occurrence of those images possible.

The structural character of the *Star Trek* images are primarily a function of the sort of signal that is being transmitted by a television station and/or tower and/or satellite quite independently of my television set. Once received, the television set's circuitry and components translate that signal into a set of sequential, viewable images – but images whose content character is largely dictated by the nature of the signal being sent by a given television station ... although, to be sure, the television set

circuitry and components have the capacity to modulate that signal in certain, limited ways.

Moreover, if we take things one step further, strictly speaking, it is not a television station or tower, per se, that is the ultimate cause of the content character of the *Star Trek* images that appear on the screen of my television set. Whether a given program is live or recorded, there are scriptwriters, actors, producers, directors, lighting and sound technicians, editors, special effects people, and camera personnel who combine together to construct the content of a given program that is intended to look a particular way when it appears on the screen of my television set.

When all is said and done, the television station might send out a signal, but the content, information, or data contained within that signal has been put together by a variety of people working in cooperation with one another. The station, on its own -- or the tower on its own, or the satellite on its own -- cannot produce the content character of those programs.

Television stations, television towers, satellites, and television sets are all highly correlated with the images that appear on the screen of my television set. However, none of them, on their own, cause those images to have the structural content character that they have. Just as my television set enables the *Star Trek* program images to appear on my set without directly causing those images to have the content they do, so, too, television stations, satellites, and towers -- each in their own way -- enable the *Star Trek* program content to be transmitted to my television set. Neither the television station nor the towers cause the *Star Trek* program content to have the character it has.

Television stations, towers, satellites, and sets do play causal roles, of a sort, in the generation of *Star Trek* program images. Nonetheless, the character of those causal roles is one of enabling *Star Trek* programming content to be manifested in my television set while the actual programming content of the *Star Trek* episode is created in a manner that, to varying degrees (depending on how things are done), is separate from, or independent of, those television stations, towers, satellites, and sets.

To what extent is the brain like a television set? In other words, could the nature of the brain be a collection of circuits and components that enable certain signals -- sent from elsewhere -- to be picked up and

translated into lived experience ... the sort of lived experience that is viewable on the screen of consciousness?

Or, is it possible that the human brain is a sort of like a television tower? Perhaps the brain is a way station for transmitting signals sent from elsewhere and which then relays that signal to something else that might not be a function of brain processes – for example, consciousness – in order to make experiences ‘viewable’ ... in which case consciousness becomes the television set and the brain is a complex receiving and relay tower.

Or, is it possible that the brain is more like a group of technicians at a television station? These technicians would generate an electromagnetic signal whose specific structure has been formed in accordance with the creative efforts of a group of writers, producers, directors, and actors who do their work outside the station and just bring in a finished product into the station that is modulated in various ways by technicians at the station to ready it for transmission to other destinations beyond the station.

Where do intelligence, reason, insight, consciousness, and ideas come from? We don’t know, but any of the foregoing scenarios are possible analogies for the role that the brain plays in enabling us to view experience.

If someone were to try to claim that the television stations, relay towers, satellites, and receiving sets were – considered as objects – conscious, or were capable of: thought, reason, logic, insight, creativity and language, most people would treat such a possibility as absurd ... although who knows? Consequently, if someone insists that the brain – as an object – is the source of: consciousness, reason, insight, creativity, and so on, why should one suppose that such a claim is any less absurd than trying to claim that television stations, relay towers, and receiving sets are capable of such phenomena?

To be sure, there is a growing body of data indicating that when injury occurs to different parts of the brain, certain kinds of dysfunctional conditions are observed. Nevertheless, how is this any different than those situations in which the circuit boards of a television set are damaged and, as a result, certain kinds of dysfunctional states are observed in relation to the operation – or non-operational -- character of the television set?

The brain might be far more complex than any given television set. However, the underlying principle might be the same – namely, just as the television set is not the source or ultimate cause of the content of, say, a *Star Trek* program, so, too, the brain might not be the source or ultimate cause of the contents of consciousness or the ‘programs’ that are manifested there.

The foregoing is not meant to indicate that the brain is not the source of thoughts and all of the other phenomena of the mind. Rather, what is intended by the foregoing is to suggest that identification of the ultimate source(s) of the phenomena of mind is far from being a settled issue.

I believe that Dr. Harris understands the difference between correlation and causation. Moreover, none of the foregoing comments were intended to imply that Dr. Harris doesn’t know the difference between correlation and causation.

Nonetheless, he often writes in a way that assumes – without any proof – that the brain is alone responsible for the creation and production of everything that takes place on the viewing screen of consciousness. As a result, he does not make it sufficiently clear to his readers that his assumption concerning the nature and function of the brain is only one among a number of possibilities.

As noted earlier in the present chapter, Dr. Harris accepts the idea that there are questions about the nature of reality for which we might not currently know the answer. Despite this lack of knowledge and understanding, Dr. Harris is of the opinion – one with which I agree -- that reality does, nonetheless, operate in accordance with determinate principles – even if we don’t know what the precise character of the “facts” are that accurately describe what those principles are and/or are unable to explain how they operate.

Our current position of knowledge/ignorance would entitle Dr. Harris to ask a legitimate question in relation to the foregoing considerations – namely: If the brain is not the cause and source of conscious experience -- along with all of consciousness’ varied programs of reasoning, logic, creativity, insight, language, and so on, then what is the cause of such phenomena? At the same time, since Dr. Harris already has committed himself in principle to the possibility that we might never know the answer to such a question -- even though we might all agree that it has a determinate answer of some kind -- nonetheless, despite the ‘fact’ that

the aforementioned question is not answerable at the present time (and perhaps never will be), one cannot presume that the ‘fact’ such an unanswerable question could be asked by someone like Dr. Harris, this fact, in and of itself, does not justifiably entitle a person – such as Dr. Harris – to make the further claim that the only acceptable way of resolving the issue is to assume that there is no non-brain source for phenomena such as thoughts, and, as a result, by default, we are left with the idea that the brain must be the source of ideas, intentions, consciousness, thinking, creativity, language, and so on.

Furthermore, if one does not accept Dr. Harris’ theoretical assumptions in relation to trying to understand the structural and functional nature of human experience, one need not automatically be forced to assume the burden of explanation in such matters. Dr. Harris is the one with the theories about such things, and, therefore, the burden of proof rests entirely with him.

He is the one who must provide plausible explanations for how the brain generates consciousness, thought, intention, creativity, language, understanding, and the like. At the present time, he (nor anyone else in neurobiology) has any plausible and fully defensible causal explanations with respect to the possible connection between the brain and any of the aforementioned phenomena – i.e., consciousness, thought, intention, and so on.

All Dr. Harris has are correlations. He doesn’t know what those correlations mean. He doesn’t know whether, or not, there are any causal relationships entailed by such correlations ... or, if such causal relations are present, he doesn’t know what they are or in which direction they go. In addition, he doesn’t know whether, or not, those correlations are a function of the dynamics of further forces or factors that are currently unknown to us.

On page 6 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris criticizes the journal *Nature* for generally accepting the late Stephen Gould’s idea of “nonoverlapping magisteria”. This term refers to the idea that the principles and facts of science and religion do not conflict with one another because the two disciplines encompass different domains of expertise.

I agree with the general tenor of Dr. Harris' rejection of the "nonoverlapping magisteria" concept. My reasons for doing so are somewhat different than his are.

More specifically, Dr. Harris wishes to take issue with Gould's/Nature's perspective concerning the idea that the reason why there is no conflict between science and religion is because science rules authoritatively over the processes of discovering and establishing the physical principles and "facts" of the universe, while religion rules authoritatively over the processes of discovering and establishing the moral and spiritual principles/"facts" of the universe. Dr. Harris rejects the foregoing distinction, because: "Meaning, values, morality, and the good life must relate to facts about the well-being of conscious creatures – and in our case, must lawfully depend upon events in the world and upon states of the human brain." (Page 6)

In addition, Dr. Harris believes that: "rational, open-ended, honest inquiry has always been the true source of insight into such processes. Faith, if it is ever right about anything, is right by accident." (Page 6)

I agree with Dr. Harris that 'rational, open-ended, honest inquiry' is an important component in relation to any sort of investigatory activity, although I am less certain about whether, or not, that sort of inquiry is the "source of insight" with respect to that process since rational, open-ended, honest inquiry might only be a necessary prelude to the emergence of insight into a given issue rather than the source of the insight into the nature or character of that situation. In other words, to say that a certain kind of inquiry is the cause or source of insight is to make a statement about the structural character of how understanding and intelligence operate, and, yet, Dr. Harris is entirely unclear as to how inquiry is the cause or source of insight.

Just as a television set enables images to manifest themselves on the screen of my set, so, too, the right sort of inquiry might enable insight to manifest itself on the screen of consciousness. Nonetheless, such inquiry might no more be the source or cause of insight than a television set is the cause of the content of the images that appear on its screen.

There are many individuals who might participate in a process of "rational, open-ended, honest inquiry." However, not all of them necessarily come up with the correct insight concerning a given inquiry.

Consequently, strictly speaking, one cannot argue that inquiry is the source or cause of insight. The two might be correlated, but their relationship might not be causal in nature, and, as a result, some additional factor or factors might be responsible for the manifestation of insight.

In addition to the foregoing considerations, Dr. Harris seems to assume that the meaning of what constitutes a “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry” is fairly straightforward. However, there are any number of instances in the history of science involving areas of inquiry such as: cosmology, astrophysics, geology, evolution, quantum mechanics, psychology, string theory, climate science, and so on, in which the participants of those exploratory processes are not necessarily guided by principles of rationality, open-endedness, and honesty but, unfortunately, are all too often guided, instead, by principles entailed by a felt need to defend one’s intellectual turf against the onslaught of new “facts” and ideas.

The status quo of science often tends to express a certain amount of inertial resistance to being moved or displaced in relation to the dynamics of ongoing revolutions in thinking in relation to the status quo of – to use Kuhn’s term – “normal science.” The idea that scientists are always “rational, open-ended and honest” with respect to their inquiry into the nature of things is a myth, and there is a considerable amount of junk science associated with, among others, the tobacco, chemical, pharmaceutical, agriculture, psychological, and environmental industries that underscores the nature of that mythology.

Dr. Harris never explains what he means by “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry”. Instead, what he does is to provide a variety of examples throughout *The Moral Landscape* and apparently feels that the reader will grasp the meaning of the foregoing phraseology through a process of interpolation and extrapolation in relation to the individual exemplars he presents during the course of his book, but I am not sure that Dr. Harris is, himself, always committed to “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry” about a variety of issues ... assuming, of course, one could arrive at a characterization of inquiry with which most people might agree.

For example -- and to offer something of an appetizer for the meal that is to come -- Dr. Harris wants to contrast “rational, open-ended,

honest inquiry” with ‘faith’. Dr. Harris appears to be of the opinion that his idea of inquiry is everything which faith is not and vice versa.

The foregoing distinction is being drawn by someone who, whether he wishes to acknowledge it or not, employs the principle of faith throughout his book, *The Moral Landscape*. More specifically, earlier I quoted Dr. Harris as asserting that: “Meaning, values, morality and the good life must relate to facts” that “must lawfully depend on events in the world and upon states in the human brain.”

The foregoing claim is a faith statement. Justifying this assertion is not all that difficult to accomplish.

Dr. Harris does not currently know how: “meaning, values, morality, and the good life” relate to lawful facts that “depend on events in the world and upon states in the human brain.” Currently, Dr. Harris does not know what the “facts” are to which meaning, values, morality, and the good life must relate,” and he does not know what the precise character of that relation is. Furthermore, Dr. Harris does not know how those facts “must lawfully depend on the events in the world and upon states in the human brain.”

What Dr. Harris does know are certain “facts” about, among other things, neurobiology (and this concession is granted for purposes of argument and not because everything that Dr. Harris might like to claim as a ‘fact’ is necessarily so). The “facts” he does know have a relationship with the many things he does not know.

Such a relationship is one of faith. Dr. Harris believes – and I have quoted him arguing in this fashion on several occasions earlier in this essay – there are “facts” that will be discovered in the future that will vindicate his current theory concerning the nature of morality as a, presently, “undeveloped branch of science.” Moreover, Dr. Harris believes that science will engage the events of the world and the states of the brain through a process of “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry” and, thereby, develop insights into the lawful nature of the dependencies that link “facts” concerning events in the world and “facts” concerning various brain states.

Dr. Harris has no proof capable of substantiating the foregoing claims. Nonetheless, on the basis of what he now believes he knows, he is of the opinion that certain things – which are currently not known to be true --

will be shown in the future to be “facts” of a lawful nature that give expression to specific dependency relationships involving the world, brain states, and morality.

Dr. Harris might use terms such as: “opinion,” “theory,” “hypothesis,” “belief,” “prediction,” “reason,” and “science” to allude to the way in which what he knows is juxtaposed in relation to what he does not know, but the connection is nothing else but faith, and that faith is what sustains Dr. Harris as he attempts to construct a reliable bridge that will link his current knowledge with the unexplored territory of the future and, thereby, possibly prove himself to be correct with respect to his claims about morality and science.

Dr. Harris has faith that the process of science, despite its many difficulties, will lead to truth. Dr. Harris has faith that “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry” will generate insights concerning the nature of various kinds of “facts.” He has faith that lawful dependencies will be established and clarified in relation to such “facts.” He has faith that those lawful dependencies will demonstrate that morality is a branch of science. Dr. Harris has faith that one needs to look no further than the brain to be able to develop a fully complete science of morality. He has faith that science can determine human values.

The concept of faith is never really defined by Dr. Harris. One does gather from some of his statements that he doesn’t think much of the idea – after all, why else would he say that: “Faith, if it is ever right about anything, is right by accident”? (Page 6)

According to Dr. Harris, faith is the antithesis of “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry.” However, what is his justification for saying this?

One finds any number of instances in *The Moral Landscape* in which Dr. Harris criticizes certain individuals for their religious views, and by implication, faith seems to be the culprit ... that is, apparently, faith is what led those people astray.

Although I might agree with Dr. Harris with respect to any number of issues that he seeks to criticize with respect to this or that religious belief or practice, nonetheless, one might argue that faith is not necessarily the problem child in relation to any of the mistakes or errors that are cited by Dr. Harris in conjunction with such religious beliefs and practices. Perhaps, the mistake or error is that the individuals that Dr. Harris takes to task

were merely guilty of placing their faith in the wrong sort of practice or belief.

If it is okay for Dr. Harris to have faith in relation to the future with respect to his present neurobiological project of hoping to demonstrate that morality is an undeveloped branch of science, then how can he argue – and still be consistent – that it is not okay for any given individual to have faith concerning what that person believes will be the face of truth in the future? The issue of faith is not a matter of what is right or wrong, but, instead, it is a matter of having a commitment to a given understanding as a correct reflection of the way the universe operates despite an absence of certain kinds of knowledge concerning all of the facts of a matter.

If the theory being propounded by Dr. Harris is correct -- in other words, the idea that morality is a branch of science and that science can determine human values – then his current faith in his project will have been justified. If, on the other hand, it turns out that his theory about morality is incorrect, then his faith in his current project will have been misplaced.

Faith is one of the primary exchange currencies of existence. The exercise of faith is no more necessarily an error than is the act of spending some form of currency in exchange for the goods of life, although, certainly, one can be criticized for the ways in which faith is used during those exchanges, just as one can be criticized for the way in which money might be used in various economic transactions.

Dr. Harris might reject use of the term “faith” when he discusses his own ideas, beliefs, understanding, values, and behavior. However, if he does so, then this merely provides evidence that he is neither: rational, open-ended, nor honest when it comes to such issues.

Faith is a measure of the confidence or commitment one has in relation to some particular idea, belief, value, theory, hypothesis, understanding and the like. If Dr. Harris is uncomfortable with the lexicon of faith, he certainly can choose other words to describe what he is doing, but he is fooling no one but himself and others who have an unreasoning, irrational, closed, and dishonest antipathy with respect to the issue of faith.

Faith is not necessarily an inherently religious or spiritual concept. Rather, it is the glue that holds much of one's life together, and, as such, it helps get one through a day of transactions in which one is trusting that the world cooperates in a way that is consistent with, and reflective of, to some extent, one's understanding about how that world operates.

Getting in a car is rooted in a faith that the car will perform as expected and that other drivers will obey the rules of the road. Eating food is rooted in a faith that such products have been properly grown, raised, harvested, cultivated, slaughtered, preserved, stored, and/or cooked. Being married is rooted in a faith that the person to whom one is married will treat one with respect, honor, fidelity, compassion, forgiveness, understanding, friendship, cooperation, intimacy, and love. Getting an education is rooted in a faith that all the work, money, time, and sacrifices that are entailed by that process will be worth it somewhere down the line.

Almost nothing we do is absent some dimension of faith. This fact is embedded in the very nature of human beings as creatures that generally exist in a condition that is far removed from omniscience.

As long as one's knowledge is constrained by ignorance, our relation with the universe will be an existential condition that involves faith. Faith is the manner in which our knowledge relates to the unknown ... faith is the character of the complex hermeneutical tensor dynamic that links all one knows -- or thinks that one knows -- to all that is unknown in phenomenological/experiential space.

In summary, Dr. Harris argues that both the journal *Nature*, as well as Stephen Gould, are wrong when they claim that the relationship of science and religion is one that is characterized by "nonoverlapping magisteria". Dr. Harris believes they are wrong because all of existence gives expression to "facts," and, according to Dr. Harris, religion is incapable of discovering those "facts." Only rational, open-ended, honest inquiry (i.e., science) is capable of establishing the lawful facts of dependency that relate events in the world to states of the brain and, thereby, demonstrate how human values can be determined by science.

Previously, I noted that while I agree with Dr. Harris that the concept of "nonoverlapping magisteria" should be rejected, my reasons for wishing to do so are different than his are. More specifically, I believe that neither physical sciences nor religion have any privileged access to the

truth, and, therefore, it makes no sense to try to divvy up the universe into those aspects that religion can address authoritatively and those facets that physical science can address authoritatively.

Physical science and religion are research programs for engaging existence. If there are physical “facts” that can be established through a rigorous and exacting process of inquiry, then religion cannot justify rejecting such “facts” ... although, of course, in saying this, I do not mean to suggest that everything and anything that might be said by someone who calls herself or himself a scientist necessarily gives expression to “facts” that accurately reflect the structural character of reality. On the other hand, if there is more to reality than physical science assumes, then physical science cannot justify its underlying premise that the ultimate nature of reality must consist of physical and/or material processes and entities ... although, once again, this does not mean that anything and everything that might be said with respect to the possibility of non-physical and non-material dimensions of reality are necessarily correct.

The truth constrains us all – irrespective of whether, or not, we understand the nature of that truth. The goal should be to understand the nature of truth in any given set of circumstances ... not physical truth and not religious truth, but truth.

Truth is nondenominational and nonsectarian. Our understanding must conform to the requirements of reality, and, therefore, correct understanding is dependent on discovering the nature of that truth.

Truth is not a function of “facts.” “Facts” are a representation of the truth concerning the way being, ontology, or the universe is alleged to be.

To try to argue that the universe should be divided up into two domains – one of which is to be addressed by physical science and one of which is to be addressed by religion – presupposes that the nature of the universe is such that it can be, and should be, parsed in this manner. If the ultimate nature of the universe is not as physical science supposes it to be, and if the nature of ontology is not as religion supposes it to be, then we are left with an irresolvable problem since the two methodologies that are being used to claim authority with respect to those matters are inadequate to the tasks before them ... inadequacies born of biases and assumptions about the way the universe or reality or ontology is believed to be and, therefore, inadequacies that will seep into and distort, if not

corrupt, everything one does in an attempt to seek to come to some viable understanding about the nature of reality.

Dr. Harris claims that: “It seems inevitable, however, that science will gradually encompass life’s deepest questions ... Only a rational understanding of human beings will allow billions of us to coexist peacefully, converging on the same social, political, economic, and environmental goals.” (Page 7)

By making the foregoing statements, Dr. Harris is expressing his faith about the nature of life’s deepest questions – namely, that they are of a kind that are fully amenable to the methods and techniques of science. By claiming that only “rational understanding” will permit human beings to reach agreements about various goals, Dr. Harris is expressing his faith that “rational understanding” (whatever that might mean) is the sort of thing that is capable of not only providing a path through which to reach agreement about a variety of goals but also of providing a means through which to generate solutions for how such goals should be achieved. In addition, Dr. Harris is expressing his faith that rational understanding constitutes the deepest, richest, most creative and most constructive capacity human beings have to reach agreement on, and generate solutions in relation to, such goals.

I have my doubts about the assumptions and presumptions that are built into Dr. Harris’ faith-based approach to engaging life and being – some of which have been noted already. I also have my doubts about the assumptions and presumptions that are built into Gould’s faith-based concept of “nonoverlapping magisteria” -- some of which have been noted already.

Dr. Harris states on page 24 of *The Moral Landscape* that: “I have made it clear that religion and science are in a zero-sum conflict with respect to the facts. Here, I have begun to argue that the division between facts and values is intellectually unsustainable, especially from the perspective of neuroscience. Consequently, it will come as no surprise that I see very little room for compromise between faith and reason on questions of morality.”

While Dr. Harris has made it very clear that he believes that ‘religion and science are in a zero-sum conflict with respect to the facts,’ what he has not made clear is why anyone should accept such a statement as being an accurate reflection of what reality demands of human beings.

The 'fact' of the matter is, reality is in a zero-sum game with respect to all human attempts to determine the nature of reality.

Science does not determine the truth, and religion does not determine the truth. Rather, truth already is whatever it is, and science and religion are but two attempts to figure out what is the case with respect to the nature of what is.

The extent to which any given scientific or religious perspective is correct will be a function of the ability of such a perspective to be able to reflect the truth of some given dimension of ontology. Being able to demonstrate that such perspectives accurately reflect the nature of reality is not always easy to establish in a way that will be able to enjoy a consensus of agreement among human beings in general. In addition, sometimes, of course, we might come up empty with respect to those demonstrations.

The absence of ultimate vindication is not necessarily a death knell for a given scientific or religious perspective. Those perspectives might have heuristic value – that is, they might serve to help us learn, discover, or operate – even if clear-cut proofs have not been developed that show those perspectives to be accurate reflections of some facet of the way things are.

Previously, I have indicated that, to a degree, I agree with Dr. Harris when he states that: “the division between facts and values is intellectually unsustainable.” In other words -- and one might wish to take issue with the following conditional – if the nature of “ought” is inherent in the nature of reality, then, obviously, any perspective that sought to separate facts from values would be artificial in as much as values would be -- given the nature of the underlying conditional -- a special sort of fact.

If, on the other hand, there is no force of “ought” that is inherent in the nature of reality, then values give expression to entirely artificial constructs – although, nonetheless, possibly still possessing heuristic value. Under such circumstances, facts and values are different from one another in the sense that “facts” have to do with the nature of, say, physical or psychological reality, whereas values have to do with frameworks for interacting with those facts in one way rather than another without one being able to demonstrate that the nature of physical reality justifies, in some sense, the use of one set of values rather than another set of values.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, I tend to disagree with Dr. Harris' way of going about characterizing what the facts are with respect to any given situation. For instance, Dr. Harris is inclined to treat reason and faith as being polar opposites of one another.

For Dr. Harris, faith seems to be a matter of blind belief. While this might be the case for some individuals, this is not how I – and, I believe, quite a few other individuals -- actually approach the dynamic of faith.

Suppose I have several friends. Let us also suppose that whenever I have problems I approach one or the other friend and ask for their assistance.

Over time, I discover that one friend is much more likely to help me with my difficulties than the other friend is. My faith in the individual who is inclined to help me out is enhanced with each new experience of assistance, while my faith in the individual who is not inclined to help me might diminish ... at least as far as asking for assistance is concerned.

Faith is not blind but is clearly rooted in experience. Faith is subject to change, and it is sensitive to what does, and does not, occur. Consequently, faith is not just a blind, static form of belief.

At the same time, the faith that I have in the individual who is willing to help me out is not exactly knowledge since I am aware that on any given occasion the friend who usually helps me might not be able to do so for any number of reasons. Perhaps he is busy or has a previous commitment or is not feeling well or is broke himself.

I could use terms such as: 'confidence level,' 'probability,' 'chance' or 'likelihood' to describe the situation with my friend. However, the idea of faith works just as well, and use of that term doesn't distort the nature or character of the relationship I have with my friend when it comes to issues of assistance.

There does tend to be an element of emotional commitment present when the term "faith" is used that might not be present when the terminology of probability models is employed. On the other hand, someone who is a gambler and plays the odds might have an emotional commitment with respect to the possibility of certain outcomes occurring rather than others, and the decision to play those odds in a certain way might be rooted in some sort of faith that has arisen as a result of past experiences in similar circumstances.

I am confident that the sun will appear tomorrow. I have faith that the sun will appear tomorrow.

The probability that the stock market will continue to rise is 'x'. I have little, moderate, or a lot of faith that the stock market will continue to go up.

I am convinced that this experiment will prove me to be right. I have faith that this experiment will prove me to be correct.

We use the lexicon of faith to give expression to an understanding that contains a mixture of things that are known and things that are not known with respect to our relationship with this or that situation. We use the lexicon of probability to do the same thing.

Dr. Harris has no faith in the idea of faith. Yet, faith is the glue that holds most of his world together, and he could not operate without it even if he chooses to use other words in an attempt to mask what is actually going on.

For Dr. Harris, science and reason are like friends of his to whom he can go and seek assistance for different kinds of problems. As such, he has faith in them even though there are times when reason and science might not be able to solve certain kinds of problems that Dr. Harris places before them.

For instance, currently, neither science nor reason has much of value to say about the origins of consciousness, intelligence, reason, logic, language, or creativity. Moreover, neither science nor reason can say what the essential nature of those phenomena is (e.g., are they material, physical, or something else), and, yet, both science and reason rely on those phenomena in countless ways, and, therefore, people who use science and reason have a faith-based relationship with such processes because there are elements of both the known and the unknown that are entangled in inextricable ways with respect to the exercise of science and reason.

We all parse the experiences of our lives into bundles of "facts" that might, or might not, accurately represent the character of those experiences. We all develop belief systems concerning such bundles that often tend to entail certain kinds of faith relationships involving the past, the present, and the future.

If Dr. Harris wishes to argue that faith plays no role in the way he interacts with science, reason, and the experiences of his life, then I believe he will have a very difficult time proving that his life is faith free. Consequently, the beef that Dr. Harris really seems to have with the prospect of trying to reconcile faith and reason is that certain people bring these two phenomena together in ways with which he does not agree.

Faith and reason are not necessarily inherently opposed to one another. Rather, the trick is to find the modes of their interaction that might provide one with the best opportunity to be able to grasp the character of reality.

In other words, religious and scientific perspectives aren't necessarily locked in some sort of zero-sum contest in which only one perspective can be correct – and, certainly, Dr. Harris has not demonstrated this is, or must be, the case. Instead, religious and scientific experiences generate data on which to reflect and with respect to which one develops various kinds of faith relationships through which an array of problems are addressed and resolved (or not) in ways that also can be critically reflected upon.

If a given set of religious beliefs is not working for me, and I lose faith in the capacity of such a system of beliefs to be able to adequately address a variety of on-going existential problems in a heuristically valuable way, then I am free to go looking for something that seems to do a better job of addressing those needs. Is this not also the case in relation to scientific beliefs, and has not such a search for something better gone on repeatedly throughout the history of science?

Stripped down to its essential features, religion is a search for the truth concerning the nature being and the nature of one's relationship with such being. Stripped down to its essential features, science is also a search for truths concerning the same issues.

Does this mean that science and religion are in competition to determine whether reality is scientific or religious in nature? Not necessarily.

To date, there really is no reason of which I am aware that has been incontrovertibly established and demonstrates why the nature of reality couldn't give simultaneous expression to both scientific and religious

truths. However, by saying the foregoing, one need not thereby be committed to a position in which science and religion must go about engaging or discovering the nature of reality in precisely the same way.

In other words, the relationship between science and religion could be complementary in nature with respect to generating understandings concerning reality. Although both science and religion are attempts to probe reality and establish the nature of truth, the truth might be sufficiently complex to accommodate a variety of different ways of engaging it and understanding it without those understandings necessarily contradicting one another.

If the truths of science and religion were complementary, then this would mean that the “nonoverlapping magisteria” notion introduced by Stephen Jay Gould (discussed earlier) might not be correct, or it might have to be modified somewhat. More specifically, it is entirely possible that one and the same set of facts concerning the physical world might support more than one level of interpretation/understanding, or it is possible that what we know of the physical world is but one level of reality.

Physical facts are what they are. If someone is devoted to the truth, then this means acknowledging the character of physical/material reality. If one can demonstrate that a certain dimension of the universe operates in a certain way, then there is no need to treat those truths as constituting threats to religious truths since it is the truth that matters and not some particular understanding of things in which one might have a vested interest.

I am of the opinion that if there are religious and physical truths about being – and I believe there are such truths – then, ultimately, those truths will not be contradictory in any way. However, we might have to abandon this or that pet idea along the way in order to reach that sort of unified position ... which is just another way of saying that it is the truth that matters and not our beliefs, ideas, opinions, worldviews, and theories.

The place where religion and science often end up stepping on one another’s toes often concerns the interpretation of “facts.” As a result, it might be of some value to remind oneself at this point that there is a fundamental difference between talking about science as a methodology

and talking about science as a process of interpreting the “facts” that are generated through such a methodology.

Science-as-methodology has produced all manner of “facts” that have been arranged in a multiplicity of ways in an attempt to make sense of those “facts.” The modes of arrangement are often referred to as “science,” but not all those arrangements are able to stand the test of time since science-as-methodology has a tendency to generate further “facts” that reveal problems – whether peripheral or essential – that undermine whatever claims are being made about the capacity of those arrangements to accurately reflect the character of reality.

Dr. Harris appears to want to argue that all religious modes of searching for the truth are unacceptable because some people have failed miserably with respect to such an undertaking and, in the process, have inflicted considerable suffering on other human beings, not to mention other life forms. If failure is the criteria for determining what modalities of searching should be pursued, then science should have been abandoned a long time ago since for every success in science, there have been many more failures and, as well, considerable suffering associated with the uses and abuses of science.

Every failed experiment in science provides important information if one knows how to make use of that data. Every failed experiment in religion provides important information if one knows how to make use of that data.

Someone once said that the only thing worse than making mistakes is not learning from those mistakes. Sometimes, the religious search for truth is a little bit – and sometimes considerably – slower on the uptake with respect to making use of the data that ensues from failed experiments than is the case with science, but, then, science, for the most part, doesn’t deal with issues concerning human: meaning, purpose, identity, and potential. Therefore, the problems engaged through religion tend to have a degree of complexity that is many magnitudes of difficulty and importance greater than are the sorts of problems addressed by science.

According to Dr. Harris, the situation vis-à-vis science and religion is as follows: “If the basic claims of religion are true, the scientific worldview is so blinkered and susceptible to modification as to be rendered nearly ridiculous; if the basic claims of religion are false, most people are

profoundly confused about the nature of reality, confounded by irrational hopes and fears ... often with tragic results.” (Page 25) Once again, Dr. Harris is wrong about the facts of the situation.

In the foregoing excerpt from his book, Dr. Harris talks about something that he refers to as “the basic claims of religion.” What are these claims?

Religion is not a monolithic process in which everyone is making the same sort of claims. In fact, religious discourse is marked by a wealth of ongoing controversies surrounding a vast array of different claims concerning the nature of reality.

Perhaps the only claim held in common by all religious modes of engaging reality is that there is something more to existence than can be exhausted by our senses (including those modes of instrumentation that augment and enhance our biological, sensory capabilities). Different religious understandings give different names to this extrasensory dimension of reality, and different religious understandings go about parsing that dimension in ways that often tend to conflict with one another.

Unfortunately, many religious people make the same kind of mistake that Dr. Harris does when he tries to claim that science and religion are caught in a zero-sum game concerning the nature of reality. That is, people from different religious backgrounds often assume that they are caught up in a zero-sum game with other religious perspectives concerning the nature of reality such that only one of the explanations can be correct.

People who consider religion, like science, to be a zero-sum game -- with reality and truth at stake -- often overlook the possibility that none of their interpretations of reality are necessarily correct. Alternatively, it could be the case that all those perspectives are correct in some ways and incorrect in other ways, and sorting out which is which is very problematic ... to whatever extent such a sorting out process actually can be successfully accomplished.

Just as there is a difference between science-as-methodology and science-as-interpretation, there also is a difference between religion-as-methodology and religion-as-interpretation. Dr. Harris actually touches on this issue toward the latter part of his book: *The End of Faith* when he

discusses his ideas about Buddhist spirituality and proceeds to emphasize the methodological aspects of such spirituality as opposed to theological interpretations that arise in conjunction with the data packages that are generated through the use of spiritual methodology.

Processes such as fasting, meditation, and contemplation are expressions of methodology that one can undertake as experimental exercises in which one remains uncommitted to any particular outcome but attempts to reflect on the data generated through that exercise in as objective and unbiased a way as possible. Issues of replication and consensus come into play with respect to such methodological considerations even as one seeks to remain open to possibility and not foreclose on any particular interpretation of those methodological events prematurely.

However one wishes to conceive of consciousness, intelligence, reason, insight, understanding, curiosity, creativity, attention, motivation, and intentionality, it seems clear that those phenomena are forms of instrumentality that are used during the process of critically reflecting on the data that arises from one's experimental forays into this or that spiritual methodology. Those phenomena are the means through which one seeks to evaluate the nature of experience.

Thus, empirical observation, critical reflection, experimental methods, instrumentation, objectivity, replication, and consensus all play similar roles in spiritual methodology – when properly pursued -- as they do in scientific methodology. The zero-sum issue does not usually arise in conjunction with methodology but, instead, tends to arise in relation to interpretations concerning the significance or meaning of the results that issue forth from the use of methodology – and this is as true in science as it is in spirituality and religion.

Spiritual methodology does not constitute a threat to science – although theological interpretations concerning the results of that methodology might constitute such a threat. Scientific methodology does not constitute a threat to spirituality – although various sorts of dogmatic scientific interpretations of the results issuing forth from the application of that methodology might constitute such a threat.

I know of no fact issuing forth from any branch of science that proves there is no transcendental dimension to being. I know of no fact issuing forth from any branch of science that shows that the universe is random

in nature ... and here, one needs to distinguish between, on the one hand, the value of using the concept of randomness as a methodological means of establishing certain kinds of baselines against which experimental results can be compared in the search for data that do not conform to the properties which would be predicted on the basis of assuming that a given phenomenon operates in accordance with random processes, and, on the other hand, using the results of experiments as a basis for claiming that the nature of the universe is intrinsically random in character.

At the same time, I know of no dimension of spiritual methodology that is capable of demonstrating that using scientific methodology is incapable of revealing important truths about certain facets of reality. Indeed, as pointed out earlier, spiritual and scientific methodologies overlap in many respects even though those methodologies might be directed at, and interested in, different aspects of reality and experience.

To be sure, there are ethical considerations that might arise in conjunction with the way and extent to which scientific methodology might be applied in some given set of circumstances. However, such ethical issues might be as much about the importance of observing the cautionary principle when venturing into areas of uncertainty and, therefore, recognizing the need to have humility with respect to our considerable ignorance about where the truth of things lies, as it is the case that those ethical issues might be about the manner in which theological interpretations have a tendency to impinge on the application of scientific methodology.

Neither science nor religion is complete unto itself. Each is a process that takes place in the midst of other people who might not share one's way of interpreting the world.

Under those circumstances, the problem becomes one of trying to decide whose perspective, if any, has priority in a given set of circumstances. More to the point, while I am not willing to automatically cede my moral and intellectual authority to some given theological interpretation of reality, I also am not willing to automatically cede my moral and intellectual authority to some given scientific interpretation of reality.

Methodology – whether spiritual or scientific -- yes! Interpretation – whether spiritual or scientific -- not necessarily!

Advocates of religion engage in problematic and unconstructive forms of caricature concerning science when they try to reduce science-as-methodology to nothing more than a case of Herr Doktor Frankenstein and his monster. Advocates of science engage in problematic and unconstructive forms of caricature concerning religion and spirituality when the former individuals try to reduce spirituality down to being nothing more than irrationality and superstition as exemplified by the case of the Inquisition and its victims.

At times, the application of results from scientific methodology has occurred in all manner of ways that have led to “tragic results” -- and war is just one example of this. At times, the application of results from spiritual methodology has occurred in ways that have led to “tragic results” – and war, as well, is just one example of this.

Religion-as-interpretation has had its share of extremists and fundamentalists – and race hatred is just one example of this. However, science-as-interpretation also has had its share of extremists and fundamentalists – and eugenics is just one example of this.

Unfortunately, because Dr. Harris seems intent on force-fitting things into a mould of zero-sum games, he often falls victim to a problematic and unconstructive ways of stating problems. This is true not only with respect to the way he often talks about science and religion, per se, but this also often is true in relation to the way he talks about the nature of the relationship that might exist between science and religion.

Things are not either black and white, or right or wrong, or correct and incorrect when it comes to science versus religion. The two processes need not be locked in a struggle to the death in which there can only be one winner and one loser.

Dr. Harris states that: “If the basic claims of religion are true, the scientific worldview is so blinkered and susceptible to modification as to be rendered nearly ridiculous.” (Page 25) Dr. Harris seems to overlook the obvious in the foregoing assertion – namely, that “If the basic claims of religion are true” (and this is his conditional not mine), then, perhaps, the scientific worldview should be susceptible to appropriate modifications to enable it to be less ridiculous than it would be if it were permitted to continue on with a false worldview.

However, the fact of the matter is that Dr. Harris is entirely vague about which religious claims he is talking about. Consequently, it is difficult, if not impossible, to carry on much of a discussion with respect to what would be necessary to do in relation to modifying some given scientific worldview if certain religious claims were true.

Conceivably, if certain religious claims were true, one might not have to modify the scientific worldview. Much depends on the claim in question.

On the other hand, Dr. Harris argues that: “If the basic claims of religion are false, most people are profoundly confused about the nature of reality [and] confounded by irrational hopes and fears.” (Page 25) Even if one knew which “basic claims of religion” Dr. Harris had in mind – which one doesn’t (although one might be able to guess what is weighing on his mind) – one still could ask Dr. Harris about the nature of the process through which those claims supposedly were proven to be false.

Dr. Harris is dealing entirely in the realm of the hypothetical. ‘If this, then that’, and, in the meantime, Dr. Harris has not shown why one should go along with, or accept as plausible, the ‘if’ aspect of any of his conditionals.

Moreover, Dr. Harris is entirely too restricted in his way of conceptualizing issues. If someone has faith that something – whether scientific, religious or philosophical -- is the truth and is then provided with evidence indicating that such faith is unwarranted, then, under those circumstances, anyone is likely to become “profoundly confused” and “confounded by irrational hopes and fears.”

This condition is known as dissociation. People whose worldview or faith-orientation is brought into question become stressed, anxious, depressed, uncertain, and tend to lose their sense of identity (depersonalization) and reality (de-realization).

The worldview or faith-orientation that could come crashing down might be political, economic, cultural, philosophical, psychological, emotional, interpersonal, spiritual, or scientific. People of science are as vulnerable to becoming “profoundly confused” and “confounded by irrational hopes and fears” when their worldview is brought into question as anyone else who suffers a crisis of faith concerning their worldviews.

On page 24 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris argues: "... there is no mystery why most scientists feel that they must pretend that religion and science are compatible. ... While few scientists living in the West now fear torture or death at the hands of religious fanatics, many will voice concerns about losing their funding if they give offense to religion."

Imagine that! People worried about losing their funding if they offend the people with the money.

The foregoing has a certain resonance with the whining of a petulant child who is not permitted to do whatever he or she wishes to do, when she or he wishes to do so, and irrespective of how such behaviors might affect those around the child. The condition is called dependency, and if one doesn't care for the conditions that are placed on one in order to obtain someone else's money, then, perhaps, one should begin thinking about how to support oneself outside the distastefulness of that dependency.

Neither science nor religion has an absolute, unquestionable right to people's money. At least, I don't recall coming across any proof that would justify such a 'right'.

Neither science nor religion has an absolute, incontrovertible right to dictate the way things should be irrespective of how people might feel about the matter. At least, I don't recall coming across anything that would justify such a 'right'

Even when universal truths are particular expressions of those universals, there tend to be many contingencies that need to be considered when seeking to understand the nature of the relationship between universal principles and particularized expressions of those principles. This is especially true when more than one universal principle is involved in the dynamic that is shaping the character of some given particular.



Chapter 9: Irreligion

The dust jacket that covers John Allen Paulos' book: *Irreligion* begins its description of the latter book with a question: "Are there any logical reasons to believe in God." The description on the dust jacket proceeds by saying that John Allen Paulos does not think there are any logical reasons for believing in God and, then, continues its description of *Irreligion* by indicating that the book is divided into a series of chapters that "... refute the twelve arguments most often put forward for believing in God's existence."

I have no idea who the publishers of the aforementioned book have in mind when they allude to those who put forward the indicated twelve arguments discussed in *Irreligion*, but aside from some individuals who have taken a college course dealing with the philosophy of religion or with some sort of course focusing on certain facets of theology, there are few members of the general public -- who if asked to give their reasons for believing in God -- are likely to offer any of the proofs explored in *Irreligion*.

Consequently, in many respects, the contents of *Irreligion* are irrelevant to how most people think about God and religion. The thoughts of the latter individuals might be incorrect, or they might be correct, but those thoughts tend not to be rooted in the sorts of logical arguments that John Allen Paulos wishes to explore in his book.

I've listened to people from many different parts of the world talk about religion and God, and, at most, there have only been a few instances in which any of the foregoing people referred to one, or another, of the arguments mentioned in *Irreligion*. Moreover, usually, these people only did so because they had taken a course in philosophy theology that discussed such issues.

The reasons that people give for believing in God often seem to have to do with existential issues of one kind or another. For instance, they might have had certain kinds of experiences that they felt -- rightly or wrongly -- induce them to believe in the existence of God, or they feel -- rightly or wrongly -- that the idea of God's existence helps to make sense of life in a way that philosophy and science cannot do. Or, perhaps, they believe -- rightly or wrongly -- that they sense God's presence when they pray or engage in certain other kinds of practices. Alternatively, they might believe -- rightly or wrongly -- they experience a deep sense of

resonance with the presence of God when they hear certain kinds of music, or visit certain kinds of religious sites, or interact with certain kinds of individuals.

People have an array of experiences, and, for whatever reasons – be they good or bad ones – those individuals interpret those experiences as constituting evidence for the existence of God. Normally speaking, people don't tend to start out by constructing several premises to form some sort of syllogism and, then, conclude: 'therefore, God exists.'

The publishers of *Irreligion*, as does the author of that book, appear to believe that the sorts of arguments that are deconstructed in the foregoing book are, somehow, of vital important to any discussion concerning religion and God. However, this just doesn't seem to be the case.

People do have reasons – irrespective of whether, or not, they are good ones – for why they believe in God. Nonetheless, for the most part, those reasons have little to do with the kinds of reasoning processes that are explored in *Irreligion*.

In the preface to *Irreligion*, Professor Paulos states: "There are many who seem to be impressed with the argument that God exists simply because He says He does in a much extolled tome that He allegedly inspired." To believe in God because the idea of God's existence is given expression in a particular book is something one either accepts or rejects, but the idea itself is a hard one to either prove or disprove to everyone beyond a reasonable doubt.

Professor Paulos finds such arguments to be unpersuasive. However, saying that he finds those arguments to be unpersuasive has no probative value when it comes to determining whether, or not, God's existence is real in some sense.

One might be able to demonstrate that this or that argument concerning the existence of God commits a logical error of some kind. Nevertheless, the fact that any number of arguments concerning God's existence entail logical problems of one sort or another says nothing at all about whether, or not, God exists ... it only says something concerning the deficiencies of certain kinds of argument.

Demonstrating the logical problems that are present in specific arguments concerning God's existence is irrelevant to whether, or not,

God exists. The nature of ontology is not dependent on those arguments, but, rather, arguments succeed or fail due to whether, or not, they are capable of accurately reflecting some dimension of what actually is the case with respect to Being/Reality.

Recalling his early years of development, Professor Paulos asserts: "The absence of an answer to the question 'What caused, preceded, or created God?' made, in my eyes, the existence of the latter being an unnecessary, antecedent mystery. Why introduce Him? Why postulate a completely non-explanatory, extra perplexity to help explain the already sufficiently perplexing and beautiful world." (Page xi)

One wonders what it means for something to be "sufficiently perplexing"? The idea sounds, at best, somewhat arbitrary since what is sufficiently perplexing to the author when he was young might not be adequately perplexing to someone who believes that the material world is not necessarily all that there is.

Furthermore, there is nothing wrong with asking questions such as: What caused, preceded, or created God. Nonetheless, those questions are not rhetorical in nature, and, therefore, matters do not end with the mere raising of those issues.

If God exists and if God was not caused, preceded, or created, then, the foregoing sorts of questions will be shown to be irrelevant to the nature of Reality. On the other hand, if God exists but God was caused, preceded, or created, then, obviously, the young Paulos's puzzlement about why one should introduce such an extra perplexity is ill considered since the reason why that sort of extra perplexity is necessary is precisely because the nature of ontology demands it.

Does God exist? Was God created, and, if so, by what?

The foregoing questions are attempting to probe the nature of Being/Reality. One cannot dismiss them as unnecessary simply because one feels that they generate an excess of perplexity or require one to consider possibilities that exceed one's capacity to be able to answer at any given time.

According to Professor Paulos, the term: "irreligion" refers to: "... topics, arguments and questions that spring from an incredulity not only about religion but also about others credulity." (Page xi) Professor Paulos never defines what he means by religion ... although it seems to have

something to do with belief systems that are predicated on God's existence.

Presumably, if there were "topics, arguments, and questions that spring from an incredulity" concerning Professor Paulos's incredulity concerning such topics, arguments, and questions, then, one might be dealing with something called "ir-irreligion," and, if this is the case, then, maybe the two "ir's" might cancel one another out, and one would, then, be left with the issue of religion.

Since, previously, I have defined religion as: The search for the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, I'm not quite sure what the source of Professor Paulos's incredulity is other than that he appears to harbor biases concerning any, and all, possibilities that might have something to do with God's existence. While Professor Paulos might be able to discover any number of errors in this or that argument concerning the existence of God, he does not put forth any arguments in his book that are capable of proving God does not exist, and, therefore, why should he find the possibility that God exists such an incredulous sort of thing?

Professor Paulos believes that the: "... first step in untangling religious absurdities is to recognize that the arguments for the existence of God depend on the definition of God. Who or what is God." (Page xiv) He, then, goes on to define God as a Being who might, or might not be: Omnipotent, omniscient, creator of the universe, or perfect (and one wonders what the criteria are for determining the nature of perfection).

If "untangling religious absurdities" depends on a definition of God, then, Professor Paulos has taken a somewhat problematic first step since he doesn't so much define God as he puts forth a set of arbitrary properties that complicate matters because one, now, is faced with a Being that might, or might not, be this or that sort of Being. In other words, if one wishes to follow Professor Paulos's path to untangling religious absurdities, one is not just required to prove the existence of God, but one must prove that such a Being might, or might not, have certain qualities and might, or might not, exhibit those qualities to varying degrees ... under those circumstances, the goal posts would be moving constantly and, as a result, one would have a very difficult time figuring out how to score points in the conceptual game to which Professor Paulos wishes to invite his readers.

I can think of a way to help untangle Professor Paulos tangled, if not tortured, start ... something that permits one to get rid of all talk of omnipotence, omniscience, perfection, and, as a result, enables one to become somewhat more focused with respect to the issue of God's existence. For instance, why not define God as that which makes all facets of existence possible?

Does God have to be omnipotent, omniscient, and perfect to do what Divinity does? Perhaps, but however God -- assuming God exists (which I do) -- does what God does, then, God might be the One Who makes all facets and dimensions of manifested existence possible.

Of course, the foregoing definition doesn't encompass cases in which Divinity exists but is not involved in: Creating, looking after, or interacting with existent things. However, if the latter sort of God existed, then, there might not be any way to detect the presence of that kind of God and, consequently, under those circumstances, one would have difficulty proving, or disproving, the existence of that which existed but did not reveal its presence in any manner ... and, therefore, such a God would likely be darker than 'Dark matter' by an indefinitely large number of orders of magnitude.

Moreover, the definition of God that was given several paragraphs back doesn't really so much define God as it indicates God is that which makes manifested existence possible. Perhaps, God is such that Divinity cannot be defined, and, if so, then one only can attribute the structural and qualitative properties of manifested existence to God's presence without necessarily being able to understand how that presence makes manifested existence possible.

Professor Paulos indicates that he "...never had a religious phase." I'm not quite sure what to make of that statement.

If one defines religion as a search for the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality -- and I really don't feel that any other definition of "religion" is viable -- then, he would be claiming that he never had any inclination to search for the truth concerning the nature of his relationship with Being/Reality, and, I rather doubt that such a possibility is true.

An alternative possibility concerning Professor Paulos's claim that he has never undergone any sort of religious phase in his life is that, perhaps,

he suffers from some form of spiritual agnosia. As a result, he might be incapable of engaging life's experiences and understanding the manner in which such experiences might be giving expression to God's presence.

If the foregoing were the case, then, one would face the further problem of having to determine whether such disabling agnosia was inherited, acquired, and/or self-inflicted. However, given that Professor Paulos is inclined to shy away from anything that adds to "sufficient perplexity", I'll assume that what Professor means when he confesses that he has never had any religious phase in his life is that, for whatever reason, he has never been an active participant in any sort of on-going search involving the possibility that a Being/Reality referred to as God -- however defined -- has anything to do with existence in general or the existence of Professor Paulos in particular.

However, although Professor Paulos indicates that he has never had a religious phase in his life, nonetheless, somewhere along the line he has acquired an evangelical approach to things. More specifically, toward the end of the preface of *Irreligion* he asserts: "I am and always have been an atheist/agnostic and will herein attempt to explain why perhaps you should be too." (Page xvi)

The opening argument in *Irreligion* concerning the existence of God involves the issue of "first causes." He believes that the general argument for trying to prove the existence of God as a first cause is as follows:

- "1. Everything has a cause, or perhaps, many causes.
2. Nothing is its own cause.
3. Casual claims can't go on forever.
4. So there has to be a first cause.
5. The first cause is God, who therefore exists." (Page 4)

Professor Paulos is of the opinion that the initial step in the foregoing argument harbors a huge logical problem. More specifically, if everything has a cause, then, according to Professor Paulos, not only must God have a cause, but, as well, there can be no first cause since every cause presupposes, yet, some other cause.

The foregoing perspective is predicated on an assumption. It assumes that God is a 'thing'

While it might be the case that "everything" has a cause, nevertheless, if God is not a thing, then, one is not necessarily required to acknowledge that God has a cause. Perhaps, only manifested things have a cause and if God is that which makes manifested things possible, then, God is the cause of such things without simultaneously being required to be dependent on causal phenomena to make such things possible.

As a mathematician, Professor Paulos understands the importance of assumptions. Consequently, he might be willing to acknowledge that many individuals don't try to argue their way to the existence of God, but, instead, they treat God's existence as a basic postulate, and, then, proceed from there.

Thus, some people might reason as follows: If first causes exist, then God is such a cause. One cannot necessarily conclude that God exists because first causes exists, but, rather, God – if God exists -- is assumed to be the sort of Being capable of operating as a first cause for all existential manifestation.

One might be right or wrong concerning God's existence. However, if God exists, then those people might reason that first causes issue forth from such a Being even though they understand that one cannot cite the idea of first causes as proving that God exists.

Professor Paulos wonders: "Why cannot the physical world itself be taken to be the uncaused first cause? After all, the venerable principle of Occam's razor advises us to 'shave off' unnecessary assumptions, and taking the world itself as the uncaused first cause has the great virtue of not introducing the unnecessary hypothesis of God." (Page 5)

The foregoing argument involves a misapplication of Occam's razor. Occam's razor revolves about the idea that one should not introduce assumptions beyond necessity, but Professor Paulos has not established what is necessary with respect to the existence of God and/or the universe.

Could it be possible that the universe has always existed, and, therefore, it constitutes an uncaused source of all that transpires in the universe? Yes, this is a possibility, but if God exists and is the uncaused

source of the universe, then, the possibility being introduced in the first sentence of this paragraph is not true.

The idea of God's existence is only unnecessary if one can demonstrate that the universe, in fact, always has existed, and that the universe is uncaused, and, as well, that the universe is the cause of whatever is manifested in the universe. Professor Paulos has not shown that any of the foregoing features are true, and, therefore, he cannot establish what is, and is not, necessary with respect to working toward trying to understand the nature of Being/Reality.

Professor Paulos goes on to argue that all of the questions that might be directed toward an uncaused physical universe (such as: Why is it here?) also could be raised in conjunction with an uncaused God (i.e., Why is God here?). Those questions, however, are irrelevant to the issue of whether, or not, God exists, and since Professor Paulos's book is, supposedly, about showing the inadequacies of twelve arguments that attempt to prove God's existence, then the foregoing sort of questions – however interesting they might be -- are irrelevant to the purported purpose of his book.

At a certain point, Professor Paulos states: "... efforts by some to put God, the putative, first cause, completely outside of time and space give up entirely on the notion of cause." (Page 5) Professor Paulos is assuming that he understands how causality works.

Suppose time and space were both considered to be manifestations along with the rest of the contents of the universe. Under those circumstances, time and space are 'things', processes, or dynamics that are made possible (i.e., caused) by God, and this remains true irrespective of whether, or not, one understands the nature of their causation.

What makes phenomenal manifestation possible? We are still trying to figure that out, and, despite having drilled down to the conceptual level of quarks, there is no complete, coherent, consistent, unproblematic epistemological account capable of generating a viable explanation of how everything in the physical universe originated or operates.

The phenomenon of 'quantum entanglement' indicates there is a great deal about even the physical, causal dynamics of the universe that we do not appear to understand. Professor Paulos supposes – as indicated in the previous quote -- that causality must, somehow, be

dependent on time and space, or that God must be within time and space in order to affect changes in time or space or to affect changes in the dynamics of 'things' within time and space.

The foregoing claim of Professor Paulos suggests that he completely understands, space, time, causality, and, possibly, God ... after all, unless one completely understands the nature of space, time, causality and God, then, how could one possibly say what must be the case with respect to the issue of causality. Yet, Professor Paulos has provided little, or nothing, in the way of evidence that suggests he possesses such knowledge.

In fact, all that Professor Paulos legitimately might be entitled to say with any degree of confidence in conjunction with the foregoing sort of considerations is the following: If causality works independently of time and space, or if God can affect change in the physical universe while God remains beyond time and space, then, I (i.e., Professor Paulos) don't know how God does it. However, Professor Paulos instead argues that God could not bring about causal results if God is beyond time and space because, when filtered through his biases and assumptions concerning those matters, he is unable to understand how that sort of dynamic might be possible.

In effect, Professor Paulos is arguing that God (if God exists) must operate in accordance with his understanding of causality (that is, the understanding of Professor Paulos). Instead of requiring his understanding to comply with the nature of Being/Reality, he appears to be insisting that reality must comply with his way of looking at things.

Perhaps, the phenomena of the manifested universe are nothing more than ideas in the mind of God. As such, God would be beyond space and time even as Divine Presence is necessary for the phenomena of the universe (including time and space) to be able to be manifested in God's mind.

How would those ideas be generated? We don't know, but the causal relationship between God and those ideas might well be beyond the physical world because the latter (i.e., the physical world) is a function of the former (i.e., ideas) rather than the other way around.

Professor Paulos, himself, writes along somewhat similar lines when he talks about David Hume's argument concerning the idea of causality.

The Scottish philosopher believed that “x causes y” only means that y follows x in every observed instance of x and y.

Hume maintained that there is no demonstrable logical necessity that ties x and y together. He believed the link between the two was of a contingent nature and, therefore, depended on ontological conditions.

Professor Paulos believes that the wrinkle in causality noted by Hume makes all statements concerning first causes inherently problematic. Consequently, he feels that any alleged proof for the existence of God that relies on making God the first cause will inherit those difficulties as well.

The problem entailed by the issue of causality has nothing to do with whether, or not, something is a first cause. The issue of causality is fraught with difficulties because we don't necessarily know, in causal terms, how the universe works at its most basic level or how a – possibly - non-material God brought forth (i.e., caused) a material universe.

In addition to Hume's contribution to the issue of causality, Professor Paulos also mentions quantum mechanics and claims that causality “... at the micro level is at best probabilistic.” (Page 7) To say that events at the micro level are probabilistic in nature is to confess that one is ignorant about why a given probabilistic distribution has the properties it does ... in other words, quantum mechanics doesn't really account for such probabilities but simply provides a means of calculating those distributions without having any real understanding of why they are the way they are.

Neither the ideas of David Hume nor quantum mechanics demonstrate that God does not exist. All those ideas indicate is that the issue of causality is not straightforward, and, consequently, a wide number of causal possibilities linking God – if God exists -- with the universe might be possible, and we just have no idea which -- if any -- of those possibilities might be the case.

At a certain point in the chapter on first cause arguments concerning the existence of God, Professor Paulos introduces the notion of so-called “natural law” arguments because he feels they have a structural similarity to first cause arguments, and, as a result, he believes that natural law arguments concerning the existence of God are vulnerable to the same

sorts of weaknesses that he believes plague first cause arguments that seek to prove God's existence.

Natural law arguments have to do with the manner in which scientists and mathematicians have put together frameworks that are capable of accurately describing various natural phenomena and, then, someone takes such regularities and proceeds to claim that those regularities and ordered properties are due to (caused by) God, the lawgiver. However, according to Professor Paulos, if someone now asks why God fashioned the laws that are observed by scientists to exist, then Professor Paulos believes a dilemma arises that does not bode well for people who are trying to prove God's existence through natural law arguments.

More specifically, suppose, on the one hand, that God had no reason for fashioning the laws of the universe that are reflected in the work of scientists. If this were the case, then, Professor Paulos feels this indicates there is something (i.e., God's will) that does not operate in accordance with natural law.

On the other hand, if God had a reason for fashioning the laws that are observed to operate in the universe (e.g., God liked the aesthetics of those laws), then, according to Professor Paulos this indicates that God is subject to principles, laws, and the like. Under those circumstances, God merely becomes a causal function of whatever those principles and laws turn out to be, and, therefore, God is no longer a first cause.

The foregoing alleged dilemma is more of a problem in the mind of Professor Paulos (and those who think like him) than it constitutes any sort of real problem for those who might wish to believe in God's existence. God doesn't necessarily need a reason for doing what God does since the capacity to do those things might be the only thing that matters.

In other words, perhaps God does what God does because God has the capacity to so and doesn't have to have a reason for doing those things. If this is the case, then, whatever natural laws arise assume the form they do because God has the capacity to fashion laws in that manner, and that is the end of the matter.

There is a variation on the foregoing possibility. That is, maybe natural laws do not have the properties they do because of this or that Divine reason but, instead, because those laws issue forth from God's

capacity to create different possibilities, and, therefore, whatever laws exist give expression to God's capacity to create those sorts of possibilities.

In other words, natural laws are manifestations of God's creative capacity. There is not necessarily any "why" ... what is, is, because God is capable of doing those things.

Consequently, God is not subject to any set of principles, laws, or the like that are independent of God. From the point of view of that kind of perspective, whatever principles, laws, and standards are manifested in the universe is because God is capable of fashioning those possibilities.

Contrary to what Professor Paulos claims in *Irreligion*, no chain of natural law is being broken in the foregoing. Instead, whatever natural laws exist owe their existence to God's capacity to issue those laws ... natural laws begin and end with God's capacity to issue those sorts of laws.

One might also wish to critically reflect on an assumption that seems to be implicit in the foregoing argument of Professor Paulos. More specifically, if God did something for a reason or did something in order to achieve a given purpose, then, according to Professor Paulos this apparently means that such a reason or purpose is, somehow, independent of God or constitutes something more basic than God, and, therefore, the idea of God, then, becomes an unnecessary layer of explanation and, consequently, can be dropped from the discussion. The logic of that sort of an argument – to the extent that logic is present at all -- escapes me.

Nothing that we know of – logically or empirically -- prohibits the possibility that God is fully aware of the internal dynamics of being God. Consequently, if there are reasons and purposes inherent in those dynamics, then, there is nothing that requires God to be unaware of how those dynamics work or requires Him to be unable to control how those dynamics work, and, therefore, the foregoing sorts of reasons and purposes are fully intentional and within the scope of God's awareness and will.

Is it possible that God has, say, an unconscious dimension that operates outside of God's awareness and beyond Divine control? Perhaps, however, Professor Paulos has not presented his readers with any good

reason why anyone should seriously entertain the idea that there might be anything that is independent of, or more basic than, God being God in a fully aware manner through which God exercises full control of Divine capacities.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, Leibniz's question – which Professor Paulos raises during his discussion – namely, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" becomes fairly simple to answer. Perhaps, God has the capacity to generate nothing at all, as well as the capacity to generate all manner of something's, and – at least according to the limits of human understanding and knowledge – what comes forth from the aforementioned capacity are the phenomena that we encounter ... irrespective of whether, or not, God had a purpose in doing things in that fashion.

Why does God create the natural laws that are observed? Natural laws are the way they are because – with, or without, purpose and with, or without, reason – God has the capacity to do such things.

Purpose, of some kind, might be inherent in the natural laws that exist, or those natural laws might serve some sort of purpose that is woven into the existential fabric of the universe. Nonetheless, God would not necessarily have had to be motivated by such a purpose in order for that sort of universe to have been created.

In *Irreligion*, Professor Paulos moves on from issues involving first causes and begins to explore arguments from design. According to Professor Paulos, the latter sorts of argument often involve pointing to the complexity of nature and claiming that only God could have made that sort of complexity possible.

Professor Paulos seems to feel that the argument from design is a teleological argument. In other words, design, order, and complexity exist in the universe because they serve God's purposes.

By adding the idea of teleology to a discussion concerning arguments from design or complexity, one tends to conflate or confuse different issues. Design and complexity don't have to serve any purpose.

Design and complexity could exist because this is just the way the universe is. Or, design and complexity might exist because God was capable of doing so and, if this were the case, design and complexity give

expression to God's capacity to generate design and complexity and, as such, need not serve any purpose.

Professor Paulos suggests that arguments from design have the following form:

"1. Something [e.g., life forms, the universe, etc.] ... is much too complex (or too perfect) to have come about randomly or by sheer accident.

2. That something must have been the handiwork of some creator.

3. Therefore God, the Creator exists." (Pages 10 and 11)

According to Professor Paulos, Premise 1 of the foregoing argument is the Achilles heel of attempts to prove God's existence as a function of the presence of design. He asks: "How do we know that something is too complex to have arisen by itself?" (Page 12) How does one know that such design or complexity couldn't have been generated by random events?

The very nature of random events is that one cannot predict their occurrence. If events have an ordered nature, distribution, or determinate character, then, by definition they cannot be random, and, as a result, one goes in search of the nature of the forces that generate those regularities ... regularities that one hopes to be able to descriptively capture through one, or another, kind of algorithm.

When probability configurations are used to describe events and those configurations do so accurately, then, the sort of order that is given expression through those configurations does not necessarily constitute evidence for the existence of random phenomena. Indeed, when probabilities are used to describe regularities, this tends to indicate that the underlying causal dynamics of that kind of phenomenon are not well understood and the best that can be done is to capture – in the form of probabilities – certain behavioral or surface features associated with the phenomenon being explored.

For example, the half-life of radioactive materials follows a predictable route that can be accurately captured through calculated probabilities. Nonetheless, we have no insight into the nature of the underlying dynamic that generates such predictable, probabilistic outcomes.

Moreover, the very fact that the half-life of radioactive materials is so regular suggests that the underlying dynamic is not a function of random

processes but is due to some unknown determinate process. The idea of randomness is leveraged in various systems of calculating probabilities in order to prevent presuppositions from skewing the modeling or predictive capacities of those systems, but this dimension of randomness is an artifact of the system of calculating probabilities and not necessarily a reflection of the nature of Being/Reality being described.

Systems for calculating probabilities are rooted in presuppositions involving the idea of randomness. Because those systems are able, on occasion, to accurately describe some aspect of Being/Reality, then, some people are inclined to conclude that the facet of Being/Reality that is being described through those systems of probability must also be rooted in randomness as well.

The foregoing sort of thinking runs the risk of confusing methodology with ontology. Being able to descriptively capture some of the behavioral properties of ontological dynamics by means of a system of calculated probabilities that is predicated on the assumption of randomness does not, in and of itself, necessarily make those ontological dynamics random in nature.

Language (methodology) can be used to describe the nature of an event (ontology). However, the fact that one can use language for description does not, ipso facto, make those events (phenomena) a function of language, and, indeed, much work has been done (scientifically and philosophically) to demonstrate that however effective language might be with respect to being able to capture the nature of this or that facet of ontology, language also has the capacity to distort our understanding concerning the nature of Being/Reality as well.

Mathematics is a language. Therefore, like all languages, it has a capacity to be able, on occasion, to accurately capture the behavioral properties of different dimensions of Being/Reality, but, like all languages, it also has a potential to distort the nature of Being/Reality that it seeks to describe.

Describing events – mathematically or linguistically – does not necessarily permit one to claim that one's manner of description completely captures the nature of the facet of ontology that is being described. Again, ontology cannot be reduced to methodology.

Let's imagine that a person writes a paper for some journal and announces in the article that the likelihood of life emerging on Earth is 'x'. Is 'x' a random event or is it due to some sort of non-random event or set of non-random events?

Assigning probabilities to the likelihood that a certain kind of event will, or will, not occur doesn't necessarily say anything about the causal history of that event or set of events. For example, if, somehow, the foregoing author had been able to study all the planets in different parts of the Milky Way galaxy and detected life on 'x' of those planets, then, while 'x' might mark the frequency with which life was found on different planets, that measure says nothing about how life emerged on any of those planets.

Coming up with a random account for the origins of life is impossible to do. Truly random events do not fit into any ordered framework, and, therefore, one could never be in a position to identify the nature of the allegedly random steps that – we are assuming for the moment – generated life ... under those circumstances, everything would be a matter of speculation and assumption.

Establishing some kind of probability model about whether, or not, life might, spontaneously, arise on its own says nothing about the nature of the causality relationships that would underlay, or give expression to, a supposedly spontaneous emergence of life. Indeed, using the term "spontaneous" usually means that we have no idea how something happened.

To be sure, there are instances involving certain kinds of structures that, supposedly, arise in an apparently spontaneous manner. For example, Ilya Prigogine received a Nobel Prize for his work concerning the phenomenon of dissipative structures that emerge under conditions that are far from equilibrium.

Nonetheless, what the aforementioned Nobel laureate did not do (and no one else has been able to do either) is to demonstrate how dissipative structures were responsible – if they were -- for the origins of life. Similarly, no one has proven that random events led to the origin of life.

Moreover, quite possibly, dissipative structures are not quite as spontaneously random in nature as some might wish to believe. Being

unable to predict what sorts of dissipative structures will arise in a given set of far-from-equilibrium conditions might only mean that we do not fully understand the determinate nature of the forces that are present under those conditions, and, therefore, so-called spontaneous structures are really more about our ignorance concerning the dynamics being given expression through those conditions than those structures suggest the possibility that anything, or everything, might be forthcoming from the right sort of allegedly random dynamics inherent in far-from-equilibrium set of conditions.

In addition, even if one did come up with some sort of explanatory account for the existence of design based on the idea of randomness, one could never be certain that some underlying algorithm involving a set of heretofore unknown, determinate, interacting set of causal factors might be responsible for what is now being referred to as a random event or random set of events. For instance, if God caused life, and, yet, we did not understand the nature of that causal process, then, a phenomenon that we do not understand could look like a random process (i.e., we have not discovered any algorithm capable of explaining that event) even though the event might not have arisen as a result of what we previously considered to be a function of random processes.

Someone might wish to argue in the following manner (and Professor Paulos does engage in this form of argument): Assume, for example, that if one considers life to be the result of a set of random processes, then this is a simpler way of trying to provide an explanation for the problem of life or design than assuming that life is the result of Divine actions would be. The idea of simplicity here should be a function of whether the elements of an explanation are necessary or unnecessary relative to the truth of things.

Consequently, a random account of life is only simpler than a God-based account of life if, in fact, life arose through such a set of random events. But, this is something that hasn't, yet, been demonstrated and might never be capable of being demonstrated.

Simplicity is a function of the truth. Whatever is true is the simplest explanation one could have for some phenomenon.

If the universe is not random, then, clothing the universe in the garb of randomness will complicate matters and, therefore, not simplify them in the direction of truth. If God does not exist, then, clothing the universe

in the garb of theistic transcendence will only complicate matters, not simplify them in the direction of truth.

Professor Paulos claims that: "...the real problem with Assumption 1 [see the top of page 256 in the present chapter] is that ... there is a well-confirmed alternative explanation for the origin of life's complexity ... and ... that is Darwin's theory of evolution." (Page 14) Darwin's theory might, or might not, be able to explain any number of things, but the two things that Darwin's theory cannot do is explain either the origins of life or its complexities because Darwin's theory has nothing to say about how functional complexities arise in the first place ... it only has something to say after-the-fact in relation to whether those functional complexities – once they arise – have the sort of adaptive value that might increase the likelihood that the gene (or genes) coding for that capacity is (are) capable of spreading (increasing its – their -- frequency) throughout the gene pool for a given species with the foregoing sort of capability or property relative to other life forms that do not possess that capacity (or do not possess it to the same degree) within the context of a given environmental niche. (This point is made in a variety of different ways in *Volume I*, Chapter 2 of the *Final Jeopardy* series of books, as well as Chapter 1 in the present volume of the *Final Jeopardy* series, and also in my book: *Evolution and the Origins of Life*).

Professor Paulos indicates there are nearly 10^{68} ways of ordering a deck of 52 cards. He further indicates that if one were to shuffle a deck of cards really well and, at a certain point, stopped to examine the order of the cards which resulted from that process of shuffling, then the order of cards one found would represent an extremely unlikely event when considered against the backdrop of all card orders that are possible, and, yet, such an ordered event did occur.

He attempts to use the foregoing idea to indicate that even if the probability of life emerging in some spontaneous, random manner were extremely unlikely – say, to the order of 10^{68} , or even higher -- then, nonetheless, just as any given ordered sequence of cards is very unlikely to occur but, nonetheless, as the foregoing example indicates, could be produced through a shuffle of the cards, so too, one might also argue that no matter how miniscule the possibility of life might be that was produced through random, spontaneous processes, nevertheless, it also could occur

just as any particular highly unlikely ordering of cards could ensue from a shuffling of a deck of cards.

There are a number of problems inherent in the foregoing argument. First, no one has ever proven that each and every ordering of cards that is possible (10^{68} of them) will, in fact, occur, but, rather, Professor Paulos is assuming this will occur.

Conceivably, the process of shuffling might produce some card sequences more often than other possibilities (e.g., if some of the cards were sticky and, as a result, did not shuffle well), and, therefore, one could not guarantee that every possible order of cards has an equal likelihood to show up during any given shuffle. The notion of equal likelihood is a methodological assumption used in the modeling of reality rather than an ontological expression of how things might actually work in the, sometimes, messy world of reality ... for instance, cards might become lost during the shuffling process, and, therefore, certain card sequences might become impossible.

To be sure, in his card example, Professor Paulos was able to generate an ordered sequence of cards that was extremely unlikely. However, what his example fails to show is that he could have produced a specific ordering of cards after shuffling the cards that had been predicted prior to the process of shuffling.

Let's assume that the shuffling process constitutes the dynamics underlying the origins of life. Furthermore, let's assume that a particular ordering of cards gives expression to a functional life form.

The fact that Professor Paulos can generate any number of highly unlikely card orders does not demonstrate that, on any given occasion, he could have generated the particular order of cards that is necessary for a functioning life form to come into being. Moreover, even if he had an infinite amount of time, he cannot prove that the process of shuffling is likely to produce the requisite ordering because, as indicated earlier, there might be dimensions to the process of shuffling that prevent every possible ordering of cards from occurring.

For example, the organisms doing the shuffling might be finite in nature and, therefore, they would never be able to take advantage of the availability of infinite amounts of time to continue to see whether, or not, those organisms would be able to shuffle the desired sequence of cards

into existence. Or, cards with the requisite values might not always be available to form a deck that could be shuffled to produce the order of cards necessary for life to be possible (e.g., some, or all of, the cards become damaged or destroyed in some fashion, or they no longer are produced, or they are, for whatever reason, prevented from reaching the location where the shuffling takes place).

Furthermore, the fact of the matter is that on Earth, at least, whatever is responsible for the shuffling of cards doesn't have infinite amounts of time to produce the requisite ordered sequence. Life on Earth showed up for the first time – as far as we know -- somewhere within a billion years, or so, after conditions on Earth became a suitable environment for all of the chemical processes to occur that would be necessary for a “spontaneous” assemblage of life, and, therefore, the particular ordering of cards (equivalent to a functioning cell) that is sought amidst the 10^{68} possibilities must occur within a relatively – compared to infinity – short period of time.

In addition, one should keep in mind that if one wishes to draw some sort of parallel between rare events happening with shuffled cards and the rare character of the set of events that appear to be necessary for life to emerge on Earth, then one must factor in an array of forces that are capable of interfering with the card shuffling process. Just as a variety of forces were probably working against the process of shuffling molecules to generate a functional life form (e.g., ultraviolet light, heat, water, cold, excess salinity, excess acidity, excess alkalinity, turbulence, toxic chemical environment, and so on), so too, if one is to keep the parallel card shuffling argument fair, one would have to posit an array of forces that are capable of interfering with both particular cards, as well, as the shuffling process in general.

Probabilities, per se, do not necessarily reflect what is actually possible. For example, someone might wish to predict that if there were an infinite number of monkeys interacting with an infinite number of typewriters supplied, somehow, with an infinite amount of paper and ribbons, then, there is some small probability that one of those monkeys would write ‘Macbeth’ or ‘Hamlet’. Realistically speaking, however, all of the foregoing machines are likely to become inoperative within a relatively short period of time because of the tendency of the monkeys to abuse those machines and because the monkeys are incapable of keeping

up with the maintenance that the abused machines will require if they are to continue to be operative.

One can, if one likes, work out some sort of probability for the likelihood that this or that work of fiction or non-fiction will – sooner or later – be produced by an infinite group of monkeys. However, one cannot empirically show that such a probability has anything of relevance to say with respect to the actual way the universe works.

The origin of life issue is not about calculating probabilities. The origin of life issue is about whether, or not, a set of allegedly, random, spontaneous events actually came together in a manner that led to the emergence of life.

Calculating probabilities cannot tell one whether, or not, that sort of a sequence of events actually did take place or would take place. This is especially the case if there were any number of forces, conditions, and factors that might interfere with, or prevent, the necessary sort of events from occurring.

Generating probability models concerning the origin of life on Earth is akin to medieval arguments that revolve about questions concerning the number of angels that are capable of dancing on a pinhead. Those ideas are entirely arbitrary, speculative, and a waste of resources.

The subtitle for John Allen Paulos's book: *Irreligion* is: "A Mathematician Explains Why The Arguments For God Just Don't Add Up." The present chapter – entitled *Irreligion* – could have carried the subtitle: A Believer Explains Why A Mathematician's Arguments Concerning God's Existence Just Don't Add Up.

The latter reworking of the foregoing subtitle for *Irreligion* should not be understood to mean that I am claiming to have proved God's existence in the pages of this chapter. Instead, the meaning of the proffered subtitle for the present chapter is that the arguments put forth by John Allen Paulos concerning the existence of God are: Arbitrary, problematic, biased, speculative, presumptuous, artificially framed, and, quite frequently, irrelevant as far as the issue of God's existence is concerned.

The contents of the previous 20 pages encompass material that critically reflects on just two of twelve arguments concerning God's existence that appear in the aforementioned book by John Allen Paulos. If I had been so inclined – which, at the present time, I am not – I could have

continued on in a similar fashion with respect to the other ten arguments that appear in his book.

Professor Paulos appears to believe that he has put forth a series of arguments that demonstrate why the title for his book – namely, *Irreligion* – is appropriate and, as a result, how discussions concerning the existence of God exhibit an excess of credulity on the part of believers. However, all that Professor Paulos actually has accomplished (and I believe the previous 20 pages of discussion provide evidence for this) is to demonstrate that Professor Paulos has considerable credulity – as well as quite a few blind spots -- with respect to the viability of his own arguments concerning the existence of God.

Chapter 10: The New Atheism

The Preface to *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand For Science and Reason* by Victor J. Stenger begins with a quote from Christopher Hitchens. In that quote, Mr. Hitchens notes that there are some atheists who wish that the mythology surrounding God were true but because they are forced by evidence and reason to conclude otherwise they, regretfully, let go of ideas involving God. Mr. Hitchens, then, proceeds to assert: "... who wishes that there was a permanent, unalterable celestial despotism that subjected us to continual surveillance and could convict us of thought-crime, and who regarded us as its private property even after we died? How happy we ought to be, at the reflection that there exists not a shred of respectable evidence to support such a horrible hypothesis." (Page 11)

Obviously, Dr. Stenger is in agreement with the foregoing sentiment. Consequently, in this instance, to engage what Mr. Hitchens says is to engage what Dr. Stenger believes, and, therefore, let's critically reflect on what Mr. Hitchens is saying because doing so will provide some degree of insight into some of the problems inherent in how Dr. Stenger views things.

To begin with – and leaving aside issues concerning what criteria (and what modes of justification) are to be used for determining what constitutes "respectable evidence" -- Mr. Hitchens is, to some extent, quite right when he says "... there exists not a shred of respectable evidence to indicate that" God is despotic and, as a result, is prepared, among other things, to convict human beings of thought-crime or considers human beings to be private property." While the foregoing ideas might give expression to what some people believe concerning the nature of God, this does not necessarily mean that God – if God exists (and I believe God does exist) – is required to act in accordance with how those people depict the nature of Divinity.

Mr. Hitchens – and Dr. Stenger – have been able to say and think whatever they like during their lives. Consequently, if one assumes that God exists, then, it is a strange form of despotism that enables those individuals to do and say whatever they like.

Moreover, assuming that God exists – which I do -- there is no indication that God will convict people for what they think. What people do, however, might be another matter.

Mr. Hitchens takes issue with the idea that Divinity might subject human beings to continual surveillance, and, yet, Mr. Hitchens seems not to feel the slightest twinge of hypocrisy over the fact that he made his living (i.e., journalist) surveilling and judging the actions of other individuals. Why is it okay for Mr. Hitchens to engage in those forms of surveillance but doing so is not okay for God?

Presumably, Mr. Hitchens surveils people because he believes in the importance of revealing the truth of things. Perhaps, among other things, he believes that bearing witness to the truth of things helps put those things in some sort of proper perspective. Perhaps, God surveils people for the same reason

In addition, if God exists, and if God gave human beings their potential (with respect to both constructive and destructive possibilities), and if God provided human beings with opportunities to freely choose how to engage their own God-given potential, then, in what sense is our existence not intimately caught up with Divine intentions? Why should God be prepared to accept the idea that human beings must have the right to do whatever they like?

Apparently, Mr. Hitchens and Dr. Stenger agree with the idea voiced in Milton's *Paradise Lost* that it is better to rule in Hell than to serve in Heaven. That perspective suggests the presence of an excess of hubris.

Mr. Hitchens dislikes the idea of Divine tyranny. Yet, he doesn't seem to have a problem with the potential for tyranny that is given expression through his own ego, emotions, and personality with respect to the possibility that there might be dimensions of God-given human potential within him (i.e., his soul) that are being imprisoned by the vested, corrupt interests of Mr. Hitchens' ego and similarly for the ego of Mr. Stenger.

Mr. Hitchens wasn't the cause of his own existence (and ditto for Dr. Stenger). Mr. Hitchens (and likewise for Dr. Stenger) didn't give himself his capacity for consciousness, intelligence, memory, emotion, language, creativity, choice, talent, movement, and so on.

Nonetheless, Mr. Hitchens and Dr. Stenger seem to consider that their lives and abilities constitute their own private property. I suppose if there is some sort of Supreme Court governing Being/Reality, then, perhaps one of these days, Mr. Hitchens and Dr. Stenger might discover that they will be required to put forth legal briefs that are capable of

justifying – in some non-arbitrary fashion -- their belief that their lives belong to them rather than to the forces that made them possible.

According to Dr. Stenger, “The new atheists write mainly from a scientific perspective. Dawkins and I are science PhDs who have spent years doing scientific research, Dawkins in biology, and I in physics and astronomy. Harris has a degree in philosophy and is working on a PhD in neuroscience. Dennett is a philosopher of science who has written almost exclusively on scientific topics. While Hitchens is not a scientist, his approach to religion is emphatically empirical. ... We are most interested in observing the world and taking our lessons from those observations than debating the finer points of scriptures that are probably no more than fables to begin with.” (Page 13)

Apparently, only scientists or the empirically inclined are capable of intelligent, rational discourse. There is a great deal of self-serving presumption and arrogance inherent in the latter part of the foregoing quote.

However, for the sake of argument, let’s assume that it is true that only scientists and empirically inclined individuals are capable of being rational concerning the issue of religion. Consider the following.

Among those who were on the committee that examined me during my oral defense of my dissertation were: A physicist, a biophysicist, a linguist (who was engaged in empirical studies involving native languages), as well as two individuals who specialized in philosophy of science. My doctorate dealt with, among other things, quantum physics, relativity, chronobiology, language, mathematics, and holographic theory.

I’ve written seven books on scientific issues. The focus of those books has been: Quantum/particle physics, astronomy/cosmology, scientific methodology, psychology, neurobiology, evolution, and certain facets of medical research (e.g., HIV/AIDS and psychopharmacology).

In addition, engaging the practices of the Sufi mystical tradition -- including remembrance (zikr), fasting, and seclusion -- has been a formative part of my life for many years. This work has been completely empirical in nature and was not, as Dr. Stenger claims, a matter of “debating the finer points of scripture.”

I believe I am as much a scientist as: Dawkins, Stenger, Harris, and Dennett are. I also believe I am as “emphatically empirical” – perhaps more so -- in my approach to religion as Christopher Hitchens was.

So, even if one wished to argue – as Dr. Stenger seems inclined to do in the previous quote – that only people who are scientists and are empirically inclined have the capacity to engage the issue of religion in any sort of objective, insightful manner, nevertheless, I believe I can hold my own with all of the foregoing individuals with respect to issues involving science, reason, and empirical data. Indeed, the first four volumes of the present *Final Jeopardy* series of books provide a wealth of data to that effect.

Having said the foregoing, consider the following quote from the book: *The New Atheism* by Dr. Stenger. On page 15 he states: “Perhaps the most unique position of New Atheism is that faith, which is belief without supportive evidence, should not be given the respect, even deference, it obtains in modern society. Faith is always foolish and leads to many of the evils of society. The theist argument that science and reason are also based in faith is specious. Faith is belief in the absence of supportive evidence.” (Page 15)

When someone frames a discussion by employing an arbitrary definition, then no one should be surprised if the foregoing individual ends up with conclusions that give expression to the biases that underlie the process of framing with which that individual began his or her discussion. Dr. Stenger defines “faith” as “belief without supportive evidence”, but he doesn’t cite any evidence to support his belief, and, therefore, his definition appears to satisfy the conditions that govern his notion of faith.

Suppose I am in some sort of difficulty involving my family and find myself in need of assistance (this assistance could be in the form of counseling, advice, money, moving to a new residence, and so on). I consider approaching several people to help me out and, as I do, I reflect on my history with those individuals.

One of the persons I am considering asking for assistance is someone with whom I have attended a number of sporting events as well as someone with whom I have gone on a few hunting and fishing trips. The other individual I am considering approaching for assistance is someone

with whom I have done business over the years and, on occasion, someone with whom I have gone out to supper with him and his wife.

Over the years, I've talked with both individuals about a variety of issues. Previously, I have asked each of the individuals for help with respect to this or that minor issue, and one of them helped me out on several occasions while the other individual indicated that he wasn't able to assist me with my requests, but he seemed to be genuinely sorry that he couldn't help me when I asked him for assistance, and he indicated that although he couldn't help me out on those occasions, I shouldn't hesitate to approach him in the future.

I like both individuals and I value their friendships. Consequently, I don't want the process of asking them for assistance to create difficulties for our respective relationships in the future.

There is no guarantee that either individual will be willing to assist me. This is not necessarily because they wouldn't want to do so but perhaps because their schedules and situations are such that they might not be in a position to assist me.

My situation is time sensitive. Moreover, I don't want to discuss my problem over the phone ... I want to be able to speak face-to-face with whomever I ask for help.

I have quite a bit of supporting evidence to consider with respect to both individuals. However, the available data is not straightforward, and, as a result, there are a number of things to mull over before making my decision concerning whom to approach with my problem.

Which of the two individuals should I ask for help? In which of the two individuals should I place my faith?

The foregoing problem revolves about the matter of faith. I have evidence, but the data is inconclusive.

Despite my uncertainties, I must choose a course of action based on an evaluation of what I do know. Whatever my choice might be, I am committed to acting on it, and there is a certain amount of hope woven into my choice that my actions will serve my best interests.

Situations akin to the foregoing set of circumstances occur on a regular basis in everyday life. Despite the presence of various forms of evidence, those circumstances often require one to engage in acts of faith – that is, one must reflect on whatever evidence is available, and, then,

make choices in the face of uncertainty – choices that one hopes will serve the best interests of oneself and/or one's family.

With whom should I do business? Which bank should I use? Which doctor should I seek out as my primary care physician? Which schools do I choose to look after the interests of my children? Whom should I marry? To which columnist or newscaster should I listen? Which friendships should I pursue? Should I take a given medication? For which politician, if any, should I vote? Which diet should I follow? Which job offer should I accept? In what company should I invest? Which scientists should I believe? Whose testimony do I accept?

All manner of data exists. We analyze, interpret, and critically reflect on that data, and, despite the fact that the available evidence appears to be inconclusive, nonetheless, the nature of life is time-sensitive and, consequently, we must make choices based on inconclusive and incomplete data.

Currently, scientists cannot viably explain the origins of: Life, the universe, time, space, physical constants (such as the value of a quantum of energy or the mass of an electron), consciousness, intelligence, reason, memory, language, creativity, talent, morality, or spirituality. Having a theory or theories for those issues is not necessarily the same thing as being able to prove that those theories are true.

The inability of science to account for a wide number of phenomena must be juxtaposed next to the ability of science to explain – at least within certain limits -- quite a few other things. In any given instance, one must make decisions about whether, or not, scientists, researchers, medical professionals, and individuals from academia know what they are talking about.

Before – and even as -- evidence indicated otherwise, many scientists said that pesticides were safe. Before – and even as – evidence indicated otherwise, any number of pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and GMOs were declared to be safe by numerous scientists, researchers and medical professionals. Before – and even as – evidence indicated otherwise, many scientists, researchers and medical doctors argued that depleted uranium posed no health risks to those who might be exposed to it.

First there were various versions of string theory, and, then, there were super-symmetry models. However, based on current research at

CERN, as well as based on a variety of other considerations, apparently neither of the foregoing two frameworks (i.e., string theory or supersymmetry) appears to be true despite the fact that they have dominated many facets of science, academia, and funding for nearly half a century.

In cosmology, first there were steady-state theories, and then, there were big bang theories. Now, more than half a century later, steady-state theories are making a come back.

Science might be fairly certain about some issues. However, there are a great many phenomena in the universe about which science is either far from certain or has no idea whatever about the nature of various phenomena (e.g., dark matter and dark energy).

In a previous quote, Dr Stenger claimed: "Faith is always foolish and leads to many of the evils of society. The theist argument that science and reason are also based in faith is specious. Faith is belief in the absence of supportive evidence. Science is the belief in the presence of supportive evidence." (Page 15)

Contrary to what Dr. Stenger asserts and as indicated earlier in this chapter, faith is not belief in the absence of supportive evidence but, rather, faith gives expression to beliefs that develop while entangled in conditions of uncertainty and, often, inconclusive evidence. Furthermore, contrary to what Dr. Stenger claims, science also gives expression to beliefs that develop while entangled in conditions characterized by uncertainty and, often, inconclusive evidence.

What assumptions, definitions, hypotheses, theories, instruments, methodological procedures, or mathematical treatments should one consider when pursuing research. If one knew the outcome before one even began, then, one would never have to make those choices, but, it is precisely because one doesn't know the outcome of a given research project, that one decides to have faith in one approach rather than another.

Careers, funding, and success all depend on scientists and researchers making choices that are based on having beliefs that exist while ensconced in circumstances involving uncertainty and inconclusive evidence. Even if Dr. Stenger has faith in his belief that science does not contain any element of faith, there is considerable evidence to indicate that his faith in that belief is not warranted.

Sometimes the faith of scientists is rewarded. Sometimes that faith is not rewarded.

The faith that some scientists, academics, and medical professionals have had with respect to various ideas, theories, research programs, treatments, inventions, and so on has had extremely destructive consequences from time to time. On other occasions, the faith that some scientists, academics, and medical professionals have had with respect to other ideas, theories, research programs, treatments, inventions, and the like has had very constructive results.

One might agree with Dr. Stenger that the sort of faith that leads to destructive and problematic outcomes is foolish and ill considered. On the other, the sort of faith that leads to constructive and heuristically valuable outcomes is not necessarily foolish.

Unfortunately, we do not always know which outcome is likely to be forthcoming. We hope that our faith in a given belief is not misplaced and that our choices will serve what is our best interests, but sometimes we have to wait for further evidence to emerge before making additional choices about whether, or not, to continue on in the direction one initially chose to pursue or whether one should consider either changing course altogether or modifying one's present course in some fashion as a function of new evidence.

At a certain point following my undergraduate years, I began to explore a variety of spiritual traditions. This included: Native American, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic forms of mysticism, as well as other kinds of non-traditional forms of mysticism (e.g., the work of George Gurdjieff). I participated in various practices and gatherings related to some of the foregoing traditions.

I had a lot of data and information concerning the foregoing matters. The sense of faith that arose with respect to how to move forward in the context of that data and information pointed in certain directions.

Initially, based on the sense of faith that arose within me concerning the spiritual directed indicated by a given body of data and information, I joined a Gurdjieff group. However, as I acquired additional evidence – both in conjunction with the leaders of the Gurdjieff group in which I was participating, as well in conjunction with some of the spiritual traditions

with which Gurdjieff had contact – the nature of my faith changed and moved in the direction of the Sufi mystical tradition.

The foregoing movement was evidence-based but because that evidence was enveloped in many uncertainties, my choice was a matter of faith rather than being rooted in a condition of certainty or having a clear-cut understanding concerning my situation. In other words, on the one hand, I had a sense that a given spiritual direction seemed to constitute the best fit with the available evidence, but, on the other hand, I was not entirely certain that the direction in which my faith was moving me was going to work out and serve my best interests.

In subsequent years, I engaged in a great many Sufi practices (e.g., fasting, chanting, seclusion, night vigils, prayer, pilgrimage, community service) that were part of the spiritual path to which my choice of faith had led me. Certain anomalous experiences occurred in conjunction with some of those practices, but just as importantly – perhaps more so -- my understanding began to change as I reflected on what was going on in my life as a function of those practices.

For example, some of my problematic behaviors and coping strategies began to change. In addition, my emotional life began to change in certain, more constructive directions.

The foregoing sorts of behavioral and emotional changes constitute data or evidence. As a result of that evidence, my faith that I was pursuing a constructive path deepened.

My relationship with my spiritual guide also changed over time. I began to have the opportunity to be in his presence for considerable periods of time, and, as a result, I had a chance to observe him in a variety of settings.

Being able to observe my teacher deal with many different kinds of problems provided me with considerable evidence upon which to reflect. That evidence was entangled in many kinds of uncertainties concerning the meaning and significance of what I was observing, but, nonetheless, such data deepened my faith concerning the value and importance of not only the relationship I had with my teacher, but, as well, how that relationship was affecting various aspects of my behavior as well as the manner in which I engaged life in general.

Over the years, I read the Qur'an on many occasions. During that period of time, I critically and rigorously reflected on its contents, and this process has moved my understanding and faith in certain directions.

That movement is evidence-based as well as rational in nature. In other words, I examined my life from the perspective of the Qur'an, and despite the fact there were many uncertainties present in that process of examination, nonetheless, my commitment to the contents of the Qur'an increased because I felt that such a process was helping me to move in a more constructive direction than might, heretofore, have been the case.

As a result, I have developed a faith perspective that is quite different from the sorts of understanding that people like Dr. Stenger, Dr. Dawkins, Dr. Harris, Dr. Dennett, Dr. Paulos, and Christopher Hitchens like to criticize in relation to various Muslims. One can examine those faith-and evidence-based considerations in any number of my books: (1) *Shari'ah: A Muslims Declaration of Independence*; (2) *The Unfinished Revolution: The Battle For America's Soul*; (3) *The Pathology of Leadership: A Sufi Perspective*; (4) *Democracy Lost and Regained*; (5) *Reflections on Education and Learning*; (6) *What's Wrong With What's Right: A Critique of Imam Feisal Rauf's Book: What's Right With Islam*; (7) *My Year Inside Radical Islam*; (8) *Sam Harris and the Future of Ignorance*; (9) *Epistle To A Sam Harris Nation: Debunking the Moral Landscape*; (10) *Unveiling Terrorism, Fundamentalism, and Spiritual Abuse*.

Faith can bring evidence and reasoning together in different ways. Sometimes faith is foolish in the manner in which it seeks to do this, and sometimes faith is quite prescient with respect to the way it deals with those matters

Sometimes the sorts of faith system subscribed to by: Dr. Stenger, Dr. Dawkins, Dr. Harris, Dr. Dennett, Dr. Paulos, Christopher Hitchens, and other like-minded individuals that deal with the manner in which they interpret and arrange evidence, reasoning, and critical reflection is quite foolish, unproductive, and arbitrary. At other times, their faith systems – that is, beliefs that arise under conditions of uncertainty involving evidence that is inconclusive and incomplete – might have valuable things to say.

Toward the end of the Preface for: *The New Atheism*, Dr. Stenger states: "Most believers have been brainwashed into thinking that religion is necessary for happiness and contentment. This flies in the face of the

fact that the happiest, healthiest, and most content societies are the least religious. The new atheists are not trying to take away the comfort of faith. We are trying to show that life is much more comfortable without it.”

If – as I believe is the case – religion constitutes a search for the truth concerning one’s relationship with Being/Reality, then religion is not necessarily about either happiness or contentment. To begin with, if truth is the goal, then, one might never feel content with having attained less than that, and, moreover, although seeking the truth might bring instances of happiness, that sort of search, more often than not, tends to be difficult, discomfiting, disconcerting, painful, sobering, and humbling.

To be sure, many people might entertain the hope that if one can successfully navigate the challenges of religion, then one might be led to some more felicitous state of being. However, before one can enjoy the possible fruits that might ensue from that kind of a journey, one has to actually undertake the process of sincerely seeking the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality, and this often involves: Struggle, suffering, change, sacrifice, as well as having to make choices that are not always conducive to being in a state of happiness or contentment.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, even if the short-term goal of religion – understood as consisting of a search for the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality – is not necessarily a matter of realizing happiness or contentment, a person, nonetheless, could find a certain kind of happiness and contentment through the challenge of seeking the truth. In other words, because one is engaged in doing something one finds challenging, interesting, and, occasionally rewarding, then, one might be content and happy with one’s condition even though that happiness and contentment do not constitute any ultimate, permanent form of happiness and contentment.

Dr. Stenger claims that the new atheists are not trying to take away the comfort of faith but, instead, are trying to indicate that life is much more comfortable without faith. Comfort and truth (on whatever level) often tend to be antithetical to one another, and, in addition, faith is often the only thing that one has to sustain oneself as one travels through the valleys of uncertainties, doubts, and trials that populate the path

along which one is journeying as one searches for the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

Dr. Stenger's claim that: "the happiest, healthiest, and most content societies are the least religious" might, or might not, be true. A great deal depends on the criteria that are used to measure happiness, health, and contentment" and whether, or not, one can justify the use of those criteria as being non-arbitrary, relevant measures for evaluating the nature of life.

However, even if one were to agree that: "The happiest, healthiest, and most content societies are the least religious," what does any of this necessarily have to do with the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality? One could be very happy, healthy, and content with one's nonreligious life and, yet, be quite wrong about the nature of reality, and if this were the case, then that sort of happiness, health, and contentment might just turn out to be a pyrrhic victory.

Nonreligious people are not omniscient ... however happy, healthy, and content they might be (and not all nonreligious people are necessarily happy, healthy, and content). Those individuals might have confidence in the manner in which they are conducting their lives, but that confidence is really just a species of faith because despite the presence of a variety of forms of evidence, there are many uncertainties concerning what the actual significance and value of that evidence might be.

The faith that nonreligious individuals harbor in the face of uncertainty might be justified, or it might not be justified. Everything depends on something that those individuals do not necessarily possess – namely, the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality.

Dr. Stenger indicates that: "As far as science can tell, the universe is matter and nothing more ... the atheist believes that we need not include anything beyond matter ... to describe the universe and its contents." (Pages 21-22) Since science tends to rely on instruments made of matter that only are capable of detecting material events, should anyone be surprised that many scientists have concluded there is nothing more to the universe than matter?

Using material instruments to gauge the nature of events is similar to when someone runs a tox-screen and only finds what the tox-screen has

been set up to discover. If you want a tox-screen or science to detect the presence of something for which it is not set up to detect, then, one is going to have to change the way one goes about doing things.

There is, of course, one instrument upon which science relies heavily that is not necessarily material in nature. This is the human mind.

Although most neuroscientists are of the opinion that the mind is a function of the brain, they are unable to explain how the brain generates: Consciousness, intelligence, reason, memory, language, creativity, morality, or spirituality. While there are many correlations involving brain activity and mental activity, nonetheless, no one has, yet, been able to discover the cognitive Rosetta stone that permits one to readily translate back and forth between the activities of brain and mind.

The foregoing set of circumstances creates an interesting puzzle. According to Dr. Stenger, science claims that: "... the universe is matter and nothing more." Yet, science is unable to offer a viable account for how matter generates the: Consciousness, intelligence, creativity, talent, and language that are used to make claims concerning the idea that matter is all there is.

Even if someone eventually discovers the aforementioned cognitive Rosetta stone that – if it existed – would permit one to show how material events generate mental processes, this still would leave unanswered the question of where does the order come from that is given expression through the laws of the natural world. Irrespective of whether one is inclined to adopt a Big Bang account or a Steady-State model concerning how the universe came to be the way it is, there are many lacunae in our understanding with respect to, for example: What makes gravity possible, or why do quarks have the properties they do, or whether, or not, space is material in nature, or why do physical constants (e.g., the speed of light, the mass of an electron, and so on) have the values they do, or, why does there seem to be an asymmetry between matter and antimatter in the visible universe ... in short, in many respects, we don't know why the universe has the ordered nature it does.

Maybe, in the near future (or within a hundred years or more) someone might discover the answer to the foregoing unknowns. At the present time, however, claiming that the universe is matter and nothing more than that seems rather premature, and, in addition, such a claim

seems to constitute more of a reflection of someone's material biases than it necessarily reflects the character of all levels of Being/Reality.

Similarly, when it comes to the origins of life, no one knows what made life possible. There are no evolutionary biologists (present or past) who have been able to put forth a viable account capable of explaining, among other origin of life issues, how the emergence of the genetic code was a purely material phenomenon.

Dr. Stenger contends that atheists "...love life even more than believers, because this is all we have. We only insist that when anyone makes a claim about the world of our senses, that science and reason are allowed to test that claim." (Page 22) Since Dr. Stenger doesn't provide any evidence to support his belief that atheists "... love life even more than believers" one can only suppose that in the light of his manner of defining faith (namely, belief without supporting evidence) one might have to conclude that Dr. Stenger is talking about the faith he has in the idea that atheists love life more than believers.

Furthermore, for Dr. Stenger to try to claim that atheists "...love life even more than believers, because this is all we have" is a ludicrous argument. Whether one is an atheist or a theist, we only have the life we have, and we need to make the best of whatever opportunity and potential is made possible by, and through, that life. As such, life is – or, at least, it should be -- something that everyone considers to be precious and worthy of whatever love we are able to muster with respect to it.

Moreover, even assuming that one could define love in some non-arbitrary fashion, I'm not sure how one would quantify love so that its presence amongst believers and nonbelievers could be measured accurately. Dr. Stenger insists that "when anyone makes a claim about the world of senses that science and reason are allowed to test that claim" and, yet, I'm not really sure that love is entirely a matter of the world of senses (i.e., love is not necessarily a synonym for either sex or lust), and, therefore, why should one suppose that science and reason must be the default positions when engaging such issues?

Are dreams a matter of the senses? Is consciousness a matter of the senses? Is creativity a matter of the senses? Is talent a matter of the senses? Are mystical experiences a matter of the senses? Is insight a matter of the senses? Is reason a matter of the senses?

The senses might have something to do with all of the foregoing phenomena. Nonetheless, there could be dimensions of those phenomena that extend beyond the realms of the senses and the material world, so why must one accept the insistence of Dr. Stenger that only science and reason should be the final arbiters in relation to such matters?

After extolling the virtues of Sam Harris for the manner in which he criticizes faith for being at the heart of much of the fanaticism, terrorism, and violence in the world, Dr. Stenger makes a very curious statement – namely: “Harris has been severely criticized for his position on certain political issues such as torture or preemptive nuclear war. I will not discuss these in this book because they have nothing to do with atheism.” (Page 31)

What a silly, illogical, irrational, preposterous statement. If Sam Harris is an atheist, and if as an atheist he believes that torture is okay and that preemptive nuclear strikes are okay, then, how are such views not a function of his atheism?

To be sure, not all atheists might agree with Dr. Harris with respect to his views concerning torture and preemptive nuclear strikes. However, all that the foregoing difference of opinion means is this: Various atheists think in dissimilar ways in relation to some topics, just as different religious people might arrive at different conclusions with respect to what they consider to be the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality.

If Sam Harris is an atheist, then the principles, methods, ideas, and values that give expression to his form of atheism and through which he filters and evaluates existence, all of this helps to inform his moral and political values. It is disingenuous, to an extreme degree, for Dr. Stenger to try to argue that Sam Harris’s pronouncements concerning torture and preemptive nuclear strikes have nothing to do with Sam Harris’s way of engaging atheism.

According to Dr. Stenger, one of the principle differences between atheists and theists is that: “The nonatheist groups seem to think that God is immune from being studied by the objective, rational, methods of science. The new atheists firmly insist that the personal, Abrahamic God is a scientific hypothesis that can be tested by the standard methods of science.” (Page 34)

There is a potential difference between what people might claim concerning the nature of God and what the actual nature of God – assuming God exists (which I do) -- might be. Although I can imagine some possibilities concerning how one might go about scientifically testing claims that some people make concerning God, setting up tests that would be able to study God qua God by means of some sort of objective, rational, scientific methodology appears to be a bit more problematic.

When I was defending my undergraduate honors thesis (it dealt with the issue of anxiety), one of my examiners – someone who, subsequently, became a well-known and respected psychologist – took issue with something that I said concerning the existence of God (at the time I was inclined toward some form of agnosticism), and my examiner indicated that proving God’s existence was easy ... all one had to do was set up a questionnaire and tabulate the results. I responded by saying that such surveys didn’t prove God’s existence, but, instead, surveys only generated data demonstrating what certain people thought about the issue.

What people think about the existence of God – whether for or against – is one thing. However, determining whether, or not, God exists is quite another matter.

For centuries, mystics have indicated that if a person wishes to explore her or his relationship with Being/Reality, then, the individual must place oneself in the crucible of mystical practices. In other words, only by sincerely engaging in a program of: Prayer, fasting, remembrance, contemplation, meditation, seclusion, community service, and charitableness over a period of time can the ‘self’ be hammered against the anvil of existence in order to bring forth the qualities of character that are necessary to place an individual in a position to be able to grasp, if God wishes, deeper truths concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality.

If one wants to become a medical professional, then one must go through the requisite set of courses, training exercises, and hands-on experiences that help one to become proficient in that profession. If one wants to become a court stenographer, then one must go through the learning processes that are needed to acquire competency in such a profession. If one wants to develop proficiency in quantum physics, molecular biology, or any number of other possibilities, then, one must

pursue the sort of programs and experiences that will enable one to engage in scientific research with some minimal degree of competency.

Similarly, if one wants to see things from the perspective of mystics, one is going to have become a mystic. One cannot study the nature of mysticism while force-fitting it into a petri dish and viewing it through some sort of electronic instrument.

Dr. Stenger appears to believe that the mystical path can be both studied and understood from a perspective that sits outside of that path. While a scientist might be able to explore any number of issues that are peripherally connected to the mystical path and, thereby, arrive at whatever conclusions seem warranted based on the methods and analytical techniques that are employed in those investigations, the actual nature of the mystical path only can be understood by someone who traverses that path herself or himself and actually succeeds, God willing, in realizing the truth about its nature.

One can't become a scientist without engaging in the practices of authentic science. One can't become a mystic without engaging in the practices of authentic mysticism.

The nature of the mystical path will not be revealed through changes in: EEGs; EKGs; functional MRIs; body temperatures; heart rates; metabolic rates, and so on. The mystical path consists in a series of changes involving one's insight into, and understanding of, the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, and since material science is committed to the idea that consciousness, ideas, insight, understanding, intuition, dreams, and learning are necessarily a function of changes in brain chemistry and nothing else (despite the fact that material science cannot explain how changes in brain chemistry can produce any of the foregoing phenomena), material science resists acknowledging the possibility that there are dimensions of reality that might transcend the capacity of material science to access.

Consequently, material science might be doomed to failure when it comes to exploring the nature of the mystical path. Material science does not necessarily have the wherewithal to access, probe, or understand the varieties of states (hal) and stations (maqam) that mark the transitions in understanding that tend to characterize the mystical path.

Dr. Stenger argues (e.g., see page 38 of *The New Atheism*) that if God exists, then that Divine presence should be capable of being detected through the observable ways in which it affects human lives. However, Sufi mystics (as well as mystics from other spiritual tradition) indicate that understanding, insight, and awareness can all change without the individual who is undergoing those experiences letting on to anyone else that such a phenomena is occurring ... I know because this has happened to me on several occasions.

If I had been undergoing an fMRI at the time the foregoing experiences occurred would anything have shown up in the visual translation of the fMRI data that was being recorded during the experience? If nothing showed up in the fMRI, does this mean that nothing actually happened within me or does it merely mean that the fMRI is not capable of detecting the presence of those experiences?

On the other hand, if the visual representation of the fMRI data did indicate that something seemed to be taking place in certain parts of my brain while I was having a certain kind of experience, does this necessarily mean that my experience was a function of those brain events, or could it mean that while such fMRI data was, in fact, reflecting some sort of brain event that was correlated with my experience, nonetheless, the brain activity that was showing up on the fMRI was not causing my experience ... but rather – possibly – my experience might have been causing the brain activity.

Just because we don't know how nonmaterial and material events can affect one another doesn't mean there isn't such interaction. Perhaps, we will have to change our understanding concerning what the nature of material and/or nonmaterial events are in order to make progress – to whatever extent this is possible – as far as gaining insight into how the brain and mind interact is concerned.

What does fMRI data prove? Nothing necessarily – and this is true irrespective of whether something did, or did, not get recorded during an fMRI while I was undergoing some sort of experience.

At a certain point in time, I told my spiritual guide about my experiences. With respect to one of the foregoing experiences, he specified its meaning or significance for me.

Of course, it is possible that my teacher was lying to me and had no idea what the experience meant and was just making something up to give me the impression that he understood the nature of those kinds of experiences. However, that sort of a possibility must be juxtaposed next to the considerable experience that I had acquired over the years while interacting with him under many different kinds of circumstances and during which I had never known him to lie about anything.

Let's say that my teacher told me that my experience meant 'x'. If I had been hooked up to an fMRI at the time of my experience, would researchers have been able to view the fMRI data and immediately have been able to state: "Oh, yes, this always means 'x'.

I don't think so, and one of the reasons why I am of this opinion, is that mystical experiences do not follow regular schedules that can be produced upon demand while hooked up to this or that instrument. Another reason why I don't believe that researchers would necessarily be in a position to be able to identify certain kinds of fMRI data as meaning 'x' is because, by and large (there are exceptions), people who are pursuing the mystical path aren't inclined to talk about the specific character of their experiences or the meanings of those experiences.

In order for researchers to be able to identify certain fMRI readings as meaning 'x', those scientists would have had to collect readings from a number of people who had undergone the same sort of experience as I had and that produced the same kind of fMRI readings as occurred in conjunction with my experience (assuming there were fMRI data to this effect) and who would all have had to be told by their spiritual guides that such an experience meant 'x'. I'm fairly certain the foregoing sort of scenario has never happened, and I am fairly certain that, for many reasons, it will never happen because, among things – and as indicated previously -- mystics tend to be secretive concerning the specific nature of those phenomena.

The reasons for such secrecy have nothing to do with a scenario akin to the idea that the emperor has no clothes, nor does it have anything to do with the possibility that some sort of flimflam operation is taking place (although there are spiritual charlatans who do engage in such activities). The reason for the secrecy has to do with trying to head off various manner of: Misunderstanding, misinterpretation, corruption, distortion, problematic expectations, and exploitation that could arise if those

experiences were openly discussed ... problems that could adversely affect both the general public as well as those who were actively pursuing the mystical path.

Moreover, even if, by some strange set of circumstances, someone were able to collect data over time in conjunction with a variety of people concerning the foregoing correlation among: fMRI data, the occurrence of certain – allegedly -- mystical experiences, and independently derived interpretations by a number of different, authentic mystical guides that confirmed those experiences, one still couldn't be certain that other kinds of ideas, emotions, or experiences might be able to produce a similar kind of fMRI profile and, therefore, one still couldn't necessarily conclude that the brain state depicted in the fMRI data either caused such, allegedly, mystical experiences or that the fMRI data permitted one to accurately conclude that the meaning of the experience was 'x'.

People have dreams that they never tell anyone about. People think about all manner of things without telling other people the nature of those thoughts. People change their ideas, understandings, opinions, and interpretations of various experiences without necessarily disclosing those changes to other individuals.

Consequently, Dr. Stenger is simply wrong to suppose that if God exists, then any interaction that God has with human beings must produce the sort of observable results that can be accessed through scientific means. God could be interacting with people – both on the mystical path as well as during the course of everyday life -- in a variety of ways without the nature of that interaction necessarily being visible to various external observers irrespective of the kinds of scientific equipment that might be available to those researchers ... or even if such interaction produced observable results, nonetheless, researchers would not necessarily know the meaning or significance of what they were observing.

Suppose a researcher decides to do a statistical analysis of whether or not prayer is efficacious. The researcher keeps track of what prayers are said by which people, and, then, the researchers wait for a period of time to see whether, or not, any of the prayers are answered (and, isn't it possible that setting a cut-off point for measuring the possible efficacy of prayers constitutes a rather arbitrary procedure since, perhaps, God

answers prayers according to a Divine timetable and not according to the artificially constructed timetable of a group of researchers?).

Assuming there were clear-cut criteria for determining whether, or not, any given prayer was answered (and I am not sure this would be easy to do), what if, when the prayer data was mathematically analyzed, the researchers could not establish any sort of statistical significance concerning those results. For instance, what if – according to one’s mathematical model -- one needed to find 23 positive results in the data (i.e., prayers that, according to the criteria, seemed to have been answered) in order to establish statistical significance at some given level of confidence, but, instead, one only found 12 positive results.

According to one’s mode of statistical analysis, anything less than 23 positive instances of prayers being answered might be explicable as being due to the interaction of chance factors. However, 23 positive results is a threshold result that would have exceeded what one would have anticipated as being possible merely through chance happenings.

Therefore, meeting or exceeding such a statistical threshold would appear to constitute a certain amount of evidence that – if it occurred – would give expression to positive outcomes involving prayer that couldn’t be explained away by the presence of chance factors. On the other hand, falling below the aforementioned threshold would be interpreted to mean that one could not distinguish those results from purely random or chance events.

If researchers obtained anything less than 23 positive results, can one necessarily conclude that in relation to the prayers of the people with positive prayer results -- but who numbered less than the statistical threshold of 23 instances – that the prayers of such people were not actually answered by God? What if, for unknown reasons, God liked to act interstitially or below the threshold of statistical significance, and, therefore, one had difficulty distinguishing between what was an event that might be due to chance occurrences and what was an event that might give expression to God’s interactive presence?

In fact, isn’t the very idea of a chance event, a potentially biased interpretation of what might be responsible for that event? If, ontologically, there were no such thing as chance, random events – that is, if God were responsible for events that are being called random – then, one would have no baseline of comparison through which to distinguish

between random and non-random events ... those distinctions would be arbitrary and artificial.

The baseline for testing statistical significance is usually identified by theoretical models concerning the idea of randomness in any given set of circumstances. For example, if one had a fair coin (one that was not weighted in a way that would lead to skewed results), one would expect that, over time, one would see roughly as many heads as one saw tails, and therefore, the dimension of chance is set at 50% -- that is, if one encountered results for either head or tails that significantly deviated from the value of 50%, then, one would have to consider the possibility that the coin was not fair, or that one was observing a statistically possible, but rare, run of sequential, chance events, or one might have to consider the possibility that something other than chance was affecting the outcome of the coin tossing process.

However, although the theoretical baseline for tossing a head or a tail might be 50% and, as a result, one would have to consider different explanations for any sequence of coins that deviated significantly from that 50% threshold, nonetheless, even when considering sequences that adhered to the foregoing threshold value, one couldn't be certain what caused any particular coin flip. The result of any given flip could be due to the interaction of a number of physical forces, or that result could be due to the intervention of something beyond those forces.

As previously noted, Occam's razor advises people not to multiply assumptions beyond necessity. If necessity is a function of the truth, then only the truth can determine whether it is simpler to assume that any given toss of a coin is due to random events or whether it constitutes a phenomenon that, somehow, falls beyond the parameters that encompass the notion of randomness.

When it comes to something like the issue of whether, or not, prayers are answered by God, then, establishing what one would expect on a random basis with respect to such an issue becomes -- if not totally arbitrary -- difficult to determine. Furthermore, the criteria one uses for identifying what constitutes an answered prayer, or the time frame one uses to look for whether, or not, prayers are answered, and even the type of prayer that one will permit in an experiment can all affect how one goes about interpreting the meaning of the outcomes for any given test of prayer efficacy.

For example, If I pray for God to have mercy on someone, how does one determine whether, or not, the prayer has been answered. Or, If I pray for God to ease someone's difficulties or to help someone through her or his difficulty, how does one measure this? Or, if I pray for something specific, yet something else appears in my life, can one necessarily conclude that God has not heard my prayer but decided to make some sort of counter offer?

Presumably, Dr. Stenger believes that he can set up experiments that will demonstrate whether, or not, God exists. Why should we suppose that God is interested in meeting the challenge of scientists to perform in this or that way?

There is a certain degree of hubris present in those who suppose that God wishes to jump through hoops in order to convince people in a certain way as far as the issue of God's existence is concerned. The responsibility for seeking the truth rests with the individual, and God doesn't necessarily have any need to ensure that everyone will come to understand the nature of her or his relationship with Being/Reality.

The battle for the truth takes place within individuals. One must struggle for the truth.

We live in the midst of uncertainties, doubts, incomplete information, and inconclusive data with respect to virtually every aspect of life. A person's manner of faith is – for better or worse (depending on the nature of one's faith) -- the coping strategy that he or she uses to engage those uncertainties and, despite the opinion of Dr. Stenger to the contrary, this remains as true for science as it does for religion.

According to Dr. Stenger: "Science is the belief in the presence of supportive evidence. And reason is just the procedure by which humans ensure that their conclusions are consistent with the theory that produced them and with the data that test those conclusions." (Page 15) However, the issue of being "consistent with" is a rather vague and amorphous topic.

A given fact might be considered to be consistent with a variety of different ideas concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. A great deal depends on the criteria that are used to characterize the notion of consistency and depends, as well, on the

arguments that are used to justify using such criteria to define the nature of consistency.

The foregoing discussion was not intended to be an exercise that proves or disproves God's existence or which proves, or disproves, that prayers are efficacious. Instead, the underlying intent has been to remind the reader that proofs concerning God's existence or nonexistence, as well as proofs attempting to prove, or disprove – for example -- the efficacy of prayers are difficult to construct in any way that will be acceptable to the vast majority of people beyond a reasonable doubt ... definitions, assumptions, processes of measurement, modes of interpretation, methodologies, and experimental setups can all help to obfuscate matters of ontology rather than clarify them.

In *The New Atheism* Dr. Stenger claims that he has proven that the Abrahamic God does not exist. In reality, he has taken a variety of issues involving topics such as: Physics, biology, morality, neurobiology, psychology, cosmology, and history, parsed them in self-serving ways, and, then, proceeds to claim that his arbitrary, if not distorted, ways of interpreting that data proves that God does not exist.

He claims that the 'New Atheism' takes a stand for science and reason. In reality, however I believe that the nearly 300 pages that have preceded the present page indicate that the 'new atheism' really only takes a stand for its own doctored versions of science and reason.

For example, consider the issue of 9/11. Dr. Stenger, Dr. Harris, Professor Dawkins, Professor Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens – who, collectively, are considered to give expression to the face of the new atheism – are all of the opinion that they understand what happened on 9/11 ... indeed, they all endorse the so-called 'official theory' concerning 9/11 – that is, the theory that is rooted in the alleged evidence that is presented in documents such as: *The 9/11 Commission Report*, *The Pentagon Building Performance Report*, and a gaggle of reports issued by NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) concerning events at the World Trade Center on 9/11.

The subtitle for the book: *The New Atheism* is: 'Taking a Stand for Science and Reason.' Yet, when it comes to 9/11, all of the foregoing individuals have abandoned science and reason.

Both prior to, and following, 9/11, there has never been a high-rise steel building that collapsed due to fire. There have been major fires involving high-rise steel buildings in: New York (1 New York Plaza, 1970), Los Angeles (First Interstate Building, 1988), Philadelphia (One Meridian Plaza, 1991), Caracas (2004), Madrid (The Windsor Building Fire, 2005), Peking (Mandarin Oriental Hotel, 2009), and (Dubai, 2015/2016) – fires that enveloped significant portions of those buildings and burned far more intensely for 5 to 15 times as long as the fires that burned in the Twin Towers – and, yet, none of those buildings were destroyed or collapsed in a heap of metal.

On 9/11, however, NIST has tried to argue that for the first, and only, time in the history of high-rise steel buildings, three such buildings in the World Trade Complex in New York all collapsed on the same day due to the impact that fires had on those structures despite the fact that the fires occurring in those buildings were of relatively limited duration (roughly an hour and a half in the Twin Towers) and intensity (the fires were, for the most part, oxygen starved for much of their duration).

One of the reasons given by NIST for why its investigators were of the opinion that the Twin Towers “collapse” had to do with the alleged damage that was hypothesized to have occurred in conjunction with a number of the floor assembly units for those buildings as those units were exposed to fires. However, Underwriters Laboratory had tested the same kind of floor assembly units that existed in the Twin Towers and had found that those assembly units would not have buckled under the conditions that existed in those two buildings on 9/11, and, therefore, those floor assembly units could not have been the reason for structural failure in the Twin Towers.

To date, more than 2,500 architects, engineers and scientists have gone on record indicating that whatever caused the structural failure of three buildings in the World Trade Complex on 9/11, the facts clearly indicate that those failures were not due to some combination of fire and plane damage as NIST has tried to claim. In fact, Building 7, a 47-storey structure that came down on 9/11 was not even hit by a plane, and, in addition, David Chandler, a high school physics teacher forced NIST to revise its reports to acknowledge that Building 7 was in free fall for a portion of its descent to the ground.

The only way in which a high-rise, steel structured building could exhibit the property of free fall during its descent is if something removed support columns from beneath each floor that, supposedly, was collapsing. This is not something that could have occurred during the sort of fire-fueled, pancake collapse that was posited by NIST.

On 9/11, all three buildings at the World Trade complex (the two Twin Towers and Building 7) descended in roughly free-fall times (10-14 seconds). A theory involving some manner of a pancake collapse would have required a number of minutes for those buildings to come down, and among other reasons, this would be because of the resistance that would have been generated by lower floors as they were being impacted by collapsing floors.

Basic laws of physics were ignored by NIST with respect to the events of 9/11. For example, aside from the above-noted issue of free-fall, NIST never explained why the seismic readings recorded in conjunction with the alleged collapse of several 500,000-ton buildings (the Twin Towers) registered a magnitude that was far less than what should have been expected from collapsing buildings of that size, and, in addition, the seismic readings associated with the descent of Building 7 were hardly distinguishable from the background seismic activity generated by city traffic.

Another physics problem connected to the events of 9/11 is that the amount of steel that constituted what remained of the Twin Towers after they came down were no where near the size that they should have been given that two 110-storey steel structure buildings supposedly had just collapsed to the ground. The piles of steel were roughly 10-14 stories high. Where were the other 96 to 100 stories of steel for each of the two buildings that should have been present at Ground Zero?

The foregoing point is especially puzzling given that the Twin Towers each came down in their own footprint. The materials composing those buildings were not, for the most part, distributed over a wide area but came down in a relatively small area (roughly the size of the base of the buildings), and, therefore, the piles of steel and contents of the Twin Towers should have formed rubble piles that were much bigger than 12-14 stories. Why the discrepancy in pile size between what actually was observed and what should have been observed had things occurred in the way that the "official story" indicated?

The foregoing issue reappears in conjunction with Building 7. That high-rise steel structure stood 47 stories tall, fell into its own footprint (defined as consisting of an area roughly the size of the base of the building), and, yet, the rubble pile for that building was approximately one-fourth of what it should have been had 47 stores of building materials actually collapsed into its own footprint. Where did the rest of the building go?

One might also keep in mind that when the people who were clearing wreckage at Ground Zero, some of the equipment being used by them weighed approximately 30-40 tons. However, use of some of that machinery had to be discontinued because it was damaging the 'Bath Tub' structure in which the World Trade complex was ensconced ... a structure that was designed to keep the Hudson River from flooding the World Trade complex as well as lower Manhattan. And, yet, one is expected to believe that two, collapsing 500,000 ton structures would not have done any damage to that same 'Bath Tub', and, in fact, many of the stores and subway lines that were located beneath the Twin Towers were undamaged.

Further anomalies concerned the high temperatures (ranging from 400 to over 2,800 degrees Fahrenheit) that were recorded at Ground Zero for months after the events of 9/11 through various means (including satellite). These high-temperatures existed despite the fact that there was no source of fuel that was identified which could have sustained the aforementioned sorts of high temperatures for such a long period of time.

In fact, as far as the identify of the fuel is concerned that might have sustained the foregoing kind of high temperatures at Ground Zero for such an extended time, one has to keep in mind that on 9/11 a great deal of the Twin Towers had turned, inexplicably, into dust. There was nothing other than steel girders left in the Twin Tower rubble that had survived the process of 'dustification' (this term comes from Dr. Judy Wood) that would have been able to fuel fires for months on end.

Consider another issue. While the pixels in the video of the explosion near the top of the North Tower of the World Trade complex are not capable of being sufficiently resolved to identify what actually hit the initial tower, a video that purportedly shows a plane entering the South Tower defies several of Newton's basic laws of physics by showing that plane just melting – without encountering any form of resistance – and,

therefore, somehow eluding several basic laws of physics: For example, (1) Every object that moves in a state of uniform motion will tend to remain in that state of motion unless it encounters an external force (e.g., a high-rise steel building); and, (2) For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction (e.g., a commercial jet that crashes into a high-rise steel structure will be hit with a force that is equal to the force with which the plane strikes the building), and, yet, the aforementioned video depicts a commercial jet melting into the South Tower at the World Trade Center complex, and, consequently, violates both the first and third laws of Newtonian dynamics.

The video should have shown a plane encountering the sort of resistance that would have been offered up by a 500,000-ton high-rise steel structure. The video did not depict such an interaction, and, therefore, the authenticity of the video is suspect.

One wonders why anyone would introduce such a video as an “authentic” account of what transpired at the World Trade Center on 9/11? One wonders even more why anyone with any understanding of science – such as, for example, someone like Dr. Stenger ... who taught physics at the university level – would not find such a video problematic from a scientific point of view.

Pilots, both military and commercial, have demonstrated that commercial jet planes could not have flown at the speeds indicated by the NIST investigators with respect to the Twin Towers (e.g., there would have been drag problems affecting the speed of commercial jets flying that close to sea level) or as was indicted in conjunction with events at the Pentagon by the *Pentagon Building Performance Report* researchers. Moreover, those same pilots have raised many questions concerning the feasibility of, among other things, crashing a commercial jet plane into the first storey of the Pentagon without encountering the destabilizing forces of the ‘Ground Effect’, or withstanding the high number of debilitating g-forces (which, at a minimum, would have been 4.0 g’s) that would have been experienced by people – including the pilot – that were aboard the commercial jet that allegedly followed the flight path laid out by the *Pentagon Building Performance Report* (...a flight path that included coming in over the Virginia Department of Transportation Antenna and, therefore, a flight path that would have required a very rapid descent

within a few seconds (resulting in high g-forces) in order to be able to crash into the first floor of the Pentagon).

April Gallop, a Pentagon employee with top security clearance, was at Ground Zero in the Pentagon. She reports that just as she sat down at her desk and turned her computer on, an explosion occurred.

After picking herself up after the explosion, she led a number of people out of the area. She reports that during the exit process she observed no fires in her vicinity (that would have been caused by airplane fuel tanks that had been breeched upon crashing), and, in addition, she reports that she saw no airplane wreckage, bodies of passengers, or luggage in the area where the explosion occurred.

A number of eyewitnesses to events at the Pentagon on 9/11 (including various members of the Pentagon Police), all reported that they saw a large, commercial-like aircraft approaching the Pentagon from the north side of the Citgo gas station that was situated about a mile, or so, from the Pentagon, and not on the south side of that gas station as was claimed by the researchers for the *Pentagon Building Performance Report*. If true, this indicates that a great deal of the latter report was nothing more than a fabrication of data.

Moreover, Pierre-Henri Bunel, a graduate of the French officers academy at Saint-Cyr, as well as a former artillery officer with considerable expertise in explosives and who worked with General Schwarzkopf during the first Gulf War analyzed the only video footage that has been released in conjunction with the Pentagon attack. He concluded that based on that footage what occurred at the Pentagon involved a detonation (associated with a missile of some kind) and not the sort of deflagration that would occur in relation to the explosions and fires that would be generated by fuels from a crashing plane.

The foregoing problems are not minor issues. They all go to the heart of the “official storey” concerning 9/11.

Everywhere else in the world – both before and after 9/11 -- no high-rise steel structure has ever collapsed due to fires (no matter how intense those fires were and irrespective of the duration of such fires). Yet, on 9/11 three high-rise steel buildings within a hundred yards, or so, of one another all, supposedly, collapsed due largely to fire damage that was not all that intense, extensive, or did not last all that long.

Why did readings of Ground Zero produce heat readings between 400 and 2,800 degrees Fahrenheit for months after 9/11 and, yet, no one ever discovered the nature of the heat source that was generating such readings? Why did the seismic readings for the demise of three buildings at the World Trade Center, each weighing hundreds of thousands of tons, not reflect the readings that should have been registered when buildings of that size came down through a pancake collapse? Why were the rubble piles for the three high-rise steel World Trade Center buildings only a sixth or seventh of what they should have been? Why would a 30-40 ton clean-up vehicle damage the Bath Tub structure that kept the Hudson River from flooding the World Trade Center and Lower Manhattan, but two 500,000 ton buildings did no damage to that same Bath Tub structure? Why did all three buildings come down in roughly free-fall speeds when the official story of a pancake collapse due to fires would have taken much, much longer? Why did the *Pentagon Building Performance Report* outline a scenario that was at odds with a great deal of the available evidence? Why did the sole analysis of the only video that allegedly captured events at the Pentagon indicate that the explosion at the Pentagon was one of detonation and not deflagration as would be the case if a commercial jet crashed into the Pentagon? Why did a Pentagon employee with top security clearance indicate that although she was in the location where the Pentagon was supposedly struck by a commercial jet, nonetheless, when exiting the area after the explosion she saw no wreckage of a plane, no luggage, no dead passengers, and, in addition, she was able to walk out of the building in her bare feet because there was an absence of fires in the area that was destroyed by whatever occurred at the Pentagon? Why did fifteen people – some of them working for the Pentagon Police – indicate that the flight path of the plane that headed toward the Pentagon just prior to an explosion at that building was on the north side of the Citgo gas station that was situated about a mile from the place where the Pentagon was hit and, therefore, such reports were completely at odds with the south side flight path that was reported in the *Pentagon Building Performance Report*?

Many more things could be said with respect to the numerous, fundamental problems that plague the so-called 'official theory' concerning 9/11 (such as the behavior – or lack thereof -- of the military on 9/11, as well as the peculiar activities taking place within the FAA on 9/11). None of these problems have to do with identifying the

perpetrators of 9/11 (although a great deal could be said about how none of the alleged hijackers would have had the requisite training and experience to fly commercial jet planes in the way that they supposedly did on 9/11), but, instead, all of the problems to which I am alluding here have to do with the problems associated with the quality – or lack thereof -- of the “official” science and research that characterized the work of the investigators, researchers, and scientists who put together the various studies of NIST concerning the World Trade Center as well as the Pentagon Building Performance Report. (For those who might be interested I have written two books concerning 9/11 – namely, *The Essence of September 11th* and *Framing 9/11*.)

People like Dr. Stenger, Professor Dawkins, Dr. Harris, Professor Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens have been so blinded by their rejection of all things religious that they have permitted their attitudes to undermine their ability to do science and research in a competent fashion or to reason effectively when it comes to many of the issues involving 9/11. In this respect, I have to commend Canada’s Barrie Zwicker, who despite being a atheist, has not permitted his ideas and feelings concerning religion to get in the way of his being able to objectively and rigorously examine the issues of 9/11 and, as a result, come to the conclusion that the ‘official story’ of the United States government and of, as well, much of the news media concerning 9/11 is not tenable.

The post 9/11 tragedies that have unfolded in Iraq and Afghanistan and the United States have led to: The loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, the displacement of thousands more human beings, the waste of hundreds of billions of dollars, and the destruction of three countries (including the United States) ... and two of those countries other than U.S. had nothing to do with 9/11. People like Dr. Harris, Professor Dawkins, Professor Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Dr. Stenger have permitted their biases against religion and against the religious to undermine their search for the truth, and in the process, they have helped grease the skids to death, destruction, and waste on a mass scale for if they had bothered to actually investigate the facts of 9/11, they – like Barrie Zwicker – might have tried to do all they could to inform people that the “official story” concerning 9/11 is not tenable and has led to policies (such as war and The Patriot’s Act) that cannot be justified.



Chapter 11: Nihilism

The etymological origins for the word “nihilism” resides in the Latin word ‘nihil,’ and this word gives expression to the idea of nothingness or nonexistence. The term “nihilism”, however, did not surface until the latter part of the 18th century as a result of some of the conceptual explorations that occurred during the Enlightenment, and, moreover, the idea of nihilism did not become a focus of discussion until very early in the 19th century.

From the very beginning, most people considered the notion of nihilism to have negative connotations. It usually was understood to be a reference to the emptiness or meaningless that was inherent in, or ensued from, a given philosophical or political position.

Hegel was, perhaps, one of the first thinkers who saw a positive, constructive potential inherent in the idea of nihilism. He believed that despite its problematic nature, nihilism still could serve as a sort of beginning through which, in time, one might find one’s way to the truth of things, and, therefore, nihilism represented a challenge that needed to be resolved by philosophers and thinkers everywhere.

Initially, nihilism was a term that was employed to criticize various aspects of idealism (e.g., the tendency of different strains of idealism to deemphasize the notion of a fixed, external world and give priority to the contents of consciousness, thereby, stripping the external world of meaning and significance). Later on, the idea of nihilism began increasingly to emerge within contexts involving philosophical, political, moral and religious issues that, in various ways, tried to deal with the loss of meaning that often arose in conjunction with those issues.

There is no one meaning associated with the idea of nihilism. Some individuals feel that nihilism alludes to the idea that, ontologically speaking, there is no such thing as reality, while other individuals believe that nihilism gives expression to the idea that knowledge concerning the nature of reality is not possible.

Still other people consider nihilism to be a way of referring to the sense of existential angst that is generated by a pervasive sense of meaningless in life. In addition, there are other individuals who treat nihilism as a statement concerning our inability to arrive at any sort of

truth with respect to the evaluation of religious, ethical, or moral principles and values.

Some people confuse or conflate the idea of nihilism with atheism. However, the ontological perspective of nihilism tends to be quite different from that of atheism.

For example, an atheist believes that God – however considered -- does not exist. Nonetheless, such an individual still might maintain that something called reality exists or that truths and knowledge concerning the nature of that reality can, nonetheless, be realized, or some atheists might wish to argue that existence does not automatically become meaningless simply because God has been removed from the equation of life.

Nihilism, on the other hand, tends not to restrict its claims to just the notion of God's nonexistence but, as well, that perspective also might – as indicated earlier – seek to argue that concepts concerning truth, knowledge and/or morality have no ontological or metaphysical counterparts. In addition, that perspective might wish to claim that existence is devoid of any sort of ultimate or essential meaning.

Nihilism – at least potentially – can be much more inclusive with respect to what it excludes than atheism is. Atheism tends to be much more targeted in what it rejects concerning the nature of reality.

However, there are modalities of nihilism that are more narrowly focused with respect to what is rejected. For instance, some individuals might argue that while the truth concerning the nature of external reality is not knowable, nevertheless, a given community could adopt rules and principles that permit the members of that community to acquire knowledge concerning the cultural traditions that have developed over a period of time with respect to its own ideas about reality, truth, existence, and moral issues.

Skepticism – when pushed to extremes – constitutes a species of nihilism. In other words, while pursuing a rigorous process of critical reflection that introduces heuristically valuable questions concerning the tenability of some given understanding might be part and parcel of rational inquiry, nonetheless, a process of questioning that is geared toward relentlessly rejecting any and all claims concerning truth,

knowledge, meaning, and/or moral values tends to be indistinguishable from nihilism.

In many instances, however, skepticism is to nihilism as agnosticism is to atheism. In fact, just as there might be a variety of reasons why someone would prefer to be known as an agnostic rather than an atheist, so too, there might be a variety of reasons why a person might feel more comfortable being known as a skeptic rather than a nihilist even though, behaviorally speaking, there might be a considerable number of similarities between the modalities of understanding being compared.

Furthermore, individuals might adopt some form of moral relativism due to underlying epistemological attitudes that are rooted in a nihilistic orientation of one kind or another. For example, if an individual believed the universe had no ultimate meaning other than the fact that it existed (a form of existential nihilism), or if a person maintained that one could never know the actual nature of the universe (a form of epistemological nihilism), then such an individual might feel drawn to the idea that all moral, ethical, political, and religious values are a function of – and, therefore, relative to – the situation in which one finds oneself.

As such, relativism would not be an expression of nihilism. Instead, relativism would constitute an attempt to cope with the moral bind that existential and/or epistemological nihilism seemed to place one.

Nihilism is not a perspective that can prove the claims to which it gives expression. In other words, if a person believes that she or he can never come to know or understand the nature of the universe, or can never come to know or understand his or her relationship with Being/Reality, then that individual will be denying herself or himself the evidential and epistemological wherewithal that is needed to actually prove that, say, the universe has no ultimate meaning or that there are no moral/ethical/religious truths inherent in the nature of Being/Reality.

Consequently, the nihilist is someone who pursues nihilism as a faith initiative. That is, not being able to prove: (1) Whether, or not, the universe has any ultimate meaning; or (2) whether, or not, one can ever come to know the nature of the universe; and (3) whether, or not, one can ever come to know the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, then although a nihilist can cite various kinds of evidential data as being in support of, or being consistent with, the idea of nihilism, nevertheless, a nihilistic perspective is nothing more than a choice about

the manner in which an individual has decided to construct his or her faith response in relation to the existential, epistemological, and moral problems or challenges that are entailed by life.

Some people consider Friedrich Nietzsche to be a nihilist. However, irrespective of whether one is inclined to agree or disagree with Nietzsche's philosophical point of view (and determining the precise nature of that point of view actually is not, necessarily, a straightforward process), Nietzsche's philosophical work appears to constitute an attempt to forge a coping response through which an individual might be able to meaningfully engage the crisis in meaning (with its attendant possibility of devolving into a complete loss of meaning altogether) that Nietzsche believed was challenging the world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Consequently, despite various interpretations to the contrary, Nietzsche was not succumbing to the currents of nihilism that were flowing through his period of history. Instead, he was trying to swim through those currents with all the energy and capacity for existential and hermeneutical survival that he could muster.

Although Nietzsche often indicated there was no truth, this assertion might have been more a matter of his assessment of the status of Platonic ideas and Christian morality, than it was some sort of nihilistic claim that truth, per se, was not possible. Consequently, philosophically speaking, much of what Nietzsche did might be understood as a two-part process.

The first part of that project consisted of him trying to draw attention to the existence of what he considered to be the dead and decaying ideas that he felt were littering -- and, therefore, obfuscating -- the conceptual landscape of his time. The second part of his philosophical project involved trying to sketch, or allude to, the sort of perspective and process that an individual had to pursue in order to discover a path that was capable of overcoming and replacing the moribund ideas concerning religion, morality, and so on that Nietzsche believed were interfering with clear, philosophical vision.

Nietzsche was better at engaging the first part of his project than he was providing solutions that actually resolved, in a viable manner, the crisis of meaning that, like the sword of Damocles, he considered to be hanging over the minds, hearts, and souls of people in Europe.

Like Hegel before him, Nietzsche believed that the threat of nihilism, or meaninglessness/emptiness, that seemed to be threatening human beings due to what he perceived to be problems inherent in Platonic, Kantian, and Christian ways of thinking – at least as those ideas appeared to be understood by the majority of people during his time – was not necessarily a bad thing. Nietzsche seemed to believe that the foregoing sort of conceptual malaise – if not degenerative, conceptual disease -- might serve to motivate human beings to undergo the sort of revolution in philosophical understanding that could lead to better ways of engaging a variety of moral and existential issues.

Old understandings, beliefs, values, ideas, and principles had to be destroyed because of the self-contradictory problems that Nietzsche believed were inherent in the logical character of their structures. This destructive aspect, however, opened up room for alternative ways of engaging Being/Reality to emerge.

In other words, if something were not done to resolve the crisis in meaning that Nietzsche felt was entailed by Platonic, Kantian, and Christian ways of thinking, then the horrifying abyss involving the sort of nihilistic disorder that he perceived to be threatening civilization would continue to engulf humanity. Nietzsche believed, however, that the threat of a growing sense of meaninglessness could be leveraged to launch a philosophical project that might not only be capable of eliminating the foregoing sort of threat but, as well, might be capable of replacing what he considered to be the debilitating and paralytic ways of philosophically and religiously understanding our relationship to Being/Reality with something that was capable of constructively serving human interests.

Nietzsche did launch the foregoing sort of philosophical project. However, he never really completely finished it but, instead, put forward bits and pieces of ideas that were often more suggestive than they actually constituted a worked-out set of solutions for the crisis in meaning that he felt was enveloping civilization.

At the heart of Nietzsche's philosophical perspective was his belief that many of the principles, values, and ideas that were inherent in Platonic, Kantian, and Christian ways of thinking could be shown to be problematic, if not untenable, in a very fundamental way. If his belief were correct, then, those who had been committed to Platonic, Kantian, and/or Christian ways of thinking would be staring into an abyss of

meaninglessness if and when they came to realize that their worldviews were beset with an array of what Nietzsche considered to be irresolvable problems.

For example, Nietzsche argued that at the heart of Christianity -- as well as the heart of a philosophical heritage that extended back to Plato -- there was a relentless will to seek out the truth concerning the nature of the relationship between human beings and Being/Reality (whether considered as Divine in nature or considered as some sort of realm of Ideal Forms or Ideas). However, from Nietzsche's perspective, this will-to-truth was the very force that, eventually, would lead to undermining perspectives concerning what one actually could know with respect to: (1) The Platonic World of ideal forms, or (2) the Kantian notion of things in themselves, or (3) religious ideas concerning Divine reality, and according to Nietzsche, the foregoing perspectives should be replaced with the insight that all one actually could have was a subjective, constructed, invented way of understanding the nature of the relationship between human beings and Reality ... whatever the nature of Reality might be (Ideal forms, noumena, or Divinity).

Nietzsche's mode of analysis was not a function of showing how this or that fact was capable of disproving various Platonic, Kantian, or Christian ideas. Rather, he believed that one of the fundamental forces inherent in the human condition involved a capacity for interpretation (*Auslegung*).

In other words, for Nietzsche, the essential nature of human connectedness to Being/Reality is rooted in our capacity for, and inclination toward, the process of interpretation. Moreover, interpretation is always relational in character and, therefore, there was no single interpretation that was capable of encompassing or exhausting all possibilities concerning the nature of Being/Reality.

The existence of something akin to 'bare facts' -- through which one would be able to grasp the character of fundamental reality -- was anathema to Nietzsche. While Being/Reality might exist in some sense, nonetheless, our way of engaging it was necessarily a function of the interpretive process through which we filtered experience ... facts, therefore, were all interpretive constructions.

Experience was always filtered through the lens of interpretation. As a result, human beings never had direct access to Being/Reality in, and of,

itself, and, as a result, one could not grasp the ultimate truth concerning the nature of Being/Reality.

Religion, morality, science, philosophy, aesthetics, and politics were all ways of trying to interpret our experience of existence. According to Nietzsche, existence couldn't be explained, but it could be interpreted.

However, if everything were a matter of interpretation, then, one couldn't argue – as many people in the 'civilized' world wanted to -- that a Platonic, Kantian, Christian, or any other point of view was capable of capturing the essential truth concerning the nature of Being/Reality. If the foregoing understanding concerning the nature of our relationship with Being/Reality were correct, then, from Nietzsche's point of view, if someone came to understand that, for example, Platonic 'ideas', the Kantian noumena, or a Christian worldview couldn't be shown to be true because those perspectives were merely subjective, constructed renderings of experience, then, Nietzsche believed that, unless certain measures were taken, such a person was in danger of slipping into the abyss of meaninglessness that had opened up beneath that person's conceptual feet.

According to Nietzsche, the interpretive process is rooted in the notion of drive or instinct (*Trieb*). Furthermore, Nietzsche felt that human beings are no more capable of grasping the reality of the nature of the 'self' out of which drives arise than human beings are capable of grasping the actual nature of external Being/Reality, and, therefore, since different drives shape the interpretive process in ways that are a reflection of the properties of those drives, human beings were often pulled in conflicting directions due to the dynamic between drives and the interpretive process.

Just as there was no one sense of Reality for Nietzsche, there was no one sense of 'self' or 'ego' for him either. The self -- or ego -- and Reality were all subject to multiple possible interpretations.

One of the basic epistemological mistakes Nietzsche believed people made was to try to objectify their interpretations of reality. That is, Nietzsche considered it to be philosophically and epistemologically problematic when an individual considers her or his interpretation of reality to be a factual, objective, reflection of reality rather than a subjective, constructed interpretation of experience that is shaped by various internal drives.

As indicated earlier, Nietzsche maintained that the idea one could access Being/Reality in some essential fashion was a fiction. Unfortunately, people treated those fictions as if they were certain truths concerning the nature of Being/Reality when, in actuality, they only gave expression to dogmas of one kind or another.

Nietzsche argued that drives and interpretations should be assessed in terms of their utility. For instance, if survival were considered to have utility, then, the value of any given interpretation or drive would depend on the extent to which that interpretation or drive helped to serve, advance, or support the goal of survival.

Consciousness, perception, intelligence, reason, knowledge, wisdom, and so on only had value to the extent that they constituted utility functions with respect to, among other things, the process of engaging and surviving the challenges of life. To whatever extent some given form of consciousness, perception, intelligence, reason, knowledge, or wisdom did not serve the underlying drives (e.g., survival, the will-to-truth), then, those modalities of processing experience were considered to be dysfunctional and needed to be replaced by modes of interpretation that were not dysfunctional in the foregoing sense.

Thinking, knowledge, and understanding were different ways of taking hold of experience and interpreting it. They were hermeneutical tools of existential mediation that permitted an individual to navigate his or her way through new and old meanings as a function of the utility values of those meanings with respect to the driving forces of life.

Nietzsche believed that because human beings vary [that is, they could become ensconced in an array of possibilities that are generated by dynamics involving: (1) Various drives, (2) interpretations concerning the nature of Being, (3) different senses of self or ego, and (4) notions of utility], then, people will tend to go about organizing their lives in different ways as a function of the foregoing sort of dynamic. However, on the positive side, those differences also constituted a source of new possibilities and choices – for both individuals and communities -- that could be engaged, reflected upon, evaluated, and through which decisions, of one kind or another, might be made.

In addition, Nietzsche believed that despite the foregoing issue of differences, nevertheless, intersubjective agreement still might be reached with respect to various drives and interpretation. Such

agreements could occur during situations in which participating human beings shared various kinds of drives that shaped their interpretations of events in similar ways as far as the utility value of those drives was concerned ... and, Nietzsche believed that in many ways human beings were often inclined toward intersubjective agreement due to a variety of shared: Experiences, languages, and needs (e.g., survival, will-to-truth).

For Nietzsche, morality tends to reflect the manner in which communities and individuals go about assigning values of utility to an array of issues involving: Drives, senses of self (or selves), as well as interpretations of Reality. He believed that a human being's journey through life is characterized by either trying to impose one's interpretation of existence on others, or by having the interpretations of others concerning such matters imposed on one.

According to Nietzsche, the way to engage the threat of nihilism that tends to arise when people realize that their connection to Being/Reality is one of subjectively constructed, or community imposed, interpretations concerning the nature of Being/Reality is to understand that human beings move forward through life by means of the process of conferring value on, or interpreting, experience. When the idea of objective standards disappear from view (assuming that Nietzsche's modality of analysis is correct), the way to overcome the threat of nihilism is not by becoming entangled in the web of meaninglessness that a loss of connectedness to the idea of truth likely brings but, rather, one overcomes the threat of nihilism by understanding that one is free to continue to confer value on, or interpret, Being/Reality in a multiplicity of ways that have the capacity to lend utility to the lives of both individuals and communities by satisfying their drives and providing them with a sense of meaning and purpose in relation to life.

Human beings must become liberated from chains of understanding that try to claim, or argue, that anything more than interpretations concerning the nature of Being/Reality is possible. When human beings are free in the foregoing sense, then, they are in a position to transform and invent anew what it means to be human, and, in addition, they have an opportunity to explore all the possibilities inherent in the process of interpretation and, in addition, while doing so, they can find joy, value, meaning, and utility in life.

Nietzsche's claim that God is dead ("Gott ist tot") is not an ontological statement. It is hermeneutical in nature.

More specifically, one of the central precepts in the perspective of Nietzsche is that all ideas concerning the nature of Being/Reality are subjective, interpretive constructions or inventions, and as a result, one cannot access the truth concerning the ultimate nature of Being/Reality. Consequently, epistemologically speaking, Nietzsche cannot make claims about whether, or not, God – in some ontological sense -- exists.

However, given the position of Nietzsche, what an individual can do is to claim that people's ideas concerning the idea of God are devoid of truth since – at best – those ideas only can give expression to this or that sort of constructed interpretation. According to Nietzsche, the foregoing realization constitutes an essential modality of deliverance from conceptual bondage and enables human beings to transcend the philosophical and religious dogmas of old by enabling them to commit themselves to pursuing the never-ending set of new possibilities that are entailed by the process of interpretation ... a process that, among other things, searches for the sort of utility functions that might be capable of serving human drives or instincts ... whether considered individually or collectively.

Human beings become the creators rather than the created. Life was considered by Nietzsche to be a process of continuously recreating oneself and one's understanding of the nature of one's relationship with existence.

Nietzsche didn't reject religion per se. He rejected versions of religion that he believed had failed to take into account the central role that interpretative creativity played in human understanding concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality.

The individual who is free to create oneself in ways that had utility with respect to the realm of satisfying human instincts/drives, is, for Nietzsche a highly religious individual. This is at the heart of his notion of Übermensch ... a being who enjoyed the sort of philosophical and religious freedom from dogma that enabled him, or her, to seize the opportunities that life presented and, thereby, to invent all manner of ideas concerning God (or Gods) and, as well, to develop a multiplicity of ways to engage those ideas of God (Gods) for the benefit of human beings – considered individually and collectively ... and, as indicated above --

'benefit' is understood by Nietzsche to be a matter of the sort of utility functions – or interpretive valuations – that satisfied human instincts/drives (such as: The will-to-truth, survival, continuing the species, and so on.

There are a number of problems inherent in Nietzsche's perspective. For example, Nietzsche never provides an account that satisfactorily deals with questions concerning the origins of: Life, consciousness, thinking, reasoning, understanding, language, or drives/instincts.

In addition, Nietzsche never provides an account of what makes the centerpiece of his perspective – namely, the human capacity for interpretation -- possible. The capacity to interpret – like the capacity for life, consciousness, thought, reason, language, and so on – is not an invention of the process of interpretation but, rather, the process of interpretation is made possible by a variety of capacities that exist prior to, and transcend, any given instance of interpretation.

What are the dynamics that give any instance of interpretation its properties? For example, Nietzsche never really specifies the nature of the dynamics through which drives/instincts supposedly shape the process of interpretation.

Moreover, Nietzsche believes that the process of interpretation alters perception. Yet, such a belief implies that there is some sort of contact with Being/Reality that occurs and that such a contact point is what is being modified by the process of interpretation, so one would like to know what the dynamics are that modify the nature of one's contact with Being/Reality and whether, or not, that point of contact allows human beings to have some degree of access to the actual nature of Being/Reality.

The foregoing considerations also resonate with a further, similar problem inherent in Nietzsche's perspective. More specifically, Nietzsche never seems to be all that clear about why the will-to-truth can never be realized in any reliable fashion.

If we don't know the dynamics between interpretation and the process of making contact with Being/Reality via experience, and if we don't know the nature of the dynamics between interpretation and perception, and if we don't know the nature of the dynamics between drives and interpretation – and Nietzsche doesn't provide a clear, viable

account of any of the foregoing issues – then, how can one be certain that truth, at least within certain limits, is not realizable? Alternatively, why should one accept Nietzsche’s perspective that one’s interpretation of experience couldn’t give expression to an accurate reflection of the nature of some facet of Being/Reality ... even if one couldn’t necessarily prove its accuracy or truth beyond a reasonable doubt with respect to other people?

Furthermore, Nietzsche never provides a satisfying account for how one is to evaluate the manner in which interpretations supposedly constitute utility functions that serve the interests of this or that drive/instinct? What are the criteria for determining what constitutes utility, and how does one justify using such criteria, and how does one measure the efficacy of those utility functions?

In other words, there are many ways in which one could try to survive or in which one might exercise the will-to-truth. How does one comparatively evaluate those ways in order to be able to determine which of them best serves the interests of underlying drives/instincts?

Nietzsche believes that the capacity to be able to continually create and recreate interpretations of reality and ourselves -- and, thereby, generate modalities of meaningfulness -- is what saves human beings from the sense of nihilism that arises when we come to understand that, at least for Nietzsche, there is no such thing as being able to realize the ultimate truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality. However, if one understands that such interpretations are not true – however meaningful they might be – then, just how does one fend off the undertow of nihilism that is threatening to suck one under – conceptually and existentially speaking -- since the process of generating meanings is, ultimately, itself meaningless because it has no demonstrable capacity to reflect something of the nature of Being/Reality?

Something is meaningful only to the extent that it can be shown to constitute a reasonable or plausible way of organizing experience and attendant evidence in a manner that might credibly capture some dimension of Being/Reality or credibly capture some aspect of one’s relationship with Being/Reality. If the idea of ‘meaningfulness’ does not give expression to the foregoing sort of understanding, then, one would appear to be living in a world of fantasy that doesn’t seem to be all that different from the hallucination-strewn world of a psychotic individual.

According to Nietzsche, of course, the foregoing sense of meaningfulness is not acceptable because we lack a reasonable, plausible, or credible way of realizing the truth of things -- all we have is the capacity to generate interpretations. Nonetheless, one has difficulty understanding how subjectively constructed interpretations that are devoid of any sense of ultimate or essential truth can be considered to be meaningful.

The foregoing sorts of conceptual inventions would seem to be nothing more than arbitrary ways of arriving at understandings that lead nowhere but back to themselves. This doesn't appear to constitute much of an antidote to the problem of nihilism.

The foregoing situation is a form of pretense in which one, wink-wink, claims that one's interpretations contain an element of meaningfulness despite the fact that one fully understands that such meaningfulness has little, or nothing, to do with truth or with uncovering the nature of Being/Reality. If an individual hopes to hold back the tide of nihilism that is threatening to engulf her or him because he or she accepts the Nietzschean perspective that one has no access to the truth of things, then that individual would have to be able to invent new interpretation at a sufficiently fast enough pace to be able to continuously divert attention away from the fact that one's creations are not actually meaningful in any substantive sense.

Finally, although Nietzsche believes that we do not have just one self but, rather, we have as many selves as we are able to generate through our interpretations of ourselves, nonetheless, Nietzsche does not put forth much in the way of evidence capable of viably demonstrating that there is, in fact, no essential self present in a human being. While it might be true that many human beings do engage in creating and recreating their sense of self, and while it might be true that, at any given time, a person might have a sense of a multiplicity of selves existing within her or him due to the existence of various interpretive schemata underlying those 'selves', nonetheless, none of this demonstrates that their couldn't be some, essential self that is being obscured by a person's constant attempt to recreate herself or himself or by a multiplicity of selves that linger on after having been invented at some point in the past.

Apparently, Nietzsche considers people who imagine their way through life to be individuals who have become liberated from the philosophical and religious dogmas of the past, and, therefore, are free to

invent the future. However, the foregoing kinds of individuals are not free because they are slaves to a process of interpretation that – according to Nietzsche – cannot generate an understanding that has any viable way of being connected to truth.

They might feel free. Nonetheless, they are thoroughly entangled in an experiential world that has no escape from a treadmill that is energized by meanings and interpretations that have no truth value.

Nietzsche believes that human beings are faced with a Hobson's choice in which one either can take what he is offering (a way to generate meaningfulness through the process of interpretation) or one can take nothing at all (i.e., nihilism). However, one is actually faced with a choice between: (1) Committing oneself to a system of faith that is rooted in a certain amount of evidence indicating that truth, for the most part, might not exist, and, as a result, becoming busy with trying to impose arbitrary valuations onto experience (and, possibly, onto other individuals) as a function of this or that interpretation, or, on the other hand, (2) committing oneself to a system of faith that maintains that, to varying degrees, truth is accessible, and, as a result, becoming busy with trying to determine the nature of that truth to whatever extent this might be possible.

Both of the foregoing possibilities are faith initiatives that, to varying degrees, are associated with different kinds of evidence but do not necessarily possess the requisite quantity and quality of evidence that would be able to convince other individuals, beyond a reasonable doubt, that one's faith-based approach might be correct. Nietzsche believes that he has eliminated (2) above from consideration, but he hasn't actually succeeded in doing so.

Theology, at least according to some individuals, gives expression to a science of God. However, it might be more appropriate to consider theology as being a hermeneutical process that conceptually explores ideas about God.

One hermeneutical engagement of ideas concerning God arose in the early part of the twentieth century. It came to be known as liberal theology.

Liberal theology gave emphasis to several qualities of character exhibited by Jesus (peace be upon him). Chief among those qualities were love and humility.

Love and humility were at the heart of a sense of morality that was considered to form the core of religion. The morality inherent in that conception of religion was intended to assist people to live life as God intended human beings to live life.

By living life in compliance with the character qualities of Jesus (peace be upon him), a person's soul would come to realize the Kingdom of God. As such, liberal theology did not regard the New Testament as a book of revelation, but, instead, considered the New Testament to be a message of good tidings for those who would sincerely undertake the challenge of trying to live in accordance with the example of Jesus (peace be upon him).

From the perspective of liberal theology, if one lived life trying to comply with the example of Jesus (peace be upon him), then, through God's mercy, one would have the opportunity to enable the soul to possess what could never be taken away. This eternal treasure consisted of a deep, indescribable sense of joy, peace, love, and certainty concerning the truth of the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality ... an understanding that was considered to constitute knowledge of God.

The perspective of liberal theology was severely tattered and torn asunder by the horrors of World War I. Consequently many of the individuals who had grown up within the tradition of liberal theology that had arisen prior to First World War had difficulty believing in, and accepting, the promises of liberal theology.

Karl Barth -- who was a staunch proponent of liberal theology prior to the war -- was one of the individuals who lost faith in the teachings of liberal theology due to the nature of World War I as well as due to the aftermath of that war. The ideas of Karl Barth were very influential in Europe during the period between the two World Wars, and, as well, his ideas influenced not only such notable theologians as Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and Rudolf Bultmann during the era following World War II, but also played an influential role in the death-of-God discussions that took place during the 1960s and 1970s.

For Barth, life was not an opportunity to realize the glad tidings of The New Testament. Instead, the nature of human life was captured by the words that have been attributed to Jesus (peace be upon him) during the experience of crucifixion – namely, “My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?”

Liberal theology taught that: God is present, accessible, and, in addition, it taught that with the right kind of moral living, the Divine presence can be experienced within the soul in this world. Karl Barth, on the other hand, had come to believe that God was neither accessible through, nor present in, history, and, moreover, Barth believed that the presence of Divinity could not be experienced within the soul in this world.

Barth considered God to be unknowable. Moreover, he believed that human beings lived beneath a cloud of impending judgment.

Aside from having to deal with the physical, economic, political, social, and cultural tragedies that were associated with World War I and its aftermath, Barth also felt alienated from, if not betrayed by, the individuals – some of who had been Barth’s teachers -- that had been leaders in the liberal theology movement. Those individuals had been very public in their support of Germany’s leaders prior to the war and claimed that Germany was not responsible for what was about to transpire.

If God was present in history, then, how could something like World War I have occurred? How could people that Barth had respected prior to World War I have been so mistaken about the nature of the relationship between human beings and God?

Religious people had not found joy, peace, love, and certainty in the bowels of World War I. Instead, they had found misery, conflict, hatred, and uncertainty.

Barth’s problem was not an academic one. He was a parson who had a responsibility to help other people struggle religiously – as well as in other ways -- with the everyday problems that had been released by the ravages of World War I, and, therefore, before he could help other people, Barth had to find a way to deal with those issues within his own life.

Barth came to believe that at the heart of human existence is a question. That question was of the form: What is the nature of the relationship between human beings and God?

Liberal theology had taught that history and culture were the means through which to engage God. In contrast, Karl Barth and others began to argue that human beings were faced with a crisis of culture that needed to bring into question every modality of human understanding concerning the nature of the relationship between human beings and God.

Barth believed that only when a human being began to realize the extent of meaninglessness inherent in human constructs concerning God would the sort of spiritual space be opened up within a individual that might enable that person to become receptive to the actual nature of the relationship between human beings and God.

Somewhat like Hegel and Nietzsche before him, Barth saw the possibility of, within limits, a modality of constructive conceptual and existential progress emerging from the condition of despair, anxiety, and sense of meaninglessness that resulted from human attempts to impose their meanings onto a Being/Reality that was resistant to efforts that were rooted in ignorance concerning God rather than in actual knowledge of God. One had to become empty of human ignorance in order to become open to what God might have to offer.

Barth used a dialectical methodology to engage the aforementioned central question of human existence – namely, what is the nature of a human being’s relationship with God. He pointed out tensions of opposites that confront human beings as they seek to answer the foregoing question ... tensions such as the idea that human beings are in the world (i.e., time-based) but God is not present in the world (i.e., eternity-based).

However, Barth was not interested in bringing those opposites together to form some more unified understanding. Rather, he argued that the truth – at least to whatever extent truth was accessible to human beings – could only be found by accepting the reality of those opposites and finding a way to live in the interstitial spaces that were being shaped by the dynamic interplay of those opposites.

Somewhat like a Zen koan, Barth felt that by immersing oneself in the paradox of seemingly irresolvable opposites, then, truth, of a sort, might

be realized. Moreover, like some of the teachings of Zen Buddhism, Barth believed that only when one dispenses with one's illusions concerning one's presumed understanding of existence, knowledge, and one's relationship with Being/Reality would a person be in a position to become open to the actual nature of his or her relationship with Being/Reality.

In effect, Barth was urging individuals to undergo a radical process of epistemological divestment through which they would enable themselves to enter into a condition akin to nihilism. In other words, he wanted people to understand the empty, epistemological character of their lowly existential condition in order for them to be able to have an opportunity, eventually, to arrive at some kind of authentic understanding concerning the truth about the nature of the relationship between a human being and Being/Reality.

According to Barth, human beings were mistaken about the nature of God. Their mistaken understanding was because human beings were devoid of any direct experience of God, and since human beings permitted their illusions concerning their alleged understanding of Divinity to mislead them about the nature of what it was to be human, they were inclined to conflate and confuse God's identity with human identity.

Barth felt that one could not use historical investigation to explore the nature of Divinity. The only thing that historical investigation could reveal is the nature of the epistemological illusions that human beings have foisted upon themselves over the centuries.

Paradoxical though it might seem for Barth, the dissolution of illusions concerning God and the nature of our relationship with God signifies the presence of Divine grace in human life. Through that grace, human life becomes transformed.

By jettisoning illusory notions of knowledge, we are placed in a position to acquire actual knowledge concerning the true nature of our existential condition. By letting go of illusory senses of certainty and security, we discover a reliable – if tenuous -- way to be present before God.

For Barth, religion is understood to be an act of unbelief because it claims to provide people with knowledge of God. Since, according to Barth, God is wholly other and, therefore, unknowable, then, presumably,

religion – which Barth considers to be about knowledge of God -- must be illusory in nature as well.

In fact, Barth felt that, in some ways, atheists were closer to the truth of things than many theists were. In other words, although atheists believed that there was no God to have knowledge of, many theists harbored false beliefs concerning their alleged knowledge of God, and, therefore, when atheists criticized theists for having idolatrous beliefs concerning religion, then, from Barth's perspective, those atheists were correct in their assessment of things in that respect.

However, by adopting the foregoing perspective, Barth was allowing himself to become entangled in the manner through which certain individuals go about defining religion ... namely, as a process through which one comes to understand the nature of God. If, instead, one defines religion -- as I have done throughout the present volume -- as a matter of seeking the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, then, Barth's position gives expression to a sincere attempt to seek the truth concerning the nature of the foregoing sort of relationship, and, therefore, what he is doing constitutes an expression of religion understood in its most unbiased sense.

If God is wholly other, and, as such, if God is unknowable, then, this is an important truth to grasp because it discloses some very basic, brutal realities concerning the nature of our relationship with Being/Reality. Barth might, or might, not be right about such matters, but what he is engaged in doing – at least from my perspective – is religious in nature.

Seeking the truth does not guarantee that one will find that for which one is looking. However, the process of seeking for the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality is, inextricably, a religious activity ... for one is seeking the sacred ground of truth, and one is seeking the sort of sacredness to which one can become committed with all one's mind, heart, and soul.

As previously indicated, the truth that Barth feels he has discovered has to do with how the unknowable nature of God impacts one's search for the truth. According to Barth, what ensues from such a discovery is the realization that human beings tend to be entangled in various kinds of illusory, if not delusional, understandings concerning their relationship with Divinity and, as a result, those illusions/delusions adversely affect

and distort how people proceed with respect to the process of seeking the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality.

For example, if one already believes one has realized the truth, then one tends to stop looking for it. Barth wanted people to struggle with the shattering possibility that they didn't know – and might never know -- as much as they thought they did with respect to the truth concerning the nature of God.

However, if human beings are as ignorant as Barth believes them to be when it comes to knowledge of God, then human beings – including Barth – are not in any position to know whether, or not, God is present in the world. One could accept Barth's claims concerning the extent of human ignorance with respect to knowledge of God, but if one accepts his claim, then, one cannot simultaneously argue that God is necessarily absent from the world ... our ignorance involving knowledge of God would leave the issue of God's presence in, or absence from, the world as an open issue.

Furthermore, perhaps the truth concerning the nature of our relationship with Being/Reality is such that even if it were true that one could not acquire knowledge of God, this does not necessarily mean that one couldn't come to fully understand the nature of being human. ... a nature that, presumably, God had made possible in one way or another. In other words, human beings might have come into existence with a potential to be able to know – through struggle -- different dimensions of being human as well as come into existence equipped with a potential to gain insight into the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality.

However, if we come to know our selves, then, we will have a sense of how God's presence impinges on, and lends shape to, the nature of being human. This wouldn't necessarily constitute direct knowledge of God in any essential fashion, but it would constitute a kind of knowledge – within certain limits – concerning the way in which a Divine Presence moves through our lives.

If we have capacities for consciousness, intelligence, reason, language, creativity and so on, then, God is the One Who – in one way or another (through evolution, creation, etc.) -- made such capacities possible. Those capacities could be used to explore, question, analyze, and reflect upon experience in order to seek to discover the truth -- to whatever extent this can be known – concerning the nature of our

relationship with Being/Reality, but those capacities might not be able to know God except to the extent that we are able to understand that God's Presence is reflected in the existence and active use of those capacities.

Until one knows what the nature of the capacities and potentials are that are within one, then, one is unable to address the issue of whether, or not, knowledge of God of some kind is possible. Without knowledge of human capabilities, one cannot know whether, or not, such knowledge – if it were possible – would be of an indirect or direct nature, and irrespective of whether it was direct or indirect, we could not know what depth of understanding might be encompassed by that knowledge.

According to Barth, when human beings come to the realization that they are devoid of righteousness and, as well, that they are – spiritually speaking -- utterly lost, then, God is pleased with those realizations. Yet, if, as Barth maintains, God is unknowable, then, how can Barth claim that God is pleased when human beings have divested themselves of all religious illusions concerning knowledge of God?

Of course, it might well be the case that God is pleased when human beings empty themselves of their religious illusions. Nonetheless, given the fundamental premises of Barth's position, he can't know whether, or not, God is pleased, and, therefore, such a claim might be nothing more than another expression of the sort of religious illusions and delusions that Barth is urging people to jettison from their minds.

Barth also argues that God can only be experienced in this world as nothingness, emptiness, and as a source of rejection and denial. Once again, however, if, according to Barth, God does not exist in this world, then the sense of denial, rejection, abandonment, and emptiness experienced by human beings does not mark the presence of God but gives expression to the felt absence of God's Presence in people's lives.

In other words, human beings are experiencing what it is like to not be able to experience the presence of God. Those experiences might reflect something important about the condition of human beings, but those experiences do not necessarily disclose anything about the nature of God.

God might be present or God might be absent. Nevertheless, in both cases the challenge facing human beings remains the same – namely, to

rid themselves of their illusions and delusions concerning what they believe they know concerning the nature of God.

Barth is also somewhat inconsistent when, on the one hand, he talks about God not existing in the world, and, yet, on the other hand, Barth states (and this was touched upon earlier in the discussion) that the process of a human being becoming reduced to nothingness reflects the transformative presence of Divine grace in the life of whoever undergoes such a process of epistemological divestment. If the condition of conceptual dissolution -- in which many, if not most, religious illusions and delusions are removed from understanding -- constitutes a sign of Divine grace, then, in some sense, God is within the world because, at the very least, God's grace has touched the foregoing sort of individual.

The individual who becomes aware of his or her own sense of nothingness and emptiness experiences the presence of God's grace. Consequently, contrary to Barth's claim about human beings being within time (the world), while God transcends that world (eternity), nonetheless, if the foregoing kind of epistemological realization were due to the presence of God's grace, then, God would be present, at least to a degree, in the world.

Barth makes a distinction between the 'old' and 'new' man. The 'old' man is the individual prior to coming to the realization of her or his essential nothingness or emptiness with respect to possessing righteousness and/or any knowledge of God, while the 'new' man refers to a person after he or she has been brought to such a realization.

The transition from 'old' to 'new' is accompanied by the emergence of faith in a person's life. According to Barth, the journey from: Being thoroughly ensconced in religious illusions and delusions concerning one's alleged knowledge of God, to: Being brought to realize the nature of one's nothingness, provides one with a wealth of evidence concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, and, the faith that arises during the second leg of that journey gives expression to a hope, of sorts, that Divine grace might continue to keep one afloat as one struggles to remain aware of one's nothingness.

Although Barth claims that faith only arises during, or following, the transition from 'old' to 'new', nevertheless, a strong case might be made for the idea that some degree of faith must be present during the first part of the journey involving the struggle to divest oneself of religious

illusions/delusions and work toward realizing one's essential nothingness. After all, why would one undertake such an arduous, painful struggle unless one felt that the result of that struggle would, in some sense, lead to a better condition than the one with which one began? ... indeed, a disheartening truth might be of far greater value than a satisfying illusion.

If one had some inkling that, perhaps, one didn't really know as much about God as one thought one did and, as well, that one wasn't as righteous as one heretofore might have believed to be the case, then such an understanding is rooted in existential data generated by lived existence that, in one way or another, provides evidence that one really doesn't know as much about God as one thought one did or that one was not as righteous as one believed, and on the basis of that evidence, one might begin to engage life in a different way. Moreover, if on the basis of that evidence and ensuing efforts to change, one felt one was getting progressively closer (however slowly) to some important truths about human existence, then that feeling of impending improvement would give expression to a faith of sorts that would help an individual to continue to struggle toward a deeper understanding of the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

At a certain point, according to Barth, faith of a lesser kind experiences the transition from the 'old' to the 'new' human being. This transition is marked by the realization of one's essential nothingness, and the experience of that realization would lend support to the sense of correctness concerning one's direction of struggle, and, as a result, a person's faith would deepen.

However, Barth has a strange understanding concerning the nature of faith. He maintained that faith was a vacuum of sorts ... that it was devoid of content and static in nature.

Barth did not consider faith to involve a transition in cognition in which one had acquired new facts about the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. For Barth, the emergence of faith was merely a change in attitude concerning one's epistemological condition ... from one of being immersed in religious illusions and delusions, to one of coming to realize that one was totally ignorant about, among other things, the nature of God.

I think that Barth's foregoing manner of understanding faith is problematic. While it might be true that faith – at least as envisioned by

Barth – does not bring one an increased knowledge of God, nonetheless, faith is not empty or static.

In the beginning, faith is rooted in the experience of restlessness that arises from the suspicion that one doesn't actually know much, if anything, about God. Or faith is rooted in the experience of having the sense that one is not as righteous as one often likes to pretend.

One has sufficient faith in the foregoing experience of restlessness (which constitutes evidence) concerning one's epistemological and moral condition that one begins to look more critically at the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. As a result, there is movement with respect to the dynamics of how one goes about engaging existence.

The faith that sustains one as one struggles toward trying to realize the truth about the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality becomes filled with experiences that deepen one's understanding of the role that religious illusions and delusions play in one's life. If, or when, an individual undergoes the transition from the 'old' understanding to a 'new' understanding involving a full realization of the extent to which one is ignorant about the nature of God, then, faith undergoes a further movement ... a movement that is rooted in the experience of undergoing a transition in understanding.

The latter sort of faith involves an acknowledgement, if not appreciation, of the fact that one has been able to undergo a transitional journey from an 'old' modality of understanding to a 'new' way of understanding one's relationship with Being/Reality due to the presence of God's grace. Consequently, faith is not empty or a vacuum but, rather, faith gives expression to an enhanced understanding of things ... including an awareness involving the presence of God by virtue of the Divine grace that brought one to such a realization which, in turn led to a deepening of one's faith that the journey on which one has embarked has been worthwhile.

Contrary to what Barth claims is the case, faith is neither static nor devoid of cognitive content concerning one's relationship with God. Through a changing faith, one has traveled from illusion to the realization of a difficult truth and, as a result, one has been able to feel the presence of God's grace in one's life by means of that changing faith.

Barth maintains that the only sense of finality one can have with respect to our worldly existence is to continue to question the meaning of that existence. Such questioning occurs against a backdrop of realization concerning our epistemological condition in the world ... a condition that indicates that absent God's grace, we can never correctly answer the essential question that lies at the heart of our being.

Nonetheless, while one might never be able to know the full meaning of life, one certainly still could be appreciative of the fact that one does exist and, thereby, one has an opportunity to seek the truth – as far as this will take one -- concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. As such, perhaps, the journey toward realizing -- by God's grace -- one's nothingness and the deepening of faith concerning God's presence that is associated with that process of realization is meaning enough for life ... or, as John Denver indicated in his song *Sweet Surrender*: "My life is worth the living, I don't need to see the end."

Barth's claims concerning: Life's meaning, knowledge of God, faith, truth, and God's status in the world are not the result of rational or scientific proofs of any kind. His claims merely give expression to Barth's experiences in life and the manner in which he interpreted those experiences and the conclusions at which he arrived with respect to those experiences.

Indeed, Barth's ideas are a reflection of the existential struggle that he, himself, underwent. His writings that expound upon those matters are merely an attempt to generalize for his readers the particulars of his own journey.

His ideas (irrespective of whether one agrees with them or not) are rooted in reflections and conclusions concerning a series of life experiences. They are not the idle, speculative musings of an armchair philosopher.

Although I agree with Barth's insistence on the importance of struggling to divest oneself of one's illusions and delusions concerning the nature and meaning of life in order to be in a position to be receptive to actual truths concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, I'm not sure that I would agree with many other facets of his perspective. For example, and as previously indicated, faith does not seem to me to be either static or empty but, instead, has the capacity to

give expression to a rigorously critical, dialectical dynamic between evidence and the possibilities inherent in that evidence.

In addition, Barth has not really provided any evidence to indicate that human beings do not have a God-given wherewithal to acquire a deeper understanding of the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality ... a form of understanding that is capable of transporting a human being beyond the point (i.e., that of the 'new' man) which Barth considered to be as far as human beings could spiritually travel in this world. Related to the foregoing issue is the following consideration – namely, Barth never actually demonstrated that God was not present in the world but, instead, Barth arrived at such a conclusion based on interpreting his own experience in that fashion.

Yet, as previously indicated, Barth acknowledged God's presence in the world by indicating that it was Divine grace that made the transition from an 'old' to a 'new' understanding possible. If God is capable of being present in the world via the dimension of grace, then, why isn't it possible that God might be present in the world in still other ways as well?

In a sense, Barth is claiming that because he has not experienced the presence of God in this world, then, therefore, God does not exist in this world and, apparently, could only exist in the realm of eternity. On the other hand, perhaps such a perspective is merely a religious illusion or delusion that might be dispelled if Barth were to have the sorts of experiences that, for example, some mystics claimed to have undergone.

Over the centuries, there have been many mystics who have been part of the Christian religious tradition. During my own research into those matters, I enjoyed reading about the desert fathers, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (an anonymous work of Christian mysticism that was written in the late 1300s), as well as *The Way of the Pilgrim* (an account of a poor seeker after truth who traveled across Russia in the 1800s and became immersed in the Jesus Prayer).

I am not trying to say that the mystics are right and Barth is wrong, nor am I trying to claim that Barth is correct about his beliefs concerning the absence, presence, or existence of God. Rather, what I am trying to suggest is that Barth might have been premature in his conclusion that God is not present in the world simply because Barth did not experience that presence ... and, again, Barth's own idea that human beings sense that the transition from the 'old' to the 'new' human being constitutes a

sign of the presence of God's grace tends to murky the waters of Barth's position because such a sign would seem to indicate that, in some way, God is present in the world.

Neither Nietzsche nor Barth was a nihilist. Rather, in their own unique fashion, each individual leveraged the condition of nihilism in order to bring about something they considered to be better.

Out of meaninglessness, came meaning. Out of hopelessness, came hope. Out of illusions and delusions came truth.

Sufi mystics engage nihilism in a far more fundamental way. From the Sufi perspective, the very first part of the Shahadah – the Muslim profession of faith – should be understood to mean not only that there is but one God, but more importantly, the first part of the Shahadah means there is no reality but God.

The second part of the Shahadah indicates that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the messenger of God. The message – namely, the Qur'an – that is communicated to human beings provides the guidance that enables human beings, God willing, to come to the realization that there is no reality but God.

Manifestations -- or phenomena -- are the fleeting signs of God's presence. The properties of those manifestations or phenomena give expression to the formal tapestry of existence that is woven from the Names and Attributes of Divinity ... if one removes that Divine weaving process from the existential equation, then, the manifestations and phenomena of that equation have no reality of their own and, as a result, do not and cannot occur in the absence of God's presence.

The set of manifestations, or phenomena, constituting the life of Muhammad (peace be upon him) constitutes a model, template, or path of existential struggle that points out the way to working toward becoming open to the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. This is also true in conjunction with the lives of any of the 120,000 prophets that have been given responsibility for assisting human beings to struggle toward realizing the essential truths concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality.

The Sufis would agree with both Nietzsche and Barth that one of the first tasks or challenges with which a human being is confronted who wishes to seek for the truth has to do with divesting herself or himself of

the illusions and delusions that have arisen from various historical and cultural sources and been foisted on, or propagandized into, one as one grows up. Before one will be in a position to receive whatever Being/Reality has to offer with respect to disclosing or unveiling the nature of one's relationship with Being\Reality, one must become an empty vessel with respect to the many illusions and delusions of the world that are passed along from human to human as if those ideas encompassed real knowledge.

Unlike both Nietzsche and Barth, however, the Sufis – as do the mystics associated with many different spiritual traditions – indicate that something of immense value lies waiting, God willing, for the person who continues to sincerely struggle with his or her quest for truth. Whereas Nietzsche maintained that the only thing waiting for a human being who had divested herself or himself of illusions and delusions was an opportunity to continue interpreting experience in a manner that was devoid of any ultimate truth, the Sufis indicate that one becomes open to the essential nature of being human and, as a result, one comes to know the truth about the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. Furthermore, whereas Barth claimed that the only thing waiting for a human being who had divested himself or herself of illusions and delusions was the realization that, on the one hand, everything having to do with being human was meaningless and empty, and, on the other hand, God was absent from the world, the Sufis – as do the mystics associated with many different spiritual traditions -- argue that while it is true that human beings have no value or reality of their own, nevertheless, human beings have been brought into existence with the capacity, among other things, to become aware of a multiplicity of ways in which God is present in the universe and beyond.

Human beings have the capacity to bear witness to their own nothingness while, simultaneously, bearing witness to the presence of God. In fact, the foregoing nothingness – when properly fashioned through the activities of Sufi methodology (that are rooted in both the Qur'an and the exemplar of the character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and God's grace) – becomes the tain on the mirror that reflects the manifestations and phenomena that the Divine Presence makes possible.

Sufis – as I believe would also be the case in relation to authentic mystics from other spiritual traditions – would agree with Barth that the transition from the ‘old individual to the ‘new’ individual (marked by the divestment of illusions and delusions) constitutes a sign of the presence of God’s grace. However, Sufis – as I believe would also be the case in relation to authentic mystics from other spiritual traditions – would disagree with Barth that God is wholly absent from the world or that God’s presence in the world is limited to making the foregoing transition in understanding possible.

Finally, Sufis – as I believe is also be the case in conjunction with the authentic mystics from other spiritual traditions – would disagree with Barth that faith is an empty, static condition. Sufis consider faith to be a dynamic process in which there is a rigorous dialectic between experientially-based evidence and the insights and unveilings to which, by God’s grace, one is opened in relation to that experience-based evidence.

Faith is deepened by evidence that is considered to corroborate or support or is consistent with one’s understanding of some given issue. Unfortunately, faith is also vulnerable to being corrupted through misunderstandings concerning the nature of that experiential-based evidence.

Not all conditions of faith are tied to the truth. Indeed, the religious illusions and delusions about which both Nietzsche and Barth warned their audiences – as have authentic mystics from many different spiritual traditions -- constitute instances of faith gone astray.

One of the most difficult and dangerous problems of discernment that one can encounter while engaged in a journey that is attempting to seek the truth about the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality has to do with trying to determine whether, or not, one’s mode of faith is rooted in truth or rooted in illusion and delusion. The people of religion with whom many atheists take exception are precisely those individuals whose corrupted sense of faith has led those people of religion away from the truth and enabled the latter individuals to commit all manner of reprehensible actions.

Sufis – as I believe is the case with respect to authentic mystics from a variety of spiritual traditions – would agree with Karl Barth that human beings, on their own, are incapable of finding the truth. Guidance and

assistance of various kinds are needed to push and pull people in the direction of truth.

For Sufis – as I believe is the case in relation to authentic mystics from a variety of spiritual traditions – the One Who has made the universe and human existence possible (irrespective of what name or term is used to refer to such a capacity). The One Who makes reality possible is the ultimate source of that guidance even though such assistance and/or guidance might become manifest through this or that person or through this or that book or through this or that experience or through this or that insight or unveiling.

Chapter 12: Sacredness

Toward the beginning of Stuart Kauffman's book: *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason, and Religion*, the author states: "...I will present a new view of a fully natural God and of the sacred, based on a new emerging scientific worldview." (Page ix) Professor Kauffman is a specialist in complexity theory ... a discipline that involves scientifically exploring the emergent phenomena that arise in conjunction with the dynamics of an underlying set of interacting components.

Professor Kauffman believes complexity theory offers the possibility of a worldview that departs significantly from the scientific worldview that arose in conjunction with the work of Galileo, Newton, and other architects of modern science. The latter, traditional, scientific worldview tends to filter experience through the lenses of reductionism in which the dynamics of some set of fundamental units (e.g., quarks, leptons, atoms, molecules) accounts for the structural properties of all observable phenomena, whereas complexity theory contends that the interaction of a set of fundamental units can, under the right circumstances, lead to the rise of phenomena that cannot be predicted merely by knowing the properties of those fundamental units and how they usually interact with one another.

For example, consider the origin of life. Professor Kauffman believes that one cannot explain the origin of life in terms of the laws of physics. Furthermore, according to Kauffman, the principles of physics are not able to account – in any satisfactory or viable fashion – for, among other things, the sort of agency that eventually arises from evolving life in the form of, say, human beings capable of generating meanings, values, and actions.

According to Professor Kauffman, science has been dominated by what he refers to as the "Galilean spell". This spell is described by Professor Kauffman as a faith-like state that is committed to the idea that the natural world in its entirety is a, more or less, straightforward dynamic involving some set of fundamental, physical laws.

Professor Kauffman argues that there are many aspects of life, evolution, economics, politics, society, and history that cannot be explained in terms of the foregoing kind of fundamental, physical laws. Furthermore, he maintains that one does not need to posit the existence of a God in order to be able to understand how the universe operates.

Professor Kauffman believes that inherent in the universe is a capacity for endless creativity that generates phenomena that are partly rooted in physical laws as well as being partly rooted in processes that appear to be relatively lawless because of the way these latter processes produce phenomena that do not conform to the usual physical laws that govern many facets of the universe.

Some people use the term “God” to refer to the ceaselessly creative dimension that is inherent in existence. Professor Kauffman, however, feels there is no need to invoke God, the Creator, because the aforementioned creative force is a function of purely natural processes that both operate over and above, as well as in conjunction with, various fundamental physical laws that help order Being/Reality.

God is a symbol, according to Professor Kauffman, that has been created by human beings. Depending on how one interprets that symbol, an understanding will be produced that serves to organize or orient life, family, society, institutions, and civilization in different ways.

Professor Kauffman wants to use science -- understood from the perspective of complexity theory -- as one of the primary means through which he wishes to interpret the symbol of God. In addition, he wants to employ an enhanced understanding of reason ... an understanding that is prepared to acknowledge both the possibilities and limitations that are inherent in reason.

Through use of a revamped notion of science and by employing a more pragmatic version of reason, Professor Kauffman feels one will have the conceptual tools that are necessary to reinvent the idea of the sacred. Moreover, he feels that such a reworking of the idea of the sacred will permit human beings to come together with a shared set of values, meanings, and purposes that serve the needs of everyone.

However, the sacred is not necessarily a function of some process of human reinventing or re-imagining that is to serve as a substitute for an idea that usually is associated with reverence for That which is capable of -- possibly -- being simultaneously present in, as well as transcendent to, the realm of the natural. Furthermore, even if one wishes to reserve judgment about whether God entails a form of Being/Reality that falls beyond, as well as is independent of, the capacity of human beings to conceptualize, there are ways of understanding the idea of sacredness that are quite independent of human invention. For instance, one might

treat the truth as sacred, and, as such, truth is not what human beings say it is, but, rather, whatever human beings say about the nature of truth must be measured against the realities to which those alleged 'truths' give expression.

Alternatively, one might consider the sacred to be a function of whatever the nature of one's relationship is with Being/Reality. That sense of sacredness depends on being able to discover the actual nature of the foregoing relationship, and, therefore, this is not a function of human invention but, instead, is a function of being able to grasp the reality of one's relationship with Being/Reality from the perspective of Being/Reality.

There is a further notion of the sacred that is independent of human inventiveness. More specifically, the sacred is that which makes Being/Reality possible, and unless one wishes to make ontology a solipsistic creation of human inventiveness (which would entail many logical and philosophical problems), then, one must look beyond human existence for the source of Being/Reality, and whatever the nature of that 'source' is constitutes sacred ground.

At least partially, Professor Kauffman appears to want to make the idea of the sacred dependent on human activities (such as: Science, reasoning, and/or creativity). However, Professor Kauffman does not seem to be prepared to consider the possibility that the realm of the sacred might be hallowed precisely because it is independent of, and, therefore, beyond the reach of, human tinkering (inventiveness).

The other dimension of Professor Kauffman's idea of sacredness seems to be a function of the capacity of Being/Reality to be able to creatively give expression to all manner of unanticipated, unexpected, and unpredictable phenomena. To some extent, this facet of Professor Kauffman's notion of sacredness would seem to assign a major role to human ignorance in shaping one's understanding concerning the sacred ... as if everything that human beings find to be inexplicable, mysterious, or unexpected is worthy of being considered to be sacred in some sense.

Furthermore, one might wish to make a distinction between the issue of creativity, per se, and That (whatever this might be) which makes creativity possible. Although the existence of any given instance of creativity might serve as a sign that something extraordinary is taking place, and, therefore, might be worthy of some form of reverence being

directed toward it, nonetheless, the source or cause of that creativity might be considered to give expression to an even greater sense of sacredness and reason for reverence.

According to Professor Kauffman, reductionism refers to the idea that everything – including life, consciousness, intelligence, reasoning, memory, language, morality, agency, creativity, and history – involve nothing more than processes that give expression to the dynamics of particles or strings. However, and to consider just one possibility, Professor Kauffman indicates that many of the phenomena that occur within the context of biological evolution cannot be explained in terms of the dynamics of particles or strings.

For instance, he mentions, in passing, the idea that “Self-reproducing molecules have already been demonstrated in experiments.” (Page 4) If one were to suppose that particles and strings were conscious, intelligent beings, then in effect, Professor Kauffman might claim that those beings would not be able to foresee how their, presumably, random activities would be capable of generating molecules that are able to re-produce themselves ... that is, those particles and strings would not be able to explain, before the fact, how their own activities would lead to the emergence of molecules that possessed properties that enabled those molecules to reproduce themselves.

Speaking more formally, if one were to characterize natural law as consisting of those formulations that provide one with a means of describing – in brief, mathematical terms – the ordered character of physical phenomena, then, according to Professor Kauffman, those formulations are incapable of capturing the dimension of emergent properties that arise in conjunction with the dynamics of those laws, and, as a result, seem to give expression to a dimension of reality that is, within limits, free of those natural laws. In other words, and as previously noted, there seems to be an element of creativity inherent in the universe that is capable of generating phenomena that fall beyond the horizons of natural law as it is normally understood.

Professor Kauffman claims that the foregoing aspects of being creative and unpredictable are not a matter of lacking the requisite sorts of contextual knowledge and understanding that would permit one to be able to come up with a precise, descriptive formulation that could capture whatever regularities might be present in phenomena that, heretofore,

had been so unpredictable. Instead, Professor Kauffman believes that the unpredictable nature of emergent phenomena will always outstrip our ability to subsume those phenomena under this or that kind of natural law.

After mentioning the idea – previously quoted – that the possibility of self-reproducing molecules has been demonstrated by means of experiment, Professor Kauffman concludes: “A Creator God is not needed for the origins of life.” (Page 4) However, one has difficulty understanding the nature of the bridge in reasoning that permits one to go from the existence of self-producing molecules to the idea that “a Creator God is not needed for the origins of life.”

To begin with, the fact that self-reproducing molecules can be produced in the laboratory does not necessarily mean that those molecules will be forthcoming in the wild. Indeed, despite decades of running prebiotic experiments that are intended to produce – from scratch -- DNA and RNA in a way that might occur in the natural world, as well as in a way that would be able to survive for any length of time in that world, no one has succeeded in generating those molecules.

Furthermore, being able to generate a molecule that is capable of reproducing itself doesn’t necessarily say anything about how the present arrangement of self-reproducing molecules involving RNA and DNA came into being. If one is able to demonstrate that it is possible to generate self-reproducing molecules in the laboratory, then, one also will have to demonstrate how those molecules could have brought about the rise of the system of RNA and DNA self-replicating molecules with which we are familiar.

Secondly, having a self-reproducing molecule does nothing to resolve the problem of how a coding system arose that was able to take sequences of those molecules that could code for this or that amino acid. Indeed, why should a sequence of self-reproducing molecules of one kind come to stand for, represent, or code for some other kind of molecule?

Finally, even if one were able to explain how self-reproducing molecules of some kind might have been possible in the conditions of prebiotic Earth, and even if one were able to account for how sequences of those molecules came to serve as a code for different amino acids, one would still be confronted with a substantial problem. More specifically, how did sequences of self-reproducing molecules that coded for amino

acids come to have an over-all arrangement that was capable of ordering the construction of sequences of amino acids and transforming them into functional structural and enzymatic proteins?

If one likes, one can begin to play around with various kinds of odds that might be assigned to the likelihood of different, possible, sequential combinations occurring, but those probabilities cannot be linked in any viably empirical manner with what might have been occurring in the prebiotic world of early Earth. However, working out probabilities is one thing, but demonstrating that the early Earth operated in accordance with the assumptions underlying those probability calculations is quite another matter.

Professor Kauffman seems to be assuming that if one can demonstrate experimentally that self-reproducing molecules are possible, then, one has all one needs to account for the origin of life. However, what Professor Kauffman's approach to things lacks is any plausible explanation for how functional biological order arises in the context of self-reproducing molecules ... the sort of ordered arrangement that consists of the dynamic interaction of disparate molecules that makes stable, self-reproducing life forms possible, complete with functional anabolic and catabolic metabolic pathways that are capable of serving a variety of functions (e.g., generation of energy, membranes that can take in materials from, and release materials into, the environment; reproduction; elimination of waste materials; defense systems capable of guarding against potential threats; learning; and so on).

To say that some sort of ordered arrangement arises through emergent processes really doesn't say anything at all. One has to be able to show how a diverse array of many kinds of emergent phenomena are capable of coming together at roughly the same time and place, with roughly the right materials, proportions, and sequences to, thereby, bring about the self-assembly of a functional cell or life form.

Consequently, the existence of self-reproducing molecules does not entitle Professor Kauffman, or anyone else, to conclude that: "A Creator God is not needed for the origins of life." He has got miles of experimental work to go before he might be in the sort of viable position that would support such a conclusion and, as a result, permit him to put the possibility of 'a Creator God' to bed.

Professor Kauffman indicates that the world of reductionist science has: "... created a dilemma for many people of faith. Those who believe in a transcendent God, one who answers prayers, and acts in the universe, find that their God must become a God of the gaps, active only in the areas science has yet to explain or must act in contravention of scientific expectations." (Page 10) Professor Kauffman's way of framing things is problematic in a variety of ways.

For instance, if there is a transcendent dimension to Divinity, then reductionist science has nothing of value to say about God. The quality of being transcendent means that such a God is beyond the reach of science, and, consequently, there is no dilemma for people of faith ... on the other hand, if one were to assume the existence of a transcendent realm, one cannot automatically assume that individuals who believe in such a possibility understand its scope, potential, or nature.

Moreover, if one believes in a God Who answers prayers – at least some of them – then, God is not just transcendent and removed from the universe, but, God would also have to be present in the universe. If this were not so, then, God could neither hear prayers nor respond to them ... and, once again, one is uncertain how Professor Kauffman considers a 'God Who is Present' to constitute a dilemma for people of faith.

Professor Kauffman refers to the idea of a 'God of the gaps' who operates – quite 'conveniently' as far as many scientists are concerned -- only in the interstitial spaces that have not already been explained in scientific terms. However, one could quite easily refer to the idea of a "science of the gaps" in which, to date, science has only had some degree of success in isolated islands of understanding amidst vast gaps of ignorance concerning many of the most important questions concerning existence.

Science has not been able to adequately account for the origins of: The universe, physical constants, life, consciousness, intelligence, language, memory, creativity, talent, morality, qualities of character, or mysticism. However – and the following is a somewhat (but only somewhat) unfair characterization – if one doesn't mind laying down the foundations for creating nuclear and biological weapons of mass destruction, or for generating inventions (such as pesticides, plastics, electronics, GMOs, various weapons systems, pharmaceuticals, and thousands of chemicals) that are hazardous to human health as well as

damaging (often lethally so) to various ecological systems around the world, then, by all means, pursue science.

Professor Kauffman claims that reductionistic science forces people of faith to resort to a 'God of the gaps' because those individuals are only capable of operating in areas that "science has yet to explain" or can only proceed along lines that operate in "contravention of scientific expectations." (Page 10) Yet, given that science has not explained the origins of: The universe, life, consciousness, intelligence, logic, memory, language, creativity, identity, talent, understanding, morality, mysticism, and so on, then there are vast areas of existence for which science has no viable answers or explanations, and therefore, those realms remain open to other modalities of investigation that might prove to have heuristic value for human beings.

Furthermore, if science cannot offer viable accounts for the foregoing phenomena, then what does it matter if one decides to act in "contravention of scientific expectations" while exploring those phenomena from a different point of view (e.g., religion or mysticism)? In fact, one wonders why science – which, at the present time, is unable to answer so many questions concerning existence -- should be considered to be the default setting for engaging life.

If a person believes that God hears and, as God wishes, God answers prayers, then, science really has nothing of significance to say about that sort of a belief. This does not mean that the foregoing belief is true but, rather, the opening statement of this paragraph is intended to indicate that scientific methodology has its limits.

Science has no reliable way of measuring how God – if God exists (and I believe God does exist) – might respond to prayer. God doesn't have to answer prayers right away, nor does God have to answer prayers according to human expectations (e.g., God could respond to prayers by giving what God wishes to give and not necessarily in accordance with human wants or desires). Furthermore, God might answer prayers in a way that could not be distinguished from accounts of events that are based on probabilistic models that treat occurrences falling below some arbitrarily constructed threshold value as constituting chance happenings.

The foregoing considerations are not directed against Professor Kauffman's science of complexity (which is opposed to the idea of reductionism). Rather, the comments above are directed – in a critically

reflective manner -- toward Professor Kauffman's belief that reductionistic science necessarily places people of faith in a dilemma that requires those individuals to turn tail and run to the hills and operate as some sort of conceptual guerilla group fighting a counterrevolutionary insurgency against science.

By saying what he does about the alleged conflict between faith and reductionistic science, Professor Kauffman intends to use those comments as a prelude to pivoting away from reductionistic science (e.g., beginning with Chapter 3 of his book) and, in the process, pointing to a view of science – as understood from the perspective of complexity theory – that offers something that might actually resonate with people of faith. For example, consider the idea of symmetry breaking.

Suppose one has a circular table that is set up to accommodate five hungry and thirsty individuals. Let us assume there is an arrangement of glasses on the table that is roughly equidistant between the plates. The first person to take a drink from one of those glasses will determine whether the glass on the right or the left is likely to become the default glass for succeeding diners.

If the first individual selects the glass on the right (which, by cultural convention, is the traditional custom), then, all the other diners are, more or less, forced to select the glass on their right as well --- as long as we assume that glasses were picked up successively by individuals as we move to the right around the table. However, if the first individual happens to be left-handed but has forgotten about dining conventions, and, as a result, chooses the glass to his or her left, then, everyone else – if glasses were selected in order moving left around the table -- would be forced to select the glass to their left.

When the first person to take a drink selects the glass to the right or left of the plate in front of that individual, then, the glass-symmetry of the table is broken. As a result, the selection of glasses on the table assumes a chirality or handedness that has been set in motion by manner in which the first individual selected her or his glass.

According to complexity theory, symmetry breaking often plays a fundamental role in many physical phenomena, including biological ones. Complexity theory considers many kinds of symmetry breaking to give expression to what are referred to as emergent phenomena.

For instance, according to Professor Kauffman, one important biological phenomenon that demonstrates the principle of symmetry breaking and the property of emergent behavior involves the six-carbon sugar glucose. Glucose is a stereoisomer, and this means that a molecule of glucose can occur in the form of either a right-handed or left-handed, mirror image arrangement ... much as when one puts one's left or right hand up before a mirror, and one sees a different handed image in the mirror relative to the hand one has placed in front of that mirror.

If the numbers of right-handed and left-handed glucose molecules in a given mixture are roughly equal, then such a mixture is said to be racemic. If, however, the mixture consists largely, if not exclusively, of right-handed or left handed glucose molecules, then the mixture is said to have a chirality or handedness to it.

As far as is known, all life forms on Earth use only left-handed amino acids and right-handed sugars. So, the left-handed amino acids that form enzymatic proteins used in living organisms help build sugars that are right-handed.

The appearance of right-handed sugars in relation to the enzymatic activity of left-handed amino acids constitutes an instance of symmetry breaking. Professor Kauffman considers this to be an example of an emergent phenomenon.

The fact that right-handed sugar molecules are put together by the activity of left-handed amino acids does not violate any laws of physics. Yet, those same laws are not capable of accounting for, or explaining, why the chirality of molecules changes during such a process.

However, it is not just the change of chirality in sugar molecules that stands in need of explanation. One also needs to explain why the amino acids that form the enzymatic proteins used to build sugars are exclusively left-handed.

In addition, one wonders about the following idea. More specifically, since amino acids can exhibit chirality – that is, exist in both right- and left- handed forms – there is no physical law of which we are aware that explains why the amino acids that occur in life forms should all be left-handed. Consequently, one wonders what led to amino acid chirality in all life forms, and, whether, or not that chirality was due to some sort of emergent phenomenon.

There seems to be a certain element of conceptual prestidigitation that is present in the foregoing example of emergent phenomena involving the transition from left-handed amino acids to right-handed sugars. In other words, Professor Kauffman refers to the transition phenomenon as being an instance of emergent behavior, but the notion that certain events just seem to appear out of thin air and are unrelated, in any determinate manner, to laws of some kind feels unsatisfying, if not somewhat disquieting.

Professor Kauffman claims that the mysterious appearance of emergent behavior is not because we lack knowledge concerning the situation. Rather, the emergence activity somehow just occurs in a given context of physical law that is unable to account for those emergent phenomena ... a context that does not appear to permit one to deduce or derive the possibility of emergent phenomena from first principles of physics.

One question that occurs to me (and one wonders if the occurrence of this idea is, itself, an emergent phenomena) is this: Why should one accept Professor Kauffman's assurances that the occurrence of emergent phenomena does not reflect any lack of knowledge on our part concerning the nature of possible causal dynamics with respect to such phenomena? Is there really no causal reason why amino acids are left-handed or why left-handed amino acids help build right-handed sugars, and, how can we be sure that Professor Kauffman's understanding of the matter is correct?

Professor Kauffman believes that emergent phenomena cannot be deduced or derived from known physical laws. However, isn't it possible that there are laws which we do not, yet, know or understand that might be responsible for emergent behavior occurring in different circumstances?

Seemingly, some force, or set of forces, is restricting the form of amino acids in living organisms on Earth to exhibit left-handedness. In addition, some force, or set of forces, appears to be constraining the handedness of sugars in living organisms on Earth to be right-handed despite being built from left-handed amino acids.

Professor Kauffman appears to be suggesting that no such set of forces exist ... that emergent phenomena just, somehow, occur. If the

foregoing characterization is correct, I don't know how he would be able to prove the truth of that perspective.

Even if one were to provide numerous examples of emergent phenomena, this doesn't necessarily constitute proof that what Professor Kauffman claims is true. One might only be providing evidence that there were all manner of things that one didn't fully understand.

If one were to adopt the logic implicit in the foregoing perspective of Professor Kauffman, wouldn't one be entitled to argue that emergent phenomena are the way in which God's presence in the world is manifested? This is not what Kauffman wants to argue because he doesn't believe in a God that is somehow ontologically independent of the universe and on which the existence of the universe depends, but, nonetheless, Professor Kauffman is advocating a position that contends that emergent phenomena give expression to a creative dimension inherent in the universe that Professor Kauffman refers to in terms of the word "God".

Professor Kauffman uses the word "God" in conjunction with the creative dimension of existence in the hopes that such usage will resonate to a sufficient degree with people who believe in a Creator God (One Who generates the universe) so that there will be a "shared religious and spiritual space for all of us" (Page 6) ... that is, a conceptual space that can be shared by both those who believe in the existence of a Creator God as well as those individuals, like Professor Kauffman, who do not believe in the existence of such a God but who are willing to use the term "God" to refer to a mysterious dimension of creativity (along with its concomitant emergent phenomena) that is inherent in the universe and manifests itself in many different ways that cannot be deduced or derived from first principles of physics.

The foregoing notion of a "shared religious and spiritual space" seems to be an act of considerable credulity ... if not somewhat delusional in nature. Other than the word "God," there doesn't appear to be any sort of "shared religious and spiritual space" occupied by those who believe in a Creator God and those who do not believe in a Creator God.

People who believe in a Creator God are able – if they reflect on such matters at all – to accommodate a great many features of both reductionistic science as well as the science of complexity. In other words, there is nothing in physics, per se, that cannot be reconciled with the idea

of a Creator God who has ‘invented’ the fundamental principles of physics, along with the principles that are given expression in the science of complexity, in order to produce an ordered universe that operates according to a set of physical laws.

However, those who believe in either reductionistic science or the science of complexity possess an understanding that seems to be incapable of accommodating the presence of a Creator God. In other words, those who adhere to the principles of reductionistic science or the science of complexity tend to be unwilling to acknowledge the possibility that the laws of nature are a function of a dimension of Being/Reality that determines the structure and dynamics of the universe but is not, itself, determined in any way by the structure and dynamics of the phenomenal universe.

For those individuals, science often becomes a zero-sum game. Consequently, they are not so much committed to the idea of searching for the truth and persevering in that search wherever it might lead but, instead, they sift experience through filters that are designed to remove from consideration any trace of data that might allude to the possibility of God’s existence.

For people like Professor Kauffman, the physical universe – whether described through reductionistic science or the science of complexity – is all there is. There is no room in their conceptual space – and as far as those individuals are concerned, there is no need -- for a Creator God.

So, what, precisely, is the nature of the “shared religious and spiritual space” to which Professor Kauffman is alluding. The word “God” is being used in very different ways by, on the one hand, those who believe in a Creator God and, on the other hand, those who believe in a purely physical universe to which, under certain circumstances, some of those individuals might be willing to use the word “God” in conjunction with the creative dimension that appears to be present in the universe.

From the perspective of this volume of *Final Jeopardy*, people who are seeking the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with the universe are engaged in a religious activity. This remains true even in the case of those individuals who are engaged in that sort of a search but who have removed the idea of a Creator God from consideration as an underlying cause of the physical universe, just as it remains true for those

individuals who adhere to some version of Buddhism that might be devoid of any concept of a Creator God.

Despite engaging in the same sort of activity – namely, seeking the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with the universe – nevertheless, the orientation of searches that include the possibility of a Creator God relative to the orientation of searches that do not include that kind of possibility tend to be quite different. Consequently, there does not appear to be a great deal of “shared religious and spiritual space” that is present.

For instance, consider the following position of David Hume. According to Hume, there is no logical bridge that necessarily links descriptive statements concerning what is (i.e., the existing universe) with prescriptive statements concerning how one should morally behave in the light of such descriptive statements.

This is sometimes referred to as the ‘is-ought’ problem of moral philosophy. According to Hume, one cannot derive or deduce the nature of moral behavior (ought) from descriptions of what is.

The manner in which those who do not accept the idea of a Creator God go about engaging moral issues tends to be quite different from those who do accept the idea of a Creator God. The latter individuals believe that ‘ought’ is derivable from ‘what is’ provided that one understands the nature of ‘what is’ in the correct manner, whereas those who do not accept the idea of a Creator God usually acknowledge the validity of Hume’s account of the “is-ought” problem and attempt to develop viable systems of moral or ethical philosophy that are rooted in some sort of rationalistic and scientific analysis concerning the nature of the universe.

If people who do accept the idea of a Creator God are wrong about their understanding of the way ‘ought’ is derived from God’s existence, then, their search for the truth about the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality will become corrupted and distorted in various ways. If people who do not accept the idea of a Creator God are wrong with respect to their mode of rationally and scientifically analyzing the nature of Being/Reality, then their modalities of generating a system of moral behavior that ought to be pursued will become corrupted and problematic in various ways.

Consequently, the risks are similar for those who accept the idea of a Creator God and those individuals who do not accept the idea of a Creator God. In other words, there are potentially problematic consequences associated with being wrong with respect to one's understanding concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality and how one goes about trying to resolve the 'is-ought' problem, and, yet, as indicated earlier, the nature of the searches conducted by those who believe in the idea of a Creator God tend to be quite different from the searches of those who do not believe in a Creator God.

Professor Kauffman wants to develop a global ethic ... one that might be shared both by those who are oriented, in some fashion, by the idea of a Creator God, as well as shared by advocates who are conceptually oriented in a way that does not recognize the idea of a Creator God. The foregoing desire is commendable, but the realization of that desire is, perhaps, a tall – if not impossible -- order to fill precisely because there are so many differences between the frameworks and orientations of the respective searches for the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality conducted by those who accept the idea of a Creator God and those who do not accept that idea.

Perhaps the best that might be done by people who are committed to different kinds of searches for the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality is for those people to be willing to recognize the sacred character of the search itself and have a sense of reverence for the individual sovereignty that is necessary to pursue such a search as long as the exercise of that sovereignty does not undermine, corrupt, or interfere with the like exercise of sovereignty by other human beings. Surely, if the truth is sacred and something for which one ought to have reverence because of the crucial role it plays in one's search concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, then, presumably, the search for that truth is equally sacred and should also invoke a sense of reverence within us concerning the essential importance of that search.

People might have different ideas about the nature of 'That' which makes such a search possible, and, as a result, different people will attribute various senses of the sacred to their understanding of the source of a phenomenal universe, and, as well, different people will come to an array of conclusions concerning what they consider the truth to be with

respect to the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality. Nonetheless, irrespective of the form that those conceptual orientations assume, the one shared conceptual space that people should have, despite their differences, is to treat the search for the truth as a sacred process for which people, despite their differences, ought to have reverence.

Contrary to the title of Stuart Kauffman's book (Namely, *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason and Religion*) the foregoing perspective does not require one to reinvent the sacred. What needs to be reinvented is our understanding concerning what already is, and, perhaps, always has been – sacred ... namely, (1) the truth, (2) the search for truth, (3) discovering the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, and (4) coming to appreciate – as best we are able to do so -- 'That' which is the Source of, and has made possible, the opportunity to undertake such a search and arrive at some sort of heuristically valuable – and, hopefully, true -- understanding concerning the results of that kind of search.

Unfortunately, people have often confused, if not conflated, the sacredness surrounding the search for truth concerning the nature of one's relationship involving Being/Reality with the conclusions they have reached while conducting such a search. Quite frequently, those conclusions have been in error, and, consequently,, constitute corruptions and distortions of the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, and that which is false is neither sacred nor does it deserve reverence.

Politics, law, government, history, education, economics, philosophy, science, and religion all have to do with providing support for, or undermining, the realm of the sacred as understood in the foregoing way. The issue of sovereignty is at the heart of the dominion of sacredness, and if one does not have reverence for the right of all people to be able to have the opportunity to exercise sovereignty in the search for the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality, then, one has lost touch with the realm of the sacred. (For an in-depth exploration into the issue of sovereignty, please read my book: *The Unfinished Revolution: The Battle For America's Soul*)

Chapter 13: The Conscious Unconscious

Nearly twenty years ago (1997), the results of an experiment conducted by a group of scientists, led by Antonio Damasio, that took place at the University of Iowa were published in the journal, *Science*. The title of the article was: 'Deciding Advantageously Before Knowing the Advantageous Strategy.'

The experiment involved four decks of cards. Two of the decks had cards that were blue in color, while the remaining two decks contained red colored cards.

Each of the individual cards from the colored decks had a value. More specifically, any given card indicated that one either had won some money or one had lost some money.

Participants in the experiment were asked to select cards from any of the four decks and turn them over one at a time. The subjects were tasked with developing a strategy concerning the decks of card that would permit a subject to maximize winnings.

Unknown to the subjects, there was a considerable difference in the values of the cards within the four decks. Cards in the red decks sometimes offered higher rewards than cards in the blue decks did, but some red cards also brought greater losses than some of the blue cards did.

The best strategy for maximizing winnings involved consistently choosing from the two blue decks. Despite small losses here and there, the blue cards provided a means to steadily increase the amount of winnings, while drawing cards from the red decks would, in time, lead to substantial losses.

The experimenters wanted to determine how long it would take for subjects to realize that selecting blue cards was the better long-term winning strategy. The experiment entailed some interesting results.

In the first phase of the experiment, the researchers discovered that after turning over approximately 50 cards from the four decks most subjects were able to develop a correct hunch concerning the nature of the best strategy to pursue. However, subjects were often inarticulate at that point about why selecting cards from the blue decks tended to be more advantageous than selecting cards from the red decks was.

Subjects didn't seem to arrive at a clear understanding of the experimental situation -- and, therefore, become able to articulate the nature of that understanding -- until quite a few cards beyond the initial 50 had been turned over. The transition point between hunch and clear understanding took place when approximately 80 cards had been selected and turned over.

The researchers then carried out a second group of trials. During this part of the study, subjects were hooked up to sensors that were capable of measuring changes in the activity of sweat glands that were located just beneath the surface in the palms of the subjects' hands.

The aforementioned sweat glands responded to changes in temperature as well as to shifts in levels of stress experienced by an individual. The Iowa researchers wanted to see if those measurements revealed anything of interest concerning their card experiment.

The researchers discovered that subjects began to display a stress response in relation to the red cards after turning over approximately just ten cards. In the earlier phase of the study, subjects didn't begin to develop a hunch concerning the idea that the best strategy involved choosing blue cards rather than red cards until they had turned over roughly 50 cards, but in this new phase of the experiment, the sweat glands of the subjects were providing data that indicated something within the subjects seemed to know five times more quickly (i.e., forty cards sooner than had been demonstrated during the previous phase of the experiment) that red cards were associated with greater risk than the blue cards were.

The increased activity of the sweat glands was accompanied by changes in the behavior of the subjects. In other words, beginning around the tenth card, the subjects subsequently became more inclined toward favoring a selection of cards from the blue decks while also becoming more hesitant with respect to selecting cards from the red decks.

According to Malcolm Gladwell, author of *Blink* (as well as *The Tipping Point*), the foregoing Iowa experiment demonstrates that there are two kinds of processes that occur within the brains of human beings. One of those two systems of information processing involves consciously reflecting on what is learned and working out a logical analysis concerning any patterns that are perceived to be present in the data one has

encountered, while the other system of information processing takes place in an unconscious manner.

The conscious method of information processing often seems to require the accumulation of considerable data before relevant conclusions can be generated, and, consequently, it is a relatively slow process. The unconscious method of information processing requires less information and, therefore, tends to occur much more quickly than does the conscious method of processing data.

For example, in the case of card experiment that took place at the University of Iowa, the first phase of that experiment determined that subjects began to develop a hunch concerning the risky nature of the red cards around the time that 50 cards had been turned over, but subjects did not have a fully articulated understanding concerning card selection strategy until some 80 cards had been turned over. According to Gladwell, the foregoing set of circumstances illustrates the conscious way of reasoning about what one is learning, and this takes time as well as exposure to a fair amount of information in order for a person to be able to successfully resolve the four deck, two-color, multiple-valued card problem.

However, the second phase of the Iowa card experiment (involving measurements of sweat gland activity) demonstrated that ‘something’ within the participating subjects – referred to as the unconscious -- was aware that red cards seemed to be more risky than blue cards were as far as maximizing one’s winnings was concerned. Moreover, this allegedly unconscious ‘something’ was able to understand – at least to a degree – more quickly and with less information than was the case for the allegedly conscious way of devising a strategy concerning the cards.

For the time being, let’s put aside the idea that Malcolm Gladwell believes that both of the foregoing methods for developing a strategy concerning the decks of cards are generated by the brain. After all, at the present time, neither Malcolm Gladwell nor anyone else is capable of showing how the brain accomplishes what he claims it does (and I acknowledge the possibility that this state of ignorance could change in the future), and, therefore, one can’t be sure at this point that the brain actually is responsible for generating the awareness, intelligence, reason, memory, and so on that are necessary for coming to an understanding about how to maximize one’s winnings in the four deck experiment.

Irrespective of what is making consciousness, intelligence, memory, reasoning, and insight possible, Gladwell's manner of describing the significance of the University of Iowa card experiment is problematic in another way as well. More specifically, he is referring to a mode of processing information that is quicker than the so-called conscious way of arriving at a strategy and, in addition, he is referring to a method of processing information that appears to require less information in order for a correct conclusion to be drawn than is required by the 'conscious' modality of processing information, and, yet, Gladwell refers to the quicker method as being unconscious in nature.

While it might be true that the so-called conscious method of processing information is not aware of how the other, quicker method of processing information accomplishes what it does, the ignorance of normal, waking consciousness concerning those matters does not mean that the quicker and less data-dependent method of reaching conclusions gives expression to an unconscious process. That which permits a human being to detect a difference in the risk value associated with red and blue cards five times more quickly than one can achieve through a so-called conscious method -- and do so despite being exposed to far less information -- is not an unconscious process in any way except from the degree of ignorance that is present in normal, waking consciousness.

The quicker, less data-dependent method of processing information exhibits the presence of awareness with respect to the color and values of the card. If the so-called 'unconscious' were not aware of the colors and values of the cards, then, it could not arrive at any conclusions concerning which strategy to pursue in order to maximize one's winnings.

Furthermore, the so-called unconscious modality of processing information appears to indicate that there are qualities of reasoning, insight, logic, memory, and understanding that are engaging the experimental task. After all, if the foregoing qualities were not present, then, the 'unconscious' would not be able to come up with a successful strategy as quickly as it does and substantially prior to what occurs in normal, waking consciousness.

Normal waking consciousness is, at best, only dimly aware of what is taking place in the "conscious unconscious." For instance, when approximately 50 cards had been turned over by subjects during the first

phase of the Iowa card experiment, the conscious mind had a sense or hunch that red cards were riskier than blue cards.

The foregoing hunch, sense, or intuition is the result of a seemingly lethargic and delayed process through which a subject becomes aware of the understanding or insight that had been generated 40 cards earlier by the “conscious unconscious.” No one knows why it takes so long for normal, waking consciousness to become aware of what transpired 40 cards earlier in the “conscious unconscious” mind, and no one knows – at least at the present time – how normal waking consciousness becomes aware of the results that have been generated through the “conscious unconscious”.

However, the fact of the matter is that we also don’t know what transpires in the Iowa card subjects between the 50 and 80-card mark. At around the 50-card mark, subjects have a hunch or sense concerning how to proceed with respect to the four decks of cards, and at around the 80-card mark, they are capable of articulating the strategy, but how the transition in understanding came about between the 50 and 80-card junctures is unknown.

Is Malcolm Gladwell correct when he claims that two modes of information processing are taking place in subjects who are participating in the Iowa card experiment? Or, could it be the case that there is only one mode of information processing taking place but that more and more of the results of the “conscious unconscious” mode of processing information are seeping into normal waking consciousness and, as a result, the conscious mind is developing – over time -- a better sense of what the “conscious unconscious” already knows and understands?

In other words, perhaps the “conscious unconscious” is merely providing normal, waking consciousness with an understanding concerning the four decks of two-color and multiple value cards, and this transfer of understanding takes time. If this is the case, it still leaves unexplained how normal, waking consciousness becomes aware of and understands what is transpiring in the “conscious unconscious”.

Irrespective of how this latter realization comes about, it does not necessarily involve a separate instance of information processing that is taking place in normal, waking consciousness. That is, normal, waking consciousness does not necessarily undergo a separate, additional instance of information processing in which it takes the results of the

“conscious unconscious” as data and subjects that data to an array of analytical, logical, and reflective processes which produces an understanding that reflects or confirms what already had been generated through the “conscious unconscious” mode of information processing.

Furthermore, even if the foregoing possibility concerning an additional mode of information processing taking place in normal, waking consciousness were the case, nonetheless, that mode of information processing would still be taking place beyond the parameters of awareness with respect to normal waking consciousness. When reflection, critical analysis, or questioning of some kind occurs in a context of normal, waking consciousness, we never really witness the actual nature of the processes involving: Reflection, critical analysis, or questioning, but, instead, we only see the results of those processes as they bubble to the surface within normal, waking consciousness.

Consequently, even if two modes of information processing were taking place, nevertheless, at the present time, we really don’t know how either of those processes takes place. Whether things are occurring on a so-called unconscious level or on the level of normal, waking consciousness, we really don’t know how: Awareness, intelligence, memory, reasoning, reflection, analysis, insight, learning, or understanding work.

The only thing that seems to be exhibiting a degree of unconsciousness is normal waking consciousness with respect to what is transpiring in the “conscious unconscious”. Normal waking consciousness is aware of its own contents, but it is unaware of how those contents come to have phenomenological status or how one comes to understand the significance, meaning, value, or potential of those contents.

In light of the foregoing considerations, the idea that the unconscious constitutes a realm that is lacking in awareness seems problematic. As the Iowa card experiment tends to demonstrate, the “conscious unconscious” is alive with awareness, intelligence, insight, understanding, reflection, and analysis, but normal, waking consciousness is unaware of all of this and, therefore, it is unconscious relative to what is transpiring in the “conscious unconscious”.

In a sense, what is taking place during, for example, the second phase of the University of Iowa card experiment resonates with certain aspects of what used to be known as multiple personality disorder and is now

referred to as dissociative identity disorder. More specifically, often times the fractured personality that occupies normal waking consciousness tends to be unaware of other personalities that are present even though some of these other personalities appear to know about what is transpiring in the personality that is occupying normal waking consciousness.

Similarly, in the four-deck card experiment, the “conscious unconscious” appears to be aware of the same data to which normal, waking consciousness has access. Nonetheless, the “conscious unconscious” is capable of processing information in a way that generates insight into the significance and value of that data in a manner that does not appear to be present in normal waking consciousness ... at least not until a hunch surfaces after 50 cards have been turned over, or not until the understanding present in normal waking consciousness becomes fairly clear at around the 80-card mark.

Assuming that the brain is responsible for the foregoing sorts of phenomena, many researchers refer to the part of our brain that is capable of arriving at decisions fairly quickly based on relatively limited information as giving expression to the “adaptive unconscious”. The ‘adaptive unconscious’ is differentiated from the Freudian unconscious by noting how the latter dimension of being is considered to be a bubbling cauldron of unacceptable desires and repressed memories, whereas the adaptive unconscious supposedly gives expression to a computer-like system of information processing that is capable of effectively engaging the exigencies of life.

Apparently, just as a modern commercial jet plane is able – as a result of on-board computers -- to continue to fly without the assistance of human beings when the aircraft is placed on auto-pilot, so too, the adaptive unconscious is described as being able to generate sophisticated, high-level modes of analysis and information processing that are quite independent of normal, waking consciousness. While it might be true that there are intelligent capacities associated with us that operate outside the awareness of normal, waking consciousness, nevertheless, as the previous discussion concerning the Iowa card experiment indicated, those capacities are not necessarily of an unconscious nature.

Antonio Damasio, the individual who led the research team at the University of Iowa involving the aforementioned four deck, two-color,

multiple-value card experiment conducted the same kind of experiment using subjects who had damage to their ventromedial prefrontal cortex ... an area of the brain that is considered to have something to do with decision-making in human beings. Apparently, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex has the capacity to differentially sort through incoming sensory data and identify issues that require attention and, in addition, help bring about a decision with respect to those issues.

Professor Damasio indicates that although the foregoing subjects are able, eventually, to arrive at an understanding concerning the risky nature of red-colored cards relative to blue cards, nonetheless, they are unable to make decisions that give expression to that understanding. Furthermore, unlike the “normal” subjects who participated in earlier versions of the experiment, subjects with damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex did not develop any hunches concerning the red and blue cards when approximately 50 cards had been turned over, and, as well, the latter subjects did not exhibit any increased activity in their sweat glands after ten – or more – cards had been turned over.

The foregoing account doesn’t explain how subjects with damage to their ventromedial prefrontal cortex come to understand that red cards are risky relative to blue cards. In other words, if – as is the case with so-called “normal” subjects – sweat gland activity does not increase when approximately ten cards have been turned over, or hunches do not arise after roughly 50 cards have been turned over, then what is the nature of the process through which understanding is acquired in subjects with damage to their ventromedial prefrontal cortex?

Apparently, damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex interferes, in some fashion, with the process of notifying sweat glands that some information of significance is present. In addition, damage to that portion of the brain also seems to be interfering with the capacity to develop hunches about the degree of riskiness that is associated with red cards.

Yet, despite those problems, individuals with damage to their ventromedial prefrontal cortex are still able to grasp that red cards are risky relative to blue cards. They are just unable to use that understanding to affect how they go about choosing cards.

Individuals with damage to their ventromedial prefrontal cortex share one thing in common with so-called “normal” subjects. No one really understands how understanding arises in either case.

Moreover, in each case, 'something' is aware of the situation and capable of gaining insight into the differential values of red and blue cards. Nonetheless, whatever that process of understanding or insight involves, it does not take place in a way that is visible to normal, waking consciousness.

That is, normal, waking consciousness is aware that it does happen but normal, waking consciousness does not know how it happens. Yet, that process exhibits elements of awareness and intelligence.

Nalini Ambady, a psychologist, conducted an experiment that observed subjects who were tasked with judging the effectiveness of a teacher based on viewing brief, soundless, videotape clips of teachers who were engaged in the activity of teaching. Initially, subjects were provided with three, ten-second, video clips of a teacher teaching, and, during several follow up experiments, Professor Ambady reduced the length of video exposure to five seconds, and, subsequently, to just two seconds per clip.

In all three of the foregoing instances – namely, using ten-second, five-second, and two-second video clips of a teacher teaching – the subjects in the experiment rated the effectiveness of teachers in a manner that closely resonated with the manner in which actual students of the teachers being evaluated rated their instructors. Apparently, decisions based on a quick analysis of very limited information were not all that different from the judgments reached by students who were exposed to a teacher over the course of a much longer period of time.

Leaving aside questions concerning methodological issues involving the meaning and measurement of effectiveness, as well as whether, or not, judgments concerning effectiveness (whether made quickly or more slowly) were even accurate, something seems to be missing in the foregoing study. More specifically, irrespective of whether judgments concerning a teacher's effectiveness were made slowly (i.e., involving actual students) or quickly (i.e., involving subjects in experiments), we don't really know how judgments concerning effectiveness were made.

When I taught psychology, students had the opportunity toward the end of each course I taught to evaluate my effectiveness ... or lack thereof. Although the evaluation forms were fairly lengthy and consisted of both boxes to be filled in as well as spaces for extended commentary, one often had little, or no, idea how students arrived at their judgments

concerning my degree of effectiveness as a teacher or to what (and why) they were responding in relation to me that shaped their judgments concerning my effectiveness, or lack thereof.

They liked this or that in conjunction with what I did in the classroom, or they disliked this or that in relation to the way in which I conducted things in the classroom. Nonetheless, one didn't actually know why they liked the things they did or why they disliked the things they did.

A subject in an experiment sees a two-second, five-second, or ten-second clip of a soundless video that shows a teacher, teaching. My students fill out a fairly detailed evaluation form based on a semester's worth of exposure to my style of teaching.

In each case, judgments are rooted in modes of analysis, reflection, feeling, and judgment to which normal, waking consciousness does not necessarily have access. The subjects in Professor Ambady's study might not know how they reached the judgments they did, but they generate an observable result that gives expression to their sense of how effective a given teacher might be, and, similarly, the students in my classroom (and in the classrooms of the teachers who are being evaluated in the foregoing experiment) fill out evaluation forms but the nature of the processes that led to such a behavioral output are hidden ... perhaps even to the one filling out the evaluation form.

'Something' is aware of a teacher's actions – irrespective of whether those actions occur in the context of an experimental study or in a classroom. 'Something' is analyzing that behavior according to an array of values, expectations, needs, hopes, interests, pressures, questions, and difficulties, and 'something' is arriving at conclusions concerning the degree of effectiveness that are deemed to be present in the actions of a teacher as a function of the factors that were taken into consideration during the processes of analysis and evaluation.

Are those processes of analysis, evaluation, and judgment conducted in an unconscious manner? Or, are they done consciously – that is, with awareness -- but in a way that falls outside of normal, waking consciousness and, therefore, merely "appear" to be conducted in an unconscious fashion?

The term "adaptive unconscious" might be somewhat oxymoronic when describing such forms of information processing. In other words,

the very quality of being adaptive would seem to imply the presence of an intelligence that, in some sense, is aware and capable, within certain parameters, of flexibly responding to incoming data and, consequently, such an adaptive capacity does not seem to be unconscious in character.

I have used the term “conscious unconscious” in an ironic and not oxymoronic sense in order to bring attention to the idea that what takes place outside of the parameters of waking consciousness is not necessarily unconscious in nature. The truth of the matter is that we – speaking from the perspective of waking consciousness -- don’t know what is going on beyond the horizons of waking consciousness or how the dimensions of our beings that fall outside of waking consciousness actually accomplish what they do ... and, yet, ‘something’ appears to be quite aware of what is taking place and that awareness seems to be of an intelligent nature.

Moreover, if, as previously indicated, the ‘adaptive unconscious’ is considered to be a computer-like system, then, how did the architecture and programming for that system come into being? To respond with the word “evolution” in conjunction with such questions is an empty gesture because, at the present time, the modern theory of evolution is not even remotely capable of explaining how the capacities for awareness, intelligence, memory, language, reason, insight, understanding, creativity, and so on came into being or how any of these capacities actually operate ... as Sir Paul McCartney once indicated, ‘we’re in the middle of something that we really don’t understand’.

“Thin-slicing” is the term that has been coined to describe what the adaptive unconscious is supposedly doing when it makes rapid judgments or conducts quick evaluations of a given set of circumstances based on limited information. The subjects in the University of Iowa card experiment were engaged in the process of thin-slicing when their sweat glands began to react to the stress surrounding the riskiness associated with red cards, as were the subjects in the teacher effectiveness study conducted by Professor Ambady when they were able to reach judgments within ten, five, and two seconds concerning the potential effectiveness of a given teacher.

There are many experiments demonstrating that the adaptive unconscious of human beings has the capacity to thin-slice, often with

very useful results. What no one has shown, as of yet, is how thin-slicing actually works.

How does the allegedly 'unconscious' dimension of human beings have the capacity to interact with reality in a manner that displays both awareness and intelligence? What were the subjects in the University of Iowa card experiment picking up on (and how did they understand its significance)? Within the time that it took subjects to select ten cards, something in them was sufficiently aware in an intelligent manner about the nature of the experimental situation to induce their sweat glands to respond to the stress generated by the riskiness associated with red cards – a riskiness that normal waking consciousness did not possess (at least not in a detectable fashion), even as a hunch, until 50 cards had been turned over and that waking consciousness could not articulate until approximately 80 cards had been turned over. What were the subjects in the teacher effectiveness study picking up on (and how did they understand its significance), when they were able to judge -- as well as students could who had spent an entire course with such teachers -- the effectiveness of teachers with just 6 seconds (3 clips of 2 seconds each), 15 seconds (3 clips of five seconds each), and 30 seconds (3 clips of 10 seconds each) of exposure to soundless, videotape clips?

To say that all of the foregoing takes place unconsciously and automatically through a process of thin-slicing does not really explain anything at all. That terminology is devoid of the sort of content that would allow one to understand what is transpiring in the adaptive unconscious during the process of thin-slicing or what makes that phenomenon possible.

We know it happens. We just don't necessarily know how it happens or what makes it possible.

In the case of the teacher-effectiveness study conducted by Professor Ambady, subjects might have been picking up on just a few features in the clips of a teacher engaged in teaching – such as physical signs that suggested the presence of: Warmth, respect for students, and/or enthusiasm concerning subject matter. If so, this could explain why only a short time of exposure was required by subjects to evaluate the effectiveness of a teacher because, in the past, subjects – as might be the case for students in general – had learned that teachers who exhibited

warmth, respect for their students, and were enthusiastic about their subject matter were generally found to be effective teachers.

The subjects in the teacher-effectiveness study – as also might be true with respect to most students – were probably quite familiar with an array of moods, looks, gestures, attitudes, and so on that have been displayed by many different teachers over decades of classroom experience. They are likely to have become quite skilled in being able to size up, or evaluate, teachers and, consequently, those subjects might not need to have to be exposed to a great deal of information in order for them to be able to quickly make a fairly accurate judgment concerning a teacher's potential effectiveness.

One also might raise a question, or two, about the nature of the selection process that was used by the researchers in order to compile their ten-second, five-second, and two-second clips of teachers teaching. Were the clips taken at random, or were the clips selected because teachers were exhibiting qualities of (or lack thereof), say, warmth, respect for students, and enthusiasm for teaching that the researchers believed were qualities that effective teachers had and ineffective teachers did not have.

If the video clips consisted of a random sampling of what teachers did in the classroom and if the subjects in the teacher-effectiveness study were not picking up on signs indicating the presence of, for example: Warmth, respect for students, and enthusiasm for teaching, in order to make their judgments, then, the nature of the process of thin-slicing in that context becomes much more mysterious and elusive. Furthermore, additional study might have to be undertaken in order to determine whether, or not, experimental subjects reached their conclusions through a different kind of evaluation process than was used by actual students who were exposed to their teachers for a much longer period of time than the experimental subjects were.

The University of Iowa card experiment, on the other hand, might involve a much more complicated and subtle set of issues than is the case in the teacher effectiveness study. For instance, how does one come to recognize the potential for risk after turning over just ten cards, and why does it take so long for that understanding to surface to a sufficient extent in waking consciousness to enable a person to have either a hunch concerning the situation or to articulate its character?

Is it possible that something within the subjects in that experiment was noticing that red cards had both higher payouts and higher penalties associated with them while also noticing that blue cards had lower payouts and lower losses associated with them? Is it possible that such a trend would show up in the time that it took to turn over ten cards?

In either case, we don't know what is responsible for being able to be aware of the differential value of the two kinds of colored cards or how that capacity works. Whatever is taking place during thin-slicing, that process, or set of processes, does not appear to be automatic and unconscious, but, instead, seems to give expression to a process that exhibits qualities of both awareness and intelligence executed in some sort of deliberative, evaluative fashion in order to provide individuals with a basis for informed – but not necessarily correct -- action.

In psychology, priming refers to a process in which people are exposed – often unknowingly – to a certain kind of stimulus that, subsequently, tends to influence how we respond to some other stimulus. For example, Joshua Aronson and Claude Steele conducted an experiment involving black college students. The students were asked to provide answers to 20 questions drawn from a standardized test that often is used to help evaluate the suitability of students for graduate school.

When subjects were asked prior to the aforementioned test to identify their race when filling out a questionnaire, those subjects tended to do only half as well as when subjects were not asked to identify their race prior to taking the test. One of the destructive dimensions of living in a society that is steeped in racist tendencies of one kind or another is that individuals who are on the receiving end of racist behavior – namely, black people – might (quite unknowingly) internalize some of those racist attitudes and, as a result, develop negative opinions concerning themselves or their abilities.

The foregoing experiment by Aronson and Steele seems to illustrate the nature of the priming phenomenon. Prior to the experiment, the subjects had gone through several decades of being exposed to all manner of racist ideas, attitudes, and stimuli concerning black people, and, therefore, the subjects had been primed to be influenced by a subsequent stimulus – i.e., filling out a questionnaire that asks about race – and, consequently, tended to do only half as well answering the

standardized test questions as when they were not asked about their race.

Following the foregoing experiment, individuals participating in the experiment were asked by the researchers about whether they were bothered because they had to identify their race in the questionnaire they filled out prior to being required to answer test questions. Individuals seemed to dismiss the possibility that having to respond to the racial identity issue on the questionnaire might have affected their performance in an adverse manner, and, yet, not only did the test results appear to indicate otherwise, but, as well, many of the participants in the experiment expressed words to the effect that they just didn't have what it takes to do well in school.

In another experiment, conducted by psychologist John Bargh, subjects were tasked with playing board games that had been set up so that the only way in which subjects could win is if they co-operated with one another. Prior to playing the board games, participants were either primed -- through being exposed in subtle, indirect ways to an array of stimuli that emphasized a theme of co-operation -- or subjects were not primed in that manner.

When subjects were primed, the subsequent games tended to proceed without conflict, and, as well, the subjects were more inclined toward interacting cooperatively with one another relative to those instances in which games were played when subjects had not been primed to act in a cooperative manner. Furthermore, in a way that is somewhat reminiscent of the Aronson/Steele study involving black college students, when subjects in the Bargh experiment were asked -- following the completion of the games -- about what role co-operation might have played in their strategies or thoughts concerning the board games, the answers the subjects gave seemed to be devoid of any considerations involving the theme of co-operation.

In other words, the subjects seemed to have no idea that their behavior in the board games had been influenced by the priming process that occurred prior to the playing of those games. The subjects believed their behavior was due to choices made during the course of any given game just as the subjects in the Aronson/Steele experiment believed that their performance on the test had nothing to do with being required to indicate their race prior to taking the test.

Subjects in both experiments had been primed by being exposed to certain kinds of stimuli prior to having to act with respect to some given subsequent task. How those subjects engaged the latter tasks appeared to be influenced by the process of priming that had taken place prior to engaging such tasks, and, yet, the subjects seemed to have little, or no, understanding that their behavior had been shaped, to varying degrees, by the priming process.

Malcolm Gladwell indicates in his book, *Blink*, that the foregoing experiments appear to indicate that free will is illusory. In other words, behavior that, supposedly, is taking place in the context of normal, waking consciousness is not being directed by what is transpiring within normal, waking consciousness but, instead, is being shaped by events that took place earlier and about which individuals seem to be unaware.

Gladwell's foregoing perspective might be both right and wrong. On the one hand, Gladwell could be correct that normal, waking consciousness is not necessarily the locus of free will that we often tend to believe is the case because, oftentimes, normal waking consciousness generates behaviors that are actually being shaped by influences that have taken place and/or are taking place beyond the horizons of a surface mode of consciousness. On the other hand, Gladwell might be wrong about the idea that free will is illusory since there appears to be something going on in the adaptive unconscious – what I have termed the “conscious unconscious” -- that requires choices to be made and which is sufficiently aware of various issues to be able (through certain kinds of reasoning and logic) to direct those choices to shape various forms of subsequent behavior.

More specifically, in order to be primed, something within an individual has to take notice of the stimuli that are being used during the priming process. Furthermore, ‘something’ within an individual has to generate various forms of meaning, significance, value, or influence, and, as well, ‘something’ has to choose to use some meanings and values, rather than others, to shape and direct subsequent behavior.

Normal, waking consciousness might be unaware of the foregoing sorts of dynamics. Nonetheless, this does not mean that those dynamics are taking place automatically or unconsciously

For instance, when black college students in the Aronson/Steele experiment performed only half as well on a bank of test questions when

they were required to fill out a questionnaire asking about their racial identity, one might suppose that there might be a very complex dynamic taking place within those individuals that occurs beyond the horizons of normal, waking consciousness ... a dynamic that gives expression to all manner of feelings concerning race that are rooted in years of being subjected to racist attitudes, ideas, and behaviors.

The foregoing experiences are frequently not written in the language of words but are coded in the language of emotions, impressions, and attitudes about which some dimension of the individual is keenly aware. Those feelings are not necessarily linear in character but often are caught up in non-linear feedback systems whose inner dynamics are very difficult to disentangle and, yet, that whole carries a determinate meaning or value for an individual ... a whole that 'something' within the individual is aware of and selects to shape behavior.

Those choices do not necessarily have to be in the best interests of the individual who is doing the choosing. Rather, such choices are the result of a nuanced set of dynamics that generate coping strategies that are intended to help a person navigate the emotional mine fields of life as best he or she can.

In the case of some black individuals – for example, the subjects in the Aronson/Steele experiment -- the cost of surviving in a racist society appears to have been a Hobson choice of internalizing certain negative impressions concerning themselves to which they were subjected repeatedly while growing up in a racist society. Those internalizations are forced "negotiations" that society has imposed on them across years of their attempting to resolve, or cope with, the many problems that racism has thrown into the lives of those individuals.

Presumably, if one were to try to assist the subjects in the Aronson/Steele experiment to overcome their inclination to continue looking at themselves through the racist filters of the surrounding society, one would have to help enable those individuals to realize that – under duress – certain choices concerning identity had been made and that, now, new choices concerning those matters needed to be fashioned in order to be able to develop a constructive sense of self. In other words, they would have to learn how to not allow themselves to be primed by questions involving racial identity ... and in order to be able to accomplish that resolution, they would have to permit two different centers of

awareness within themselves – namely, normal waking consciousness and the so-called adaptive consciousness (the conscious unconscious) – to interact with one another with the help of someone who could help guide them through the process of facilitating the exchange of different understandings between normal, waking consciousness and the adaptive unconscious (i.e., the conscious unconscious).

What is transpiring in the so-called adaptive unconscious is not devoid of consciousness, nor is it devoid of intellect, choice, reasoning, logic, or insight. Moreover, what is taking place in the adaptive unconscious is not necessarily automatic but often consists of an on-going dynamic involving shifting themes, issues, considerations, and choices that are conducted against, and playing off, a backdrop of existing feelings beliefs, values, meanings, attitudes, and memories.

As is true in the case of identity diffusion disorder – i.e., multiple personality disorder – the foregoing cases involve different centers of consciousness that have a compartmentalized or partitioned relationship with respect to one another. Normal, waking consciousness and the “conscious unconscious” are both engaged in making various kinds of choices within contexts that are governed by properties of awareness, intelligence, and reasoning that are not necessarily automated in nature (although some forms of automation – such as habits – might be present) and, from time to time, the choices that are made in each center of consciousness influence, if not interfere, with one another.

Many of us have been conditioned – by psychology, philosophy, neurobiology, and evolutionary science -- to look at human functioning in hierarchical terms in which intelligence, awareness and choice are the exclusive purview of normal, waking consciousness. However, what goes on in conjunction with the so-called adaptive unconscious also involves processes that are characterized by conscious, intelligent, reasoned choices ... but the forms of intelligence and reasoning that take place in the conscious unconscious often seem alien to the modalities of understanding that are associated with the processes of logic, intelligence, and reasoning that occur in waking consciousness.

If choices that are made through the adaptive unconscious – i.e., the conscious unconscious – come to shape behavior, is there not something within an individual that still is exercising choice or expressing a modality of will (although it might not be entirely free of various influences)? Just

because normal, waking consciousness might not be the source of choice or the exercise of free will in those cases, one cannot necessarily conclude that choice and free will are illusory but, rather, one might have to consider the possibility that the locus of some instances of choice and free will comes from a dimension of the individual that is other than the locus that usually is cited when discussing issues involving choice and free will – namely, normal waking consciousness.

More than a decade ago, Raymond Fisman, an economist, and Sheena Iyengar, a psychologist, conducted an experiment. It involved speed dating.

Speed dating makes use of the phenomenon of thin-slicing. In other words, based on very limited interaction with another individual (usually less than ten minutes), two individuals make decisions about whether, or not, they would like to spend more time (i.e., go out on an actual date) with their speed dating partner.

With one exception, the Fisman/Iyengar experiment was set up like real world speed dating situations. That exception had to do with a relatively short questionnaire that subjects had to fill out on four occasions – namely, prior to a given speed date, shortly after the occasion of that speed date, and, then, a month following, as well as six months after, a speed date had occurred.

The questionnaire consisted of a number of categories (e.g., shared interests, ambition, humor, intelligence, attractiveness, and sincerity). Subjects were required to indicate – using a scale of one to ten – what they were seeking in a potential dating partner, and, then, they were also required to evaluate the extent to which a given individual (i.e., speed date) had reflected the preferences that had been indicated prior to the speed date.

After compiling and analyzing the data collected during their experiment, Raymond Fisman and Sheena Iyengar discovered something interesting. More specifically, the qualities that subjects claimed were of interest to them prior to a speed date often did not correspond with the qualities of the individuals to whom they were attracted in speed dates.

Furthermore, the qualities subjects claimed to be looking for prior to a speed date often changed as a result of the qualities of an individual to whom they were attracted during a speed date. For example, if a subject

claimed to be looking for someone who was funny and ambitious, and, then, had a speed date with someone who was sincere and intelligent, those subjects often would change the nature of the qualities they claimed to be looking for prior to the next speed date in order to reflect the qualities of a previous speed date to whom they had been attracted.

Preferences were given before the fact of a speed date, and, sometimes, those preferences would change after a speed date had occurred. However, subjects often did not have any understanding in normal, waking consciousness about how their preferences had been, or were being, formed.

Many psychologists argue that the foregoing activity is taking place in the adaptive unconscious and, therefore, often is considered to be giving expression to some sort of unconscious, automatic process in which choice does not play a role. Nevertheless, even if normal, waking consciousness is clueless about where preferences come from or how they are formed, this does not rule out the possibility that there is 'something' in the adaptive unconscious – i.e., the conscious unconscious – that is keenly aware of what it is seeking in a potential date and recognizes the presence of what it is seeking when that set of qualities shows up and, as a result, that 'something' within us is attracted to those qualities when they are present irrespective of whatever normal, waking consciousness claims to be seeking.

Once again, evidence seems to suggest that there is more than one locus of consciousness/awareness operating within human beings. Normal, waking consciousness considers the foregoing sort of activities to be unconscious but, in reality, normal waking consciousness is merely referring to its own ignorance concerning those matters and, as a result, normal, waking consciousness tends to ignore, or to dismiss, that activity because it is considered to be inconsistent with what appears to be taking place in normal, waking consciousness.

Margaret Heffernan uses a two word term to give expression to the tendency of normal, waking consciousness to manifest a resistance to, if not hostility toward, that which occurs beyond the parameters of normal, waking consciousness – no matter how obvious, intelligent, and insightful the products of that "conscious unconscious" activity might be. She refers to the foregoing phenomenon as "willful blindness".

Sometimes normal, waking consciousness is responsible for instances of willful blindness, and sometimes the adaptive unconscious (conscious unconscious) is the source of willful blindness. In either case, a locus of consciousness and form of reasoning actively resists the presence of certain kind of data or evidence.

All human beings engage in the process of thin-slicing. We often do not have, or do not take, the time to examine -- with any degree of rigorous, critical reflection -- the vast amounts of information that are generated through experience, and, consequently, we develop coping strategies that are intended to permit us to cut through the mounds of existential data to which life gives expression and arrive at heuristically valuable conclusions.

However, a great deal of thin-slicing takes place outside of normal, waking consciousness. As a result, in order to be able to gain some insight into what is transpiring beyond the parameters of normal, waking consciousness, we have to undertake a certain amount of reverse engineering and try to reconstruct in normal, waking consciousness the nature of the structures, influences, dynamics, and so on that are impinging on -- in both constructive and problematic ways -- normal waking consciousness.

Some forms of thin-slicing seem to be capable of accurately accessing certain dimensions of reality. For example, the University of Iowa four deck, two-color, multiple-valued card experiment revealed a human capacity to correctly parse experience in advantageous ways.

On the other hand, the previously discussed Aronson/Steele experiment involving black college students demonstrates how some stimuli (e.g., a box asking about racial identity on a questionnaire) have come to play a problematic priming role that results from a faulty manner of thin-slicing reality (e.g., adopting negative ideas about oneself based on how one has been treated by others on account of one's race).

Biases constitute modes of thin-slicing. For instance, human beings develop biases for, and against, religion as a result of processes that often take place outside of normal, waking consciousness.

Biases also give expression to forms of willful blindness. In other words, despite the existence of evidence to the contrary, human beings

often have a tendency to ignore that evidence and proceed to thin-slice experience through the filters of their biases.

Arguably, one of the most important questions confronting every human being concerns the issue of religion. Seen from the perspective of the present volume, nothing seems to be more important than trying to determine the truth about the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

Each individual faces the same problem in conjunction with the issue of religion. We need to determine whether, or not, one's manner of thin-slicing existence does, or does not, give expression to instances of bias and willful blindness capable of distorting one's understanding concerning the truth about the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

In effect, many theists claim that atheists are guilty of willful blindness with respect to the manner in which they thin-slice experience and disregard evidence that, supposedly, reveals the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. On the other hand, many atheists claim that theists are the ones who are guilty of willful blindness when it comes to the manner in which theists thin-slice existence and ignore evidence that, supposedly, demonstrates that the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality has nothing to do with the existence of a god or gods.

Both theists and atheists often fail to critically reflect, in any rigorous fashion, on the contents of normal, waking consciousness. Furthermore, both theists and atheists often fail to critically explore the realm of the adaptive unconscious or conscious unconscious in order to try to understand what is transpiring beyond the parameters of normal, waking consciousness that might affect – constructively or problematically – one's attempt to discover the truth about the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

What makes normal, waking consciousness possible? What makes the adaptive unconscious or conscious unconscious possible? How does each of the foregoing realms of consciousness facilitate, or undermine, one's attempt to arrive at the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality?

In its own way, the adaptive unconscious or the "conscious unconscious" gives expression to modes of: Awareness, intelligence, logic,

reasoning, and forms of choice just as much as does normal, waking consciousness – or, as it might be termed: “unconscious consciousness”. Yet, we do not understand how either form of awareness is possible or is capable of carrying out intelligent, logical, reasoned choices that might, or might not, reflect the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality.

Both realms of information processing invite critical scrutiny. We fail to do so at our own peril.



Chapter 14: Me, Myself, and I

Thomas Metzinger begins the introduction to his book, *The Ego Tunnel*, in a very provocative fashion. He claims that: "... there is no such thing as a self."

Metzinger considers the idea of the "self" to be a term that is intended to refer to some sort of entity that is the subjective locus of awareness or consciousness. The 'self' is supposed to be that in which phenomenal experiences takes place, but according to Thomas Metzinger, "... nobody has ever been or had a self."

For instance, consider the following experiment that was conducted in 1998. Jonathan Cohen and Matthew Botvinick – who were psychiatrists working at the University of Pittsburg – devised an illusion in which subjects came to experience an artificial limb as being part of themselves.

More specifically, one of the hands/limbs of individual subjects was placed on top of a table and was hidden from view, while a rubber hand was placed in view on top of the same table and positioned in a way that could have been how a subject might have placed his or her hand on the table if it had not been hidden. At a certain point in the experiment, both the hidden – actual – hand of a subject and the artificial hand were stroked simultaneously.

After continuing the simultaneous stroking for a minute, or more, subjects came to experience the rubber, artificial hand as being their own, and subjects felt the strokes as if they are emanating from the artificial hand itself. Moreover, subjects experience a connection between their biological shoulder and the artificial hand, and, as a result, subjects sense the presence of a 'virtual arm'.

According to Thomas Metzinger, the feelings, sensations, and so on that are present in the rubber-hand illusion are contents of what he refers to as the 'phenomenal self model' ... or, PSM. The 'phenomenal self model' arises in conjunction with brain activity that creates the phenomenal and experiential sense of being a whole organism.

The emergence of the 'phenomenal self model' is, supposedly, what permits a human being to be able to interact with events that occur outside of, or within, an organism and construct a representation of such events. As such, the 'phenomenal self model' is a phenomenal representation of an organism's sensory representation of in-coming data.

Metzinger indicates that while most animals have the ability to experience consciousness to one degree, or another, nonetheless, human

beings have a brain that has been able to do something that no other form of animal life on Earth has been able to accomplish. Metzinger believes this uniquely human capacity to phenomenally represent sensory data is what enabled biological evolution to initiate cultural evolution.

The foregoing perspective raises a lot of questions. For instance, if the brains of human beings are unique among life forms on Earth with respect to the former's ability to generate a phenomenal representation of sensory data so that we can become aware of the process of being aware, then how did such a capacity come into being?

Furthermore, Metzinger believes the brain is responsible for generating a phenomenal representation of sensory data, but he doesn't really explain how the brain accomplishes this. In addition, if one cannot demonstrate that the brain is responsible for the phenomenal representation of sensory data, then, how can one be sure that such a capacity is due to the activity of the brain rather than something else – say a 'self'?

Just as subjects in the rubber-hand illusion came to believe that the artificial hand belongs to them and is capable of sensation, then, perhaps, Metzinger is operating under an illusion in which he believes that the brain is the locus of phenomenal experience when, in reality, phenomenal representation is due to the existence of an entity known as the 'self' that might not necessarily be a function of brain activity.

A short while later in *The Ego Tunnel*, Metzinger discusses out-of-body experiences (OBEs). He describes an OBE as a state "... in which one undergoes the highly realistic illusion of leaving one's physical body."

How do we know that an OBE is an illusion? Metzinger refers to the work of Olaf Blanke, a neurologist in Switzerland, who has been able to induce an OBE in subjects by electronically stimulating their brains.

An OBE involves the presence of two bodies. One of these bodies is viewed as an object, while the other body is experienced as being the phenomenal medium through which one views the object body and that is separate from the latter body.

When an electrode is used to probe a person's brain and, in the process, generates an OBE, what happens? How does the electronic probe produce the phenomenal content of the OBE?

The fact of the matter is that we don't know how electronically stimulating a part of the brain gives rise to the phenomenal content of an OBE. Moreover, we don't know if an OBE might be generated through other means that do not involve an electronic probe.

Metzinger is assuming that an OBE is an illusion of some kind. However, he can't actually explain how the illusion works or whether every instance of an OBE is nothing more than an illusion.

I do not have an opinion, one way or another, about whether an OBE is real or illusory. However, until one knows how – of if – the brain generates the phenomenal content of an OBE, then, the fact that one is able to trigger an experience electronically, does not necessarily demonstrate that an OBE is a function of brain activity of some kind but, rather, only indicates that in some unknown fashion, that phenomenon can be triggered by means of an electronic probe.

Does the presence of the electronic probe open a door to some other realm of reality? Does the use of that probe somehow activate an aspect of the self?

Currently, we do not have any definitive answers concerning the OBE phenomenon. Consequently, Metzinger is being premature when he concludes that an OBE is an illusion or that the brain is what generates an OBE or that just because some instances of an OBE can be triggered by the presence of an electronic probe, then, therefore, one should assume that all instances of an OBE are generated in a similar fashion.

Metzinger uses the term "Ego Tunnel" to refer to the phenomenological dimension of human experience. The "Tunnel" aspect of the foregoing term is intended to convey the idea that the phenomenological representation to which the Ego gives expression constitutes an impoverished portrayal of existence in which many details of actual reality have been ignored – perhaps selectively -- during the process of choosing that to which one will attend.

I'm nor really sure how using the term "Ego Tunnel" enables one to jettison the notion of self. After all, a self might be just as capable of determining what to attend to and what to ignore as the "Ego Tunnel" is capable of doing, and, in fact, one can't help but wonder if the whole self/Ego Tunnel issue is more of a terminological difference than a means

through which to demonstrate that an entity referred to as the 'self' does not exist.

One of the things Metzinger indicates that the Ego Tunnel achieves is to provide individuals with a point of view ... a sense that the contents of phenomenology belong to "me" or are "mine". Yet, a question that bubbles to the surface in the foregoing context is why the brain couldn't operate just as well – if not better – by engaging experience like a computer does ... that is, through a neutral, non-me oriented perspective in which solutions to issues are worked out free of any sense of 'me' or 'mine'?

The means through which a brain goes about generating a concept of 'me' or 'mine' is not clear. Moreover, the evolutionary pathway that would give rise to that sort of a concept is also unclear.

Metzinger claims that the Ego Tunnel exhibits the property of 'transparency'. What he means by this latter term is that the Ego Tunnel is not aware of the electrical, cellular, and biochemical activities which make the contents of phenomenology possible that are transpiring through the Ego Tunnel.

If the Ego Tunnel is not capable of seeing how its contents come into existence, then, the Ego Tunnel is not necessarily in any position to know whether, or not, the contents of its phenomenology are a function of brain activity or a function of the activities of the 'self' or a function of some other dimension of Being/Reality. The relationship between the activities of the brain and the contents of phenomenology are not currently known, and, as a result, the relationship between the Ego Tunnel and the activities of the brain seem to be more a matter of opacity than transparency.

In any event, according to Metzinger, the Ego Tunnel does not see brain functioning, per se, but instead, experiences a representation of that brain functioning. In other words, when engaging the information processing filters and lenses generated by the brain, the Ego Tunnel generates -- at the behest of the brain -- a phenomenological representation of the information that is being processed by the brain. In addition, the Ego Tunnel is somehow led to conclude that the data and information being processed by the brain belongs to the Ego Tunnel and that the Ego Tunnel is responsible for the appearance of contents in consciousness.

What enables the Ego Tunnel to come to the conclusion that the contents of consciousness belong to it is unknown. How that capacity came into being is unknown. How the Ego Tunnel is able to generate a phenomenological representation of brain functioning is unknown.

From the perspective of Metzinger, the Ego Tunnel is not a self because there is no entity present in the Ego Tunnel that can be referred to as a 'self'. The Ego Tunnel consists of phenomenological representations of brain functioning and nothing else.

Phenomenological events occur. For Metzinger, that is the beginning and end of the matter.

Metzinger believes that phenomenological contents are merely a way of organizing, and keeping track of, information that is being processed by the brain. However, there is no self that is organizing the data, and there is no self that is keeping track of such data ... rather, the brain is organizing and tracking everything.

Somehow -- thanks to the amazing, but inexplicable, invention of the brain that was noted previously -- the Ego Tunnel gets the idea that those phenomenological contents belong to it, and, therefore, those contents can be referred to as being "mine" and as giving expression to "me". Unfortunately, as noted earlier, the process through which the brain makes the Ego Tunnel possible, or makes its predilection for "me" and "mine" possible, remains a mystery.

Metzinger maintains that the only way in which thoughts, ideas, feelings, memories, and sensations can be experienced as belonging to the Ego Tunnel -- that is, as being experienced as "mine" -- is because the Ego Tunnel is incapable of penetrating the epistemological curtain behind which brain functioning takes place. In other words, the Ego Tunnel is unable to grasp that its contents are merely a phenomenological simulation of brain activity and, therefore, incorrectly assumes that the contents of consciousness have been made possible by the functioning of the Ego Tunnel.

The Ego Tunnel might not be able to directly view the activities of the brain, but its inability to do so should not prevent the Ego Tunnel from catching sight of the seemingly somewhat embarrassing realization that the Ego Tunnel really has no idea how thoughts, ideas, feelings, memories, and sensations come to appear in consciousness. Therefore,

there appears to be considerable evidence accessible to the Ego Tunnel to suggest that the thoughts, ideas, feelings, and so on that are appearing in consciousness are not necessarily ‘mine’ and do not necessarily give expression to ‘me’ and, actually, seem to be due to the presence of something that exists beyond the horizons of the phenomenology to which the Ego Tunnel gives expression.

In fact, one might suppose that being unable to account for the source or origins of various objects, themes, ideas, feelings, and so on that appear in consciousness might serve as a stimulus that should trigger an investigation into what makes the contents of consciousness possible. Did ‘I’ really generate those ideas, feelings, thoughts, or memories, and, if so, how did ‘I’ do it or why, but if ‘I’ did not generate those ideas, feelings, thoughts, memories, and so on, then what did make those phenomena possible and why ... and what is the relationship of ‘I’ to those phenomena?

What – if anything -- do the contents of consciousness tell me concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality? Apparently, with just a little bit of reflection concerning the phenomena of consciousness, one can’t help but stumble into essential questions involving religion when the latter is considered to give expression to the search for the truth about the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality.

What do the ideas of ‘me’, ‘mine’ or ‘self’ even mean? Seemingly, the self gives expression to some sort of capacity or potential for reflecting on experience in order to arrive at conclusions concerning what one considered the truth to be in relation to the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality.

However, even if the foregoing were the case, this doesn’t necessarily make that capacity or the conclusions that ensue from it ‘mine’, nor does such a capacity -- or the conclusions that ensue from it -- necessarily give expression to ‘me’ if ‘I’ – a locus of consciousness -- am not the one who is responsible for making those phenomena possible. There appears to be a strange sort of relationship between, on the one hand, the contents of consciousness whose origins are unknown and, on the other hand, the presence of a sense of ‘me, myself, and I’ that tends to be inclined to claim ownership with respect to foregoing sort of phenomena even though the only justification for doing so – if one can call it that – is the

fact that those phenomena and the sense of 'me, myself, and I' share a certain degree of phenomenological contiguity.

According to Metzinger, "We are never directly in touch with reality as such" because unconscious filter mechanisms of the brain "... prevent us from seeing the world as it is." (Page 9) However, in the very next paragraph, he claims that: "... we know the world only by using representations, because correctly representing something is what knowing is."

How does one know that a given representation is "correct" unless one has some means of comparing such a representation with 'that' which it supposedly represents? Presumably, the process of establishing the extent to which a representation can be considered to be correct involves making contact with reality to one extent or another.

It might, or might not, be true that we are unable to see the world as it is in any ultimate sense. Nonetheless, we often see enough to be able to construct systems of representation that – to varying degrees – accurately reflect properties and qualities of different dimensions of Being/Reality ... properties and qualities that permit us to be able to successfully navigate through certain regions of the existential waters of life.

Metzinger indicates that the filtering mechanisms to which our sensory systems and brain activities give expression were inherited from our ancestors. However, he does not provide – nor, to date, has anyone else provided – an account of how those filtering systems or other capacities of the brain came into being ... instead, those abilities are, more often than not, assumed into existence without any real understanding of, or insight into, the origins of those sorts of phenomena.

A page later – i.e., page 10 – Metzinger states: "All evidence now points to the conclusion that phenomenal content is determined locally, not by the environment at all but by internal properties of the brain only." If such a statement were true, then, one could not argue – as Metzinger does on the previous page of his book – that it is possible to establish whether, or not, any given representation of the world is correct.

If phenomenal content were a strict function of internal properties of the brain, and, as a result, the environment played no role in the structural character of that phenomenal content, then, in effect, one would be forced to conclude that the contents of phenomenal experience

were arbitrary constructions that had nothing to do with what is taking place in the world beyond the brain. While some of the constructions that appear in phenomenal space might well be arbitrary in nature, we know that not all of those constructions are of an arbitrary nature because human beings do have – within certain limits – a capacity to interact with different facets of the environment and come away with representations of those interactions that permit human beings to develop understandings – limited though they might be – that appear to accurately reflect how certain aspects of the environment operate.

Undoubtedly, what an individual phenomenally experiences and understands is substantially influenced, shaped, colored, and organized by the sensory filters and other information processing mechanisms that are generated through brain activity. Therefore, in this sense, phenomenal contents are – as Metzinger previously indicated -- a product of local events internal to the brain.

Nevertheless, if this were all there were to the matter, then knowledge of the environment would be impossible, and, since some forms of knowledge concerning the environment are experienced on a daily basis by most human beings, then, obviously, certain dimensions of the phenomenal contents of consciousness necessarily are shaped by the manner in which environmental events affect (i.e., shape and orient) human abilities to process information.

For example, color – per se -- might not exist out there in the environment. However, if the environment did not have -- on both a quantum and macro level -- the physical properties it does, then our sensory filters would not be affected in the way they are, and, as a result, we would not have the experience of color that we do.

In other words, color and the environment are not unrelated or unconnected phenomena. What we experience in phenomenal space is not just a function of brain activity but, as well, that experience is also a function of the manner in which the environment impinges on, and interacts with, human capabilities.

According to Metzinger, “The problem of consciousness is all about subjective experience about the structure of our inner life, and not about knowledge of the outer world.” (Page 11) He goes on to state that the neural correlate of consciousness (NCC) is a function of the minimal set of

cellular activities in the brain that are capable of bringing about a given conscious experience.

Metzinger believes there is a specific NCC for every kind of experience that occurs in phenomenological space. According to Metzinger, thoughts, ideas, feelings, moods, attitudes, insights, concepts, and sensory experiences are all functions of a specific NCC or set of coordinated cellular activities taking place in the brain.

The foregoing perspective of Metzinger presumes that consciousness, intelligence, emotion, understanding, sensation, reasoning, creativity, and logic are all caused by brain activity of one kind or another ... in other words, that activity can be expressed as a function of some minimal set of neural correlates of consciousness. Metzinger is a proponent of the foregoing view because he can point to a great deal of evidence indicating that by activating or disrupting neural correlates of consciousness one, respectively, can either cause or prevent certain kinds of experiences from occurring.

Somewhat analogously, however, one can bring about, or stop, a radio program by flicking a switch on a radio. One also can bring about, or stop, a television program by manipulating a remote control device that helps to operate a television set.

Nonetheless, strictly speaking, the original source for either the radio program or the television program is not, respectively, the radio or the television set. The two electronic devices are required in order to be able to listen or view programs, but those devices are not the source of those programs.

Similarly, one might be able to use an electronic probe to help initiate a certain kind of phenomenological experience (as was done in the previously mentioned issue of out-of-body experiences) or one might be able to show that damage to a certain kind of NCC prevents a particular kind of phenomenological experience from occurring, or disrupts that sort of an occurrence in some manner (as was the case in the University of Iowa four deck, two-color, multiple-value card experiment involving subjects with damage to their ventromedial prefrontal cortex that was discussed in Chapter 13 of the present volume). Nonetheless, such evidence does not necessarily demonstrate that the programming that appears in phenomenological space originates with, or is generated by, neural correlates of consciousness.

Metzinger believes that the Ego Tunnel – which he considers to give expression to a set of neural correlates of consciousness that are generated through brain functioning – has a sense of “mine and me” that has, somehow, evolved. For Metzinger, the sense of selfhood is caused by some underlying set of neural correlates of consciousness.

Unfortunately, Metzinger cannot provide a verifiable account of how such a neural correlate of consciousness evolved. Furthermore, he cannot provide a verifiable account of how such a neural correlate of consciousness generates the sense of self, me, or ‘I’.

He considers this sense of self – namely, the Ego Tunnel -- to be “the deepest form of inwardness” (Page 12) that is possible in human beings. Yet, given that Metzinger does not know how the sense of selfhood evolved or how that sense of selfhood is capable of being produced by neural correlate of consciousness, then one puzzles about how he can claim to know that the Ego Tunnel constitutes “the deepest form of inwardness” that is possible in human beings?

What is the metric through which he is measuring his notion of self except his own ideas about what selfhood involves? Why suppose that the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality needs to be restricted to the sense of things concerning the nature of the self to which Metzinger is committed?

At one point in *The Ego Tunnel*, Metzinger argues that: “Human beings in certain historical epochs – during the Vedic period of ancient India or during the European Middle Ages, when God was still perceived as a real and constant presence – likely knew kinds of subjective experience almost inaccessible to us today. Many deep forms of conscious self-experience have become all but impossible due to philosophical enlightenment and the rise of science and technology – at least for the many millions of well-educated, scientifically informed people. Theories change social practice, and practice eventually changes brains, the way we perceive the world.” (Page 17)

One can agree with Metzinger that theories can change the way in which people perceive the world. Nonetheless, what truths, if any, those theories disclose concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality tend to lead to a variety of questions and problems.

In the foregoing quote, Metzinger refers to historical epochs such as Vedic India and the European Middle Ages and, then, uses the phrase: "... when God was still perceived as a real and constant presence." What proofs can Metzinger offer that are capable of definitively demonstrating how God might not be real or a constant presence in the world of today?

He indicates that because there are many people today who are philosophically enlightened, well educated, and scientifically literate, then those individuals are unlikely to be able to have the same sort of subjective experiences as individuals who lived in Vedic India or the European Middle Ages. The foregoing contention of Metzinger might, or might not be true, but it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with establishing the truth concerning the nature of any reality other than the truism that when people permit their understandings to be filtered, oriented, shaped, and colored by theories, then, oftentimes, they can only perceive and experience what those theories permit them to perceive or experience.

Being philosophically enlightened, well educated, and scientifically literate are only of value to the extent that those conditions enable a person to grasp the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. Metzinger appears to believe that being philosophically enlightened, well educated, and scientifically literate gives expression to a commendable set of forces that prevent human beings from being able to perceive God as "a real and constant presence" ... not because it is necessarily true that God has been proven not to be "a real and constant presence" but because many philosophically enlightened, well educated, and scientifically literate people have – as a function of theoretical principle – removed those possibilities from epistemological consideration.

At the present time, Metzinger can't perceive the self as being anything other than a set of neural correlates of consciousness that, somehow, have given rise to the idea of a self. This is precisely because he is a philosophically enlightened, well educated, and scientifically literate individual whose biases and assumptions prevent him from entertaining the possibility that the origins of the 'self' might come from something other than the activity of the brain. Consequently, his mode of perception is not necessarily a reflection of the truth concerning the nature of the self as much as it might just be a reflection of the biases and assumptions

that he uses to filter the meaning, value, and significance of his experiences.

If – as Metzinger claims – theories alter the way people perceive the world, then, he has to be prepared to accept the possibility that his way of perceiving the world might merely be a function of the theories to which he subscribes rather than being a reflection of the truth concerning the nature of the self. Metzinger dismisses the understandings of, for example, Vedic India not because he actually has been able to grasp what those understandings involve – and whether, or not, they are true – but because he has become perceptually blind to those possibilities as a result of his having become philosophically enlightened, well educated, and scientifically literate.

As if he were living in Jonestown, Metzinger gulps down his homemade batch of Kool-Aid. In addition, he wants to argue that such a concoction is wholly beneficial to human beings ... without the possibility of any toxic side effects despite the fact that he doesn't necessarily understand the properties of all the ingredients that have gone into the making of the Kool-Aid or understand what impact those ingredients might be having on his capacity to seek the truth concerning the nature of his relationship with Being/Reality.

At one point in *The Ego Tunnel*, Metzinger notes that: "Mystics of all cultures and all times have reported deep spiritual experiences in which no "self" was present, and some of them, too, stopped using the pronoun 'I'. (Page 64)

One should exercise a certain amount of caution with respect to the statements of mystics. They speak from the perspective of a certain understanding of, or insight into, the significance of a given spiritual state, condition, or experience, and people who engage that perspective from the outside, rather than from within, often misunderstand and misinterpret what is being said.

For example, Sufi mystics (and Metzinger does mention them in his book) often distinguish between the conditions of "fana" and "baqa". Fana is said to occur when an individual is overwhelmed by the experience of Divine Presence and, as a result, the individual loses sight of individuality even as the experience of Divine Presence is filtered through the very nature of that individuality, whereas baqa is said to refer to instances in which a person has been brought into a condition of

realization concerning the essential nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality ... a realization that permits one to be aware of the nature of one's individual existence as a manifestation that has been made possible by Being/Reality.

Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (may God be pleased with him) – who lived in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries – described fana along the following lines. At nighttime, on a clear evening in a rural area, one is capable of seeing the stars in the sky, but when the sun comes up, then even though those stars still are present, one can no longer see them with the naked eye because one's vision is overwhelmed by the presence of the sun.

Similarly, when the Presence of Divinity is experienced, perception is overwhelmed by the experience of that Presence. The individual is still present, but one is unable to "see", or be aware of, oneself.

Experience is dominated by the individual's spiritual perception of Divine Presence. Yet, that perception is actually a filtering of Divine Reality.

In other words, an individual experiences Divine Presence as a function of what his, or her, potential permits. Different individuals with different potentials would have an experience of the Divine Presence that reflects their individual potentials.

The individual is a locus of manifestation for Divine disclosure. During fana, the individual loses sight of this reality, and, consequently, there is only the experience of Divine Presence.

In the condition of baqa, on the other hand, individuals are brought to a realization that there is no reality but God. At the same time, however, there is a simultaneous realization within those individuals that they serve as so many loci of manifestation that give expression to the Presence of Divinity according to the individual properties of those loci, and, in the process, individuals are permitted to experience both the presence of the Sun while also being able to note the presence of their selves as loci of manifestation of the Divine Presence.

In the vocabulary of ibn al-'Arabi (May God be pleased with him) – a Sufi saint of twelfth and thirteenth century Andalusia -- human beings give expression to 'ayn al-thabita. These fixed potentials – or loci of manifestation -- are brought to life through the dynamic interplay of the

Names and Attributes of Divinity that provide those fixed potentials with their natures and, then, induce them to reflect the dynamic interplay of Divine Names and Attributes running through them according to the properties of that fixed potential.

Divine Names and Attributes are particularized ways of referring to the qualities, properties, processes, activities, forces, and phenomena that are made possible through God's presence. One cannot infer anything about the nature of God on the basis of the manner in which Names and Attributes are manifested other than that God has made those phenomena possible.

In the Qur'an, there are 99 Names of God that are mentioned. A few of these are: Qadir (the One Who is able to accomplish), Mubdi' (the Originator), Hakam (The Source of rule and judgment), Ghafur (The much forgiving One), and so on.

Each Name gives expression to a Divine capacity that can affect Being/Reality and that can be called upon by addressing God through that Name. Each Divine attribute refers to a quality that is present in Being/Reality and makes the latter possible.

Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (May God be pleased with her) – a Sufi saint of the eighth-ninth century – once chastised a male colleague. The latter individual had been comparing himself with Muslims in a local community and noting how the Muslims in that community often didn't say their prayers or they didn't fast during Ramadan, the month of fasting, whereas he never missed prayers, and, as well, he not only observed the fast of Ramadan but he also fasted on many other occasions as well. Upon hearing what her male colleague said, Rabi'a (May God be pleased with her) said. "Thy existence is a sin with which none other can compare."

The sin that is being cited in the foregoing anecdote has to do with the man's belief that he has an existence that can be considered independently of God's presence. That belief obscured the Presence of God and gave priority to a false understanding concerning the nature of the relationship between that man and Being/Reality.

We all have an ego. The transliterated, Arabic counterpart to ego is "nafs" ... although nafs is a term that encompasses an array of possibilities that are much broader and nuanced than the qualities that are usually associated with the notion of ego, and some of the possibilities

encompassed by the term “nafs” include those tendencies within human beings that are in rebellion against, or denial of, the truth of things concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality.

In effect, the Sufi path is about assisting individuals to overcome the lower tendencies of nafs and during that process, individuals are assisted, if God wishes, to journey toward a state of being in which, among other things, the condition of fana and baqa might be realized. When one is caught up in the machinations of the lower self or nafs (ego), then, one cuts oneself off from discovering more inward, spiritually substantial aspects of the potential of the self.

Thus, broadly speaking, there are three dimensions of the self. One dimension of the self involves the activities of the lower self as it goes about rebelling against, or denying, the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality and, in the process, attributes all manner of things to itself as being “me” and “mine”.

Another dimension of the self involves the capacity – if activated by Divinity – to experience the presence of God while losing sight of one’s own presence within such an experience. This is the aforementioned condition of fana.

A third dimension of the self involves the capacity – if activated by Divinity – to realize, in depth, various facets of the meaning and significance of the idea that there is no reality but God. Within the context of such a spiritual station, the individual realizes that one is a locus of manifestation that has a capacity to be self-aware of one’s essential nature while experiencing the Presence of the dynamic interplay of the Names and Attributes of Divinity.

When mystics issue reports about experiencing a state of selflessness, they are not necessarily saying there is no self that is experiencing that state. In fact, the very capacity to experience a state of selflessness constitutes a way of engaging the presence of Being/Reality through the filters of human potential.

A human self is present. However, the individual’s spiritual condition is such that the individual is not aware of that human presence but is only aware of the Divine Presence.

One needs to make a distinction between the false self and the essential self. When the veils of the false self are removed – God willing –

through various kinds of spiritual experience, then one is able to catch sight of the existence of a deeper, more inward, essential sense of self.

One manifestation of that essential self is given expression through the condition of fana when the Presence of Divinity overwhelms one's sense of self. Nonetheless, the self is still filtering that Presence in accordance with the nature and potential of that inward aspect of self even though there is no sense of self-awareness present during that spiritual state.

The eye cannot see itself during the process of vision, and, yet, the qualities of the eye shape, color, and structure what is perceived. Similarly, during fana, the individual cannot himself or herself but, nevertheless, the qualities of the individual filter the way in which the Divine Presence is experienced.

Another manifestation of that essential self is realized while inhabiting – God willing -- the station of baqa. In this spiritual station, the individual experiences the Presence of Divinity through a modality of self-awareness that perceives the dynamic interplay of Divine Names and Attributes as they are given filtered expression through the nature and potential of one's most inward, essential sense of self.

To build upon the example of the eye used earlier, baqa is somewhat like the eye being able to see itself as it is engaged in the process of vision. During baqa, the Presence of God is experienced, but, simultaneously, awareness is present indicating that something – namely, the self – is actively engaged in that experience.

In conjunction with the state of fana and the station of baqa, individuals might – as Metzinger previously indicated – abandon use of the term 'I' because only God is entitled to use such a pronominal reference. Nevertheless, there is a self that is present in those instances even if – relative to the Self of Divinity – such a self is wholly derivative from the manner in which the Names and Attributes of Divinity establish 'ayn al-thabita with potentials that are capable of serving as loci of manifestation for the presence of Divinity.

Metzinger hypothesizes that like the aforementioned mystics, there might be many: "... simple organisms on this planet" that "may have a consciousness tunnel with nobody living in it." (Page 64) In effect, Metzinger appears to be arguing that mystics who abandon use of the

pronoun “I” are merely coming to the realization of what has been the case since the simplest of organism appeared on Earth – namely, the notion of “self” is nothing more than a myth – and, as well, Metzinger appears to be alluding to the idea that the biological history which runs from: Simple organisms that enjoy a degree of consciousness, to: Human beings who exhibit a more enhanced capacity for consciousness, gives expression to a continuous line of evolutionary development that is devoid of any sort of ‘self’ entity that inhabits consciousness.

Unlike Metzinger, I’m not going to speculate about what does, or does, not take place within simple organisms. Simple organisms have their own relationship with Being/Reality.

The degree to which those organisms – or any organisms other than human beings – are aware of the nature of that relationship is unknown. In fact, we tend to be unaware of the extent to which even other human beings are aware of the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality.

Metzinger claims that the origins of the ‘myth of self’ are rooted in evolutionary changes of various kinds. For instance, he refers to the: “... development of cell membranes and an immune system to define which cells in one’s body were to be treated as one’s own and which were intruders.” (Page 64) Billions of years later, according to Metzinger (and other proponents of evolution), nervous systems arose that were capable of carrying on the physical partitioning project that began with cell membranes and immune systems, and those brains became able to create representations concerning the organism that gave expression to phenomenal models of the self interacting with an external world.

Neither Metzinger, nor anyone else, currently understands how cell membranes came into being by means of evolution. A number of possibilities in this regard are discussed in the evolutionary literature, but no one has been able to experimentally demonstrate how the complexities associated with membrane functioning – even in simple organisms – were able to arise through a step-by-step process of evolutionary development.

Neither Metzinger, nor anyone else, currently understands how the immune system arose through a process of evolutionary development. Neither Metzinger, nor anyone else, currently understands how the nervous system, with all of its many kinds of neurons, glial cells, and

neurotransmitters, was able to organize itself through the step-by-step process of evolutionary development.

Finally, neither Metzinger, nor anyone else, currently has a viable account for how the notion of self came into human consciousness by means of evolutionary development. Metzinger runs through an array of possibilities concerning the foregoing issue in his book *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*, but nowhere within the pages of that book does one find a definitive, plausible, viable explanation that demonstrates that the self is nothing more than the nervous system's way of constructing a means for phenomenally representing the activities of the brain.

One encounters many theoretical possibilities in the aforementioned book of Metzinger. However, none of those possibilities tend to show anything more substantive than speculative hypothesizing.

Metzinger states that: "In the history of ideas, contemporary philosophical and scientific debates about the mind developed from this protoconcept – an animist quasi-sensory theory about what it means to have a mind. Having a mind meant having a soul, an ethereal second body. This mythical idea of a 'subtle body' that is independent of the physical body and is the carrier of higher mental functions, such as attention and cognition, is found in many different cultures and at many times. Examples are the Hebrew *ruach*, the Arabic *ruh*, the Latin *spiritus*, the Greek *pneuma*, and the Indian *prana*." (Page 86)

According to Metzinger, no such 'subtle body' exists. What exists is a process of information processing in the brain that, in turn, makes possible a phenomenal or conscious representation that really constitutes nothing more than a reflection of some of the results of the underlying process of information processing.

Let's put aside terms such as: *ruach*, *spiritus*, *pneuma*, or *prana* that were mentioned by Metzinger in the foregoing quote. Let's just consider his use of the term "ruh".

In contradistinction to the foregoing position of Metzinger, the "ruh" is not necessarily a "subtle body". Instead, from the perspective of practitioners of the Sufi path, "*ruh*" gives expression to a dimension of 'ayn al-thabita.

'Ayn al-thabita is a fixed form potential. This potential is a locus of manifestation that can be induced to give expression to various qualities and properties that are established – and activated -- through the dynamics of the interplay of Divine Names and Attributes.

'Ayn al-thabita is like a form of virtual reality. The hardware and programming underlying this form of virtual reality are rooted in the dynamics of Divine Names and Attributes.

Any given instance of 'ayn al-thabita has no reality of its own, any more than the virtual objects that are manifested through computer activity have a reality of their own. Moreover, just as a computer is capable of generating dynamic “spaces” – i.e., virtual forms – that manifest different properties as a function of the capacities inherent in computer hardware and concomitant programs, so too, the activity of Divine Names and Attributes are capable of generating dynamic “spaces” – i.e., 'ayn al-thabita – that manifest different properties as a result of the manner in which Divine Names and Attributes both establish and interact with any given instance of 'ayn al-thabita.

Eddies in a body of flowing water have a reality of sorts, but they have no actual reality of their own. They are the result of the way that different currents and sources of turbulence interact with one another, and when those currents and sources of turbulence alter the nature of their interaction, then those places where eddies appeared previously will no longer give expression to those eddies.

Similarly, human beings – like eddies – have no actual existence of their own. Rather, they are the form – i.e., the virtual, dynamic space – that is generated through the interplay of Divine Names and Attributes.

There is no dualism entailed by the foregoing arrangement. There is just the presence of Divine Names and Attributes that bring about the manifestation of dynamic spaces – i.e., the virtual reality of 'ayn al-thabita – that serve as the loci of manifestation through which Divinity gives expression to this or that dynamic interplay of Names and Attributes and which serves the interests of Divine aspirations, purposes, and intentions with respect to what transpires in the virtual reality – Being/Reality -- that has been made manifest.

In terms of the perspective being outlined in the foregoing paragraph, *ruh* – in contrast to what Metzinger claims -- is not a subtle body that is

different from, yet capable of, interacting with physical bodies. Moreover, in contrast to the position outlined in the previous quote from *The Ego Tunnel*, the ruh is not the “carrier of higher mental functions, such as attention and cognition,” but, instead, the ruh is the locus of manifestation – that is, a dimension of the dynamic, virtual space known as ‘ayn al-thabita -- whose properties and qualities (including attention and cognition) have been programmed through the dynamics or interplay of Divine Names and Attributes.

Attention and cognition are made possible through the dynamics of Divine Names and Attributes, just as the properties of the virtual realities that are created in computerized games have the properties that are made possible by the hardware and programming that underwrite such games. Physical and mental properties are different kinds of manifestation that are made possible by the underlying dynamic, and, in addition, those properties can be made to interact with, and affect, one another through the virtual programming to which the interplay of Divine Names and Attributes gives expression.

No duality is present. All that is present is the dynamic interplay of Divine Names and Attributes that have been generated through the presence of God.

The only reality that is substantial is Divinity. All other “realities” are insubstantial in as much as they are derivative, virtual forms of being ... manifestations that are made possible by the dynamics or interplay of Divine Names and Attributes that have been set in motion by Divine purpose or himma.

Metzinger refers to terms such as “*ruh*” (or *prana*, *ruach*, and *spiritus*) as if they were just entries in the history of ideas that have arisen over the years. He doesn’t believe those terms have any actual counterpart in Being/Reality.

However, when individuals such as Rabi’a al-Adawiyya, Ibn al-‘Arabi, and Ahmad Sirhindi speak (may God be pleased with them all) – as well as when many other Sufi saints speak (or write) – they are not proffering conceptual speculations but, instead, they are reporting on insights that have arisen in conjunction with the results of experiments that have been conducted in the crucible of Sufi practices. One can, if one wishes, accept or reject what they have to say, but until one replicates the experiments

they have conducted, then one is not in any position to determine whether, or not, what they have to say is true.

Moreover, interestingly enough, authentic Sufi masters indicate that what they have and can say concerning the nature of the relationship between an individual and Being/Reality is only a very, very limited description concerning what they have experienced. In other words, what they have said is like the tip of an iceberg that runs to great ontological and epistemological depths beneath the surface waters of normal, waking consciousness.

Sufi masters might agree with Metzinger that various conceptual, emotional, motivational, social, sensorial, biochemical, and physical forces are at play within an individual through which a sense of self could be created in which nobody is actually at home – i.e., the false self. Nonetheless, Sufi masters might take issue with his contention that such a constructed sense of self is all that is possible, or they might take issue with his contention that there aren't dimensions of human potential that give expression to a much more substantial, inward sense of self than is generated through the manner in which the brain processes information.

Chapter 15: Is 'Rational Mysticism' Oxymoronic?

In 2003 John Horgan released the book: *Rational Mysticism: Spirituality Meets Science in the Search for Enlightenment*. Horgan had become a science writer in the 1980s.

While Horgan believed that science offered the best way to proceed with respect to acquiring knowledge in general, nonetheless, he also felt that science was not necessarily capable of uncovering all of the mysteries of existence. Consequently, the aforementioned book explored the possibility that some sort of blending of science and mysticism might serve as a viable method for pursuing spiritual enlightenment.

There are a number of issues that arise in conjunction with the title of Horgan's book – namely: *Rational Mysticism: Spirituality Meets Science in the Search for Enlightenment*. For example, is the idea of “rational mysticism” oxymoronic – that is, is that title a contradiction in terms. If such a juxtaposition of terms is not oxymoronic, then, what exactly – if anything – might be meant by the idea of ‘rational mysticism’?

Is spirituality the same thing as mysticism? Or, are there differences between the two terms?

What is enlightenment? Is it one epistemological condition, or does enlightenment consist of a variety of kinds and levels of understanding?

Can science and mysticism ever really meet? If not, does this mean that mysticism is inherently illogical and irrational?

Let's start with the issue of enlightenment. What is the relationship between enlightenment and truth?

From the Sufi perspective (and since Christopher Hitchens mentioned but did not elaborate on the Sufi perspective in his book: *god is not Great* that I critically explored earlier, I will take this opportunity to talk a little more about the Sufi tradition), the truth can never be exhausted. Therefore, whatever enlightenment might be, it constitutes a grasping of truth up to some unknown point that is marked, on the one hand, by an individual's capacity for knowing the truth, and, on the other hand, by the Divine Grace that is extended to

any given individual's potential for understanding the truth and which activates that potential to one degree or another.

Consequently, enlightenment is a process of realizing the truth to greater degrees according to one's capacity and God's Grace. As such, enlightenment is not necessarily one state or condition but alludes to an array of possibilities concerning the realization of one, or another, facet or dimension of truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

Consider the following story. A Sufi initiate entered the courtyard of the house where his spiritual guide lived. The initiate was proclaiming, "I have seen God ... I have seen God." His shaykh came out to calm the man down and asked the latter individual to provide a description of the experience.

After calming down, the man recounted what had occurred. Upon hearing the man's account, the shaykh indicated to the man that he was a silly fool. All that the young man had experienced was the light, or nur, of his ablution ... that is, his state of ritual cleanliness.

Apropos the foregoing considerations, there is a telling story concerning my Sufi teacher. Although my spiritual guide became a shaykh quite independently of his academic achievements, he did earn a doctorate in England.

His external examiner was A.J. Arberry who, at the time, was an internationally recognized scholar with respect to both Islam and the Sufi path. Professor Arberry had converted to Islam while translating the Qur'an but kept his conversion quiet because of prejudices concerning Islam and Muslims that existed within various academic circles at the time ... a situation that, to varying degrees, has grown steadily worse over the last sixty years.

Professor Arberry described my future spiritual guide's dissertation as the best work on the Sufi path that he had seen in the English language. High praise, indeed, and, over the years my shaykh thought about publishing that dissertation.

However, after he went through several 40-day periods of seclusion following his being given the responsibilities associated with becoming a shaykh, he felt that if the thesis were going to be published, then, the manuscript would have to be revised in order to

take into account what he had learned and experienced during his periods of seclusion. With each additional period of seclusion, the need to revise the original manuscript became greater because there was an increasing gap between the level of understanding given expression in his dissertation and the spiritual understandings that were arising through his periods of seclusion.

The thesis manuscript never did get revised. Moreover, my spiritual guide decided against publishing it despite its being described by A. J. Arberry as being the best treatment of the Sufi path that was available in the English language at that time.

My shaykh sometimes mentioned a quote of a friend of his – someone who was also a Sufi shaykh – that bears upon the following anecdote. His friend had once said that there have been so many Rumi's who have never uttered a word.

The Sufi path is like an iceberg. While there is a certain amount of the path that has visibility above the vast ocean of mystical understanding that lies beneath the surface phenomena – and the writings of people such as Rumi, Hafiz, Attar, and ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with them all) have helped give expression to that sort of visibility – nonetheless, for the most part, the deeper truths of the path are hidden from view and are rarely spoken of ... although allusions to those realities might find their way into various lines of poetry or an occasional discourse.

Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) wrote the *Meccan Revelations* based on a series of spiritual experiences or unveilings that took place in Mecca over a relatively short period of time. When completed, the book covered more than 10,000 pages and, yet, this vast expanse of pages constituted only the portion of those experiences that could be mentioned ... a very small subset of the understandings that arose in conjunction with the foregoing experiences.

Sufis often use the terms “Hal” – state – and “Maqam” – station -- to refer to different kinds and levels of enlightenment. Usually, “Hal” gives expression to transitory conditions of unveiling that are gifts, whereas “maqam” tends to allude to more permanent conditions of understanding that are, in some sense, earned through God's accepting various acts of worship involving: Prayer, fasting, charity, seclusion,

zikr – that is, remembrance -- service, and so on ... all of which can be done through modalities of observance that are accomplished with varying qualities of intention, commitment, and understanding.

Different Sufis have put forth various sets of enumerations concerning the purported states and stations of the Sufi path. While there might be varying degrees of overlap among those enumerated sets, nevertheless, each of those frameworks reflects the experiences of individuals, and if one takes seriously the Sufi maxim that God's disclosures never repeat themselves, then, different ways of parsing mystical experiences tend to reflect the journeys of individual human possibilities and potentials rather than necessarily revealing a set of experiences that constitute a uniform and universal road map for traveling the Sufi path.

There are many kinds of kashf – i.e., spiritual unveiling – ilham – that is, flashes of spiritual intuition or insight – and tajalli – i.e., Divine manifestations. In their own ways, kashf, ilham and tajalli are all modes of enlightenment ... but they do not necessarily give expression to enlightenment in any final, definitive, and absolute sense.

Moreover, one also should keep in mind, that spiritual truths are capable of being engaged through different, interior faculties of individuals ... such as the: Mind, heart, sirr, and spirit. Therefore, a given truth can be understood in different ways by each of our interior faculties, and, therefore, human modes of understanding can refract the same light or nur of God in a multiplicity of ways.

Most Sufis do accept the distinctions between different levels of enlightenment involving the condition of fana and the condition of baqa. Fana marks the passing away of the false self with a simultaneous process of becoming absorbed in the presence of Divinity to such an extent, that all else passes away from awareness, whereas, baqa alludes to modalities of realization concerning the presence of the essential Self and the ways in which that presence reflects the Names and Attributes of Divinity.

Nevertheless, fana and baqa are not necessarily the same for everyone who might be opened up to those possibilities. Individual capacity and Divine Grace are capable of modulating spiritual conditions in different ways even as there might be a certain amount

of commonality and similarity with respect to some of the phenomenological features of those two general conditions.

For example, some Sufis break down the stages of love in the following way: (1) compatibility, (2) inclination, (3) fellowship, (4) passion, (5) friendship, (6) exclusive friendship, (7) ardent affection, (8) enslavement, and, finally, (9) bewilderment. Each of the foregoing stages gives expression to different dimensions of enlightenment that come through the spiritual condition of love, and, yet, within the context of the highest form of enlightenment associated with the condition of love, the individual experiences bewilderment concerning the nature of the mystical disclosures that are being manifested by the Beloved.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, let's return to another question that was mentioned toward the beginning of the present chapter. More specifically, are the terms mysticism and spirituality synonyms – that is, do they refer to, more or less, the same process?

Perhaps, one approach to describing the relationship of spirituality and mysticism is as follows: Although all mysticism gives expression to spirituality, not all spirituality necessarily gives expression to mysticism. Spirituality alludes to the idea that there is an important set of truths that exist beyond the exterior forms of formal modalities of worship, whereas mysticism gives expression to a path of experiential and epistemological realization concerning the nature of those truths ... that is, mysticism is a methodological means for realizing, God willing, the promise to which spirituality alludes.

Given the foregoing possibility, what is one to make of the title of John Horgan's aforementioned book: *Rational Mysticism: Spirituality Meets Science in the Search for Enlightenment*? In what sense might spirituality meet science?

A great deal depends on what one means by science. One possibility runs along the following lines.

In his book, Horgan explores the scientific work of, among others, Michael Persinger, Franz Vollenweiden and Andrew Newberg. Persinger uses a machine – dubbed 'the God machine' – to electromagnetically induce – allegedly – mystical experiences in individuals, whereas Vollenweiden's research involves attempting to

map the neural circuits that supposedly are responsible for both blissful and nightmarish experiences, while Newberg's work is directed toward identifying the neural circuits that he believes are causally responsible for mystical experiences in meditating Buddhist monks and praying nuns.

Other individuals have explored the neurochemistry of chemicals such as: Mescaline, LSD, DMT – dimethyltryptamine – and ayahuasca. The underlying assumption of such research is that the altered states of consciousness associated with the ingestion of the foregoing sorts of chemicals is a function of biochemistry and, therefore, mystical states are nothing more than transformations in the neural circuitry of individuals.

The problem with the research of people such as Persinger, Vollenweiden, and Newberg, as well as the work of those who – theoretically – are exploring the biochemistry of spirituality is that no one has been able to establish a clear baseline for identifying what constitutes a mystical experience. All altered states of consciousness are being labeled as mystical experiences, and that equivalency is not necessarily warranted.

Secondly, there is a problem with claiming that spiritual or mystical states are being caused by: Electromagnetic stimulation, the ingestion of certain chemicals, or the activation of certain neural circuitry. At best, there is only a certain correlation between, on the one hand, the presence of, say, electromagnetic or chemical stimulation, and, on the other hand, an altered state of consciousness of some kind.

No one has been able to show how the phenomenological properties of a given experience – altered or otherwise -- are shaped, organized, colored, and modulated by the presence of either a given form of electromagnetic or biochemical stimulation. It is a huge – and very much unwarranted – jump to try to claim that stimulation is causing phenomenology to have the properties it is exhibiting, and moreover, as pointed out previously, even if one could prove that electromagnetic and biochemical stimulation was the cause of any given altered state of consciousness, there is nothing to demonstrate that those altered states of consciousness are necessarily mystical in nature.

There is another sense of science that might be much more relevant to the issue of spirituality and mysticism. This sense has to do with the methodological features that are inherent in the practice of science.

More specifically, science encompasses a number of properties that are considered integral to that undertaking. For example, science is rooted in: (1) Empirical observation; (2) the use of instrumentality; (3) objectivity; (4) recursive methodology; (5) replication; and, (6) consensus among a community of experts or individuals who have deep knowledge concerning the practice of that methodological process. Each of the foregoing facets of science has a rigorous counterpart on the mystical path.

The Sufi path begins with observations concerning the experiences of life, and, indeed, every facet of lived experience comes under critical scrutiny. Moreover, just as material science spends time cleaning and calibrating various instruments in order to get accurate readings or measurements concerning the experiences of life, so too, the Sufi path gives considerable emphasis to the importance of cleaning and calibrating the inner faculties of mind, heart, sirr, and spirit, or ruh, in order to acquire accurate readings concerning the experiences of life.

In addition, although mysticism might appear to be inherently subjective, the fact of the matter is that the Sufis give a great deal of attention to eliminating all sources of possible bias – both from within as well as from without -- that might interfere with having an objective understanding of any given experience. Consequently, a recursive methodology – that is, a process that generates results that are critically analyzed, and, then, fed back into an underlying methodological process to develop a deeper, improved, and broader understanding – is used by Sufi practitioners, and this involves repeated activities such as fasting, seclusion, night vigils, service, remembrance, and so on as a means of working toward a condition of, God willing, heightened, existential objectivity.

Furthermore, just as it is the case in material science that unless one can replicate certain results, then, one must continue to exercise a certain amount of caution concerning the viability of a given idea, so too, practitioners of the Sufi path maintain that unless one replicates –

within certain degrees of freedom – the findings of previous explorers of the mystical path, then, one must exercise a certain amount of caution with respect to the nature of one’s understanding concerning the Sufi path. And, finally, one’s journey along the mystical path should reflect the general values, principles, findings, and behavior of those who previously or currently have exhibited, or are exhibiting, demonstrable expertise in the realm of mysticism.

Of course, just as there are so-called scientists who seek to give the appearance of having acquired certain results in a scientific manner but have fudged their data and conclusions, so too, there are so-called spiritually oriented individuals who seek to give the appearance of having acquired mystical realization without actually having done so. In other words, just as there is junk science, there is junk mysticism, and it is not always easy for someone to distinguish between the two.

When people take substances such as mescaline, LSD, DMT, and ayahuasca (vine of the dead), they believe they are communing with spirits and derive various ideas, values, principles, and insights from those engagements. Those altered states of consciousness can be profoundly intense and leave a lasting impression on the way a person looks at, and interacts with, life.

All of the foregoing possibilities concerning experiences that constitute intense, meaningful forms of learning and insights might be true. However, to what extent mescaline, LSD, DMT, ayahuasca, or any other form of neural stimulation permit one to gain access to the deepest truths concerning human existence and the nature of reality is debatable.

Going to university or joining an encounter group can lead to experiences that open one’s eyes in profound and intense ways that one might not otherwise have considered had one not gone to university or spent time in an encounter group. However, to be opened to various possibilities – whether in conventional or unconventional ways – does not make the insights or understandings arising out of those engagements either necessarily true or reflective of the ultimate nature of reality or human potential.

Is mysticism just a different way of seeing, knowing, perceiving, or being like sociology, psychology, physics, and economics are different

ways of seeing, knowing, understanding, and orienting oneself with respect to life? Or, does mysticism constitute an attempt to get to the bottom or essence of things as far as human existence and reality are concerned?

If, ultimately, reality is not a function of material processes, and, if mysticism is a methodological process for exploring those non-material phenomena, then, science in its modern, material sense is largely irrelevant to the mystical path. However, as the earlier outline concerning six of the basic features of science as a methodology indicated, to say that materialistic science has little relevance to mystical pursuits is not to say that rigorous, critical engagement of mystical methodology isn't possible.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, I'm not convinced that mysticism – even when done correctly -- is capable of exhausting the truth. Abu Bakr Siddiq (May God be pleased with him) said that 'realization of our inability to attain comprehension of God is, itself, a form of comprehension'. However, even though mystical practices might not be able to permit us to attain comprehension of God, I do believe that those practices – when done with proper guidance – open us up to the possibility of understanding the essential Self and the potential for that Self to engage and come to reflect – to varying degrees -- certain aspects of the truth.

When mysticism is pursued correctly – and this means, among other things, that the path or way is traveled under the close supervision of an authentic mystical guide – then mysticism constitutes a spiritual path directed toward helping an individual to attain whatever degree of enlightenment is consistent with that person's spiritual capacity and the Divine Grace that is extended to that individual with respect to realizing such a capacity ... in whole or in part. In short, mysticism is a path that, God willing, takes one from surface forms back to the spiritual roots underlying those surface forms and in the process brings one to a condition of realization and understanding concerning some of the hidden truths that are normally veiled within Creation.

There have been those individuals such as: Mansur al-Hallaj (may God be pleased with him) through whom the words: Ana'l Haqq – i.e., "I am the Truth" – were issued, as well as Byazid al-Bistami (may God

be pleased with him) through whom the words: 'Holy Am I. How Great is My Glory' were given expression. There is considerable confusion arising in conjunction with those utterances.

The foregoing sorts of sayings tend to scandalize the literally minded because those statements seem to confuse, if not conflate, Creation with Creator. On the other hand, many mystics feel that the theologically and legalistically-minded clerical authorities fail to recognize the presence of the first part of the Shahadah in the foregoing sorts of utterances – namely, bearing witness that there is no reality but God ... in other words, all phenomena are just so many loci of manifestation for various arrangements of properties whose nature is a function of the interplay of Divine Names and Attributes.

Ra'bia of Basra was alluding to the foregoing sort of perspective when she said that: "Thy existence is a sin with which none other can compare." Many of us believe we have some sort of substantive reality when, in point of fact, we are but illusory manifestations, or *tajalli*, that are derived from, and totally dependent on, the creative imagination of Divinity.

The Sufi path is about learning how to remove the illusions that veil the presence of Divinity. When illusions dissipate – and many of our understandings concerning the nature of reality are mostly illusory in nature -- what remains except the Truth?

Only those who have been provided by God with the necessary understanding to help an individual navigate her or his way through the hazardous waters that flow along the mystical path are authentic shaykhs. Such understanding contains the forms of reason and logic that help initiates of the Sufi way come to learn how to differentiate between the illusory and the real in the experiences of life.

One cannot reason one's way to the foregoing sort of understanding. The understanding is a gift of Grace that arises in whomever God pleases.

An authentic spiritual guide is the trustworthy and reliable source for the sort of logic, reason, insight, and understanding that is needed by a seeker at any given stage of the mystical journey. This is the only sense in which the idea of "rational mysticism" has any significance on the Sufi path ... something is logical, reasoned, insightful, and a form of

authoritative understanding only to the extent that it reflects the truth of a given phenomenon.

If one is guided by an authentic shaykh, one has access to that sort of logic, reasoning, insight, and understanding, and this is why a teacher, through God's Grace, is able to guide a seeker. Without an authentic shaykh – or worse, in the presence of a spiritual charlatan -- one will become lost since only authentic shaykhs are, by the Grace of God, masters of the rigorous methodology of the mystical path ... only those individuals are practitioners of the science that gives expression to a mysticism that, when properly understood, is fully rational, but it is a form of rationality that transcends the reasoning of philosophers, theologians, and material scientists.



Chapter 16: Jungian Visions

Vision 1

Broadly speaking, Carl Jung believed that in order for an individual's personality to develop properly a person must deal with certain kinds of psychological challenges during the course of her or his life. Moreover, according to Dr. Jung, the nature of the challenges that confront an individual during the first part of life -- say, up until about young adulthood -- are quite different from the sort of challenges that are faced by a person during the second half of life (from, roughly, mid-life onward).

In many ways, Dr. Jung agreed with Dr. Freud that the task of the first half of life was to establish the sort of strong sense of ego identity and self-sufficiency that would enable an individual to operate independently and which would equip that person to find a productive place in society (in terms that Erik Erickson attributed to Dr. Freud: To be capable of 'lieben und arbeiten' -- to love and to work). In order to accomplish this, a person had to break free of, and make peace with, the instinctually charged character of the relationships that arise in conjunction with one's parents or other family members and that shape many, if not most, of the events of the first half of life.

For Dr. Jung, however -- and unlike Dr. Freud -- an individual's psychological work did not end with a successful, neurosis-free navigation of the troubled waters of early development. According to Dr. Jung, in order for a person to become a fully functioning human being, an individual also had to revisit the realm of the unconscious during the second half of life in order to bring into balance and integrate certain aspects of personality that, for whatever reason, had not been attended to properly or had been separated off from conscious functioning while dealing with the earlier psychological crises of life ... for example, an individual might have to bring certain dimensions of the feminine (anima) or masculine (animus) facets of personality into balance or integrate them into some more stable relationship.

On the basis of his own harrowing encounters with the tremendous forces of the unconscious -- encounters that almost overwhelmed and destroyed him -- Dr. Jung believed that, at a minimum, two conditions were necessary to undertake the psychologically perilous journey of the second half of life. The first requirement, outlined earlier,

was for the individual to have achieved healthy ego functioning unencumbered by lingering residues of the problems characteristic of the first half of life.

The second condition noted by Dr. Jung was that an individual should not undertake the process of revisiting the unconscious without competent support, and, according to Dr. Jung, this assistance needed to come in the form of a qualified therapist who was familiar with the territory. Although therapy sessions could be used to help individuals to negotiate unresolved issues left over from the first half of life, Jungian therapy really tends to come into its own with helping people to meet the psychological challenges associated with the journey back to the unconscious that tends to arise during the second half of life.

One needed a strong ego in order to resist the temptation to surrender to, become lost in, and be overwhelmed by, the forces of the unconscious. Similarly, one needed an enlightened guide or therapist to help one learn how to enter into dialogue with, as well as interpret the symbols of, the unconscious so that the situation, if properly handled, would allow the individual to take advantage of the benefits that the unconscious had to offer in the way of an expanded, more balanced, more integrated sense of self than could be accomplished through the establishment of a strong, healthy ego as a result of successfully meeting the psychological challenges of the early stages of development.

Dr. Jung looked at the unconscious in a very different manner than did Dr. Freud. The latter conceived of the unconscious as constituting a wellspring of instinctual, primary processes, as well as the repository of repressed material that had been produced while an individual tried to prevent instinctual energies from being expressed directly. Dr. Jung, on the other hand, considered the unconscious to be a doorway of sorts that linked human beings to a realm far beyond instincts and primary processes.

For Dr. Jung, the unconscious realm was a treasure house of psychological wisdom that, among other things, might be able to help a person resolve many of the problems that arose during the process of psychological development. Jung claimed that this interior storehouse of knowledge and wisdom had been accumulating since the times of primitive man ... and, maybe, from an even earlier time in evolutionary history.

According to Dr. Freud, in many ways -- but not in all -- the unconscious is an entity created by the individual through repression of experiential

components drawn from everyday life. At the same time, Dr. Freud believed that the ego -- which was the home of the reality principle and secondary processes of rationality through which an individual dealt with the demands of the external world -- must become the master regulator of the ways, and the extent to which, various irrational processes and contents of the unconscious were to be given expression in any given set of social circumstances. Thus, his famous dictum: 'Where id is, there shall ego be'.

According to Dr. Jung, however, everyday experiences were merely the stimuli for eliciting various dimensions of an inherited -- not constructed -- unconscious that contains much more than repressed material. Furthermore, although Dr. Jung believed the unconscious could never be mastered or even tamed, he maintained that an individual could derive psychological benefit through limited, controlled excursions into the trans-rational realm of the unconscious.

Nonetheless, Dr. Jung also believed that because the unconscious had the capacity to mislead the individual, as well as destroy the individual, the process of bringing certain facets of the unconscious to some degree of conscious realization was a tricky business. The task had to be undertaken in measured, carefully analyzed, and properly interpreted steps, or the individual risked having his or her sense of self become fused with, and dissolved in, the forces of the unconscious.

By venturing into the realm of the unconscious through a series of limited, therapeutically guided excursions, the individual comes to realize -- hopefully -- that the everyday world is not the only reality. Rather, the objects of the everyday world are understood as 'a' reality instead of 'the' reality, and even though the external world gives expression to a reality of considerable importance, in many ways, the interior world constitutes an even more important dimension of Being/Reality.

In fact, the objects of the everyday world were able to assume symbolic significance by pointing in the direction of unconscious processes, as well as to serve as loci of projection for these same unconscious forces. This is where myths enter the picture.

For purposes of comparison, one might note that Dr. Freud construed myth to be an externalized symptom of the repressed contents of various kinds of libidinous striving ... especially those associated with the incest wishes of children concerning their opposite sexed parent. Indeed, for Dr. Freud, all of civilization was a sublimated containment response to the

attempt of the forbidden inclinations of the id to seek public expression, and, considered from that perspective, myths constituted a process that was in the service of the defense mechanism of sublimation.

Dr. Jung, on the other hand, didn't consider myths to be public signs of an underlying pathological trade-off with the unconscious. He maintained that myths -- along with dreams, art, and the active imagination -- were clues or tools that could be used to unlock different secrets of the unconscious during the constructive, life-affirming process of individuation through which an individual sought to become whole, integrated, and balanced.

Myths, dreams, the active imagination, and art formed part of the running dialogue with the unconscious that Dr. Jung considered to be essential to the process of working toward a healthy resolution of the psychological challenges of the second half of life. Simply stated, myths were concrete, symbolic encapsulations of the unconscious wisdom and powers that were beckoning us to return to the hidden dimensions of the inner life in order to have a shot at winning the ultimate prize: Namely, a deeper, richer, more harmonious and integrated sense of the meaning of the self as a distinct individual identity and personality formed against the backdrop of both society and the history of the species.

According to Dr. Jung, running through the myths of different societies were a set of commonalities that he considered to be a reflection of the underlying archetypes that formed the collective unconscious. Archetypes were emotionally charged, primordial images that gave expression to different themes of psychic importance to an individual, and among those archetypes one could find images involving themes such as: The trickster, the mother, the flood, and the child.

The collective unconscious was the inherited repository of psychological forms, dynamics, themes, and meanings (i.e., archetypes) that constituted a deep -- although largely unconscious -- reservoir of wisdom from which human beings might draw in order to complete the process of self-individuation. Dr. Jung considered experiences involving primordial images that occurred in dreams, art, fantasies, and psychotic episodes to constitute evidence for the existence of the collective unconscious.

As intimated earlier, Dr. Freud believed that the similarities among the myths of different societies gave expression to the underlying libidinous drives that were part of our common biological inheritance that

differentially manifested themselves through a set of psychological stages of development that were rooted in human biology. Yet, each person underwent this encounter and struggle with the species-wide biological inheritance of libidinous drives in a fashion that uniquely reflected the individual's interaction with his or her family and the surrounding community.

Dr. Jung believed myths came into being when a given society created a symbol-laden story that was anchored in, and animated by, different archetypal motifs of the collective unconscious. The symbols of the myth were intended to elicit the active participation of those who heard or read the myth by helping to remind people of the forceful shaping presence of archetypes in our lives and, through this means, entice individuals to follow – through the process of therapy -- the symbolic clues of the myth back to its source.

The thematic contents, or archetypal forms, of myths came with the psychological inheritance that accompanied those contents, but unlike the case of Dr. Freud, myths were not reducible to our biological inheritance. As such, the thematic contents of myths rather than their particular symbols were psychological givens in the lives of all individuals.

The particularized details of any given myth were drawn, according to Dr. Jung, from the social, cultural and historical character of the lived experience of a people. Therefore, the way in which these particularized details symbolize, and give expression to, the underlying archetypal themes is peculiar to the circumstances of the people out of which a certain myth arises, and, for this reason, Dr. Jung disapproved of the tendency of some people in the West to adopt the myths of various Eastern cultures and try to incorporate the symbols of those myths into a Western context.

For Dr. Freud, the purpose of myth is to serve as a sublimated, disguised medium for emotional release that is intended to provide a form of compensation ... albeit an inadequate one relative to the direct expression of libidinous energies and drives. According to Dr. Freud, the individual inherits a set of libidinous drives that are rooted in biology instead of in the phenomenology of experiential themes.

On the other hand, Dr. Jung considered the purpose of myth to be about providing individuals with an opportunity – by means of a return to the unconscious -- to seek a deeper understanding of the nature of self, personality, meaning and identity. The individual inherits a common set of

psychological themes that are a crystallization of certain aspects of the experiences of one's ancestors that carry ramifications for the process of self-fulfillment and self-realization (i.e., individuation).

The Freudian approach to myth is to consider it as a symbol of something that is hidden and, in reality, that hidden 'something' is different from the character of the myth. If the myth were not substantially different from that which remains hidden, then, various defense mechanisms would be activated in an attempt to prevent those contents from being given public expression.

However, from the perspective of Dr. Jung, the myth is not something that is different from the underlying archetype. The symbols of the myth are intended to lead toward, or elicit, the reality of the archetypes giving phenomenological expression to different facets of the collective unconscious.

However, once the archetype or archetypes that are present in a myth have been properly identified, one must undergo a further process of interpretation by means of therapeutic guidance. According to Dr. Jung, one cannot understand the meaning of a myth in the context of one's life until one has insight into how the archetypes being symbolized through that myth fit into the concrete and particularized character of one's life circumstances and developmental history.

Dr. Jung distinguishes between mythology and myth by indicating that, unlike a complete mythology such as a religious tradition, no one myth can contain all of the archetypal themes that exist in the collective unconscious of human beings. Therefore, no one myth -- again, unlike any given mythology -- provides all of the materials that are necessary for working toward either a proper balancing of one's personality or toward a realization of the deep riches that Dr. Jung considers to be inherent, at least potentially, in the nature of the self.

Individual myths call one to particular aspects of: Identity, meaning, self, and personality through the specific archetypes to which our attention is being drawn by the symbols of the myth. A mythology, on the other hand, calls one to engage the full spectrum of psychological possibilities that are inherent in the archetypes of the collective unconscious to which one's attention is being directed through the complex symbolism of that mythology.

When individuals concentrated on only certain myths -- rather than the dynamic intricacies of a fully elaborated mythology -- Dr. Jung believed that those people cannot help but leave substantial dimensions of their selves unexplored, undeveloped, unbalanced, and, therefore, not capable of being integrated with the rest of one's being. Consequently, at best, the process of individuation would be woefully incomplete, and, at worst, those people might risk becoming overly identified with the archetypal underpinnings of particular myths. According to Dr. Jung, these sorts of individuals rendered themselves vulnerable to a mental breakdown through loss of identity and sense of self as human beings who possess a potential that carries beyond any given archetype.

For some researchers, the idea of the unconscious appears to have a problematic ontological status. In other words, with respect to certain processes and issues, those researchers might be prepared to accept the existence of a realm referred to as the 'unconscious' that, in some way, is attached to, or a part of, one's being. However, there are many other aspects of life that often are said to belong to the unconscious, or that, supposedly, give expression to various forces of the unconscious, about which the foregoing researchers might harbor doubts as to whether or not one is talking about something that actually exists ... rather than merely being a way of talking about phenomena that we don't fully understand.

One obvious example where the existence of an unconscious dimension to human affairs seems apparent concerns various aspects of personal memory and motivation. For instance, there might be a name, fact, or piece of information that one knows but, for some reason, one can't produce or retrieve it on a given occasion.

Presumably, the data that remains out of the reach of our consciousness could be said to be residing in the unconscious. On the other hand, there might be some individuals who would wish to say that such material is not really in something called the unconscious as much as it merely remains inaccessible -- temporarily or permanently -- to conscious recall.

In other words, being out of consciousness is not necessarily the same thing as being in a realm of the unconscious. For example, what is going on in some country on the other side of the Earth might be taking place outside of our current state of consciousness, but this doesn't, as a result, automatically qualify that unknown data to be a part of someone's

unconscious regions, nor does it necessarily create, in and of itself, an unconscious realm in which that data can be said to exist or reside.

Moreover, there are many facets of a computer's database or memory banks that might not be in use at any given time. However, one might not, therefore, want to claim, therefore, that a computer can be said to possess an unconscious realm.

In fact, someone might wish to reverse the foregoing argument. That is, if one does not want to attribute an unconscious realm to computers when their current programming state or operating mode does not permit them to have access to certain aspects of stored data, then, perhaps, the same is true of human beings as well.

Another -- possibly better -- example that might indicate the existence of an entity called the 'unconscious' involves various non-conscious emotional or motivational patterns that are operating within us on an ongoing basis. More specifically, these motivational and emotional patterns or processes might be real forces shaping our behaviors, yet we are not aware of them because they are hidden beneath, say, psychological defenses that permit us to attribute more acceptable or flattering reasons to the behaviors that are rooted in that veiled network of emotion and motivation.

Although the idea of the unconscious existed before Dr. Freud came along, to some extent, he was able to place it in a more scientifically acceptable light. For, in addition to dreams, hysteria and so on, Dr. Freud also took phenomena that he referred to as the psychopathology of everyday life -- like slips of the tongue -- as commonplace sorts of examples that might serve as empirical evidence for the existence of the unconscious.

Hidden emotions and motivations, along with instinctual drives, played a very important part in disclosing the presence of the unconscious realm as far as Dr. Freud and a variety of other psychological investigators were concerned. This data does not prove the existence of a region, state, realm, place or entity known as the unconscious, but, at least, the foregoing sorts of data lend some degree of plausibility to that idea.

Nevertheless, there are other cases -- and Dr. Jung's notion of the collective unconscious is one example of this -- to which the term 'unconscious' is applied as a way of talking about forces, processes, and phenomena that we don't really understand and which, in point of fact, might have nothing necessarily to do with a psychological or biological realm that

contains unconscious materials. Instead, these processes and phenomena might be impinging on us from some other realm, through a dynamic we are not aware of, and we merely attribute our experiences to the unconscious because, for a variety of cultural and historical reasons, we might be more prepared to accept that kind of ontological or metaphysical interpretation in conjunction with those events than if someone were to try to argue for an other-worldly or a spiritual account of those sorts of phenomena or processes.

The foregoing possibility could be due to the manner in which philosophical and cultural conceptions concerning the nature of the relationship between the individual and Being/Reality undergo transition over time. In other words, at certain points in history, people might be prepared to accept -- as true -- ideas such as: Visitations by a creative muse, demonic possession, satanic influences, or dreams as messages from some other world.

Now, however, as a result of various kinds of scientific, psychological, and philosophical influence, many people are ready to give credence to -- or, at least, entertain the possibility that -- alternative, more modern ideas concerning the nature of Being/Reality. These latter ideas might include, for example, the idea that dreams are due to certain kinds of brain activity during REM sleep, or those ideas might give expression to the notion that creativity is the result of a free play of concepts that is generated through various modalities of brain chemistry, together with K-complex electrical rhythms, or someone might wish to argue that demonic possession is really a residual, delusional effect of some kind of breakdown in the metabolic pathways of, say, serotonin and/or dopamine.

Yet, in point of fact, we are not necessarily any closer to understanding what is going on now than when people were attributing these phenomena and processes to other-worldly agents. Currently, terms such as: Neurotransmitters, brain chemistry, and electrical activity are used to give descriptive expression to the realm of the unconscious, but all we really possess with respect to the use of those terms are the existence of certain patterns of correlation rather than a solid case of causation ... in fact, we 'moderns' often like to feel superior -- somewhat smugly so -- relative to the allegedly primitive myths of yesteryear, simply because we

are able to couch our ignorance in very impressive-sounding technical language.

Carl Jung might represent an interesting sort of transitional figure with respect to all of the foregoing considerations. More specifically, in certain respects he is an important part of the conceptual revolution that has been taking place during the last hundred and thirty years, or so, in which psychological and biological accounts have gained ascendancy -- at least in some quarters -- relative to various spiritual or religious accounts, and are considered, by some individuals, to give expression to sound, empirical accounts or explanations concerning the events of our lives. Yet, at the same time, Dr. Jung's notion of the collective unconscious seems to be part of a metaphysical framework that transcends, and, therefore, cannot necessarily be reduced to, the brain functioning of individuals.

Moreover, one frequently finds Dr. Jung speaking about the soul, spirituality, the importance of religious symbols, and so on. Yet, in many respects, he appears to make spirituality a function of purely psychological processes.

For him, spirituality and religion sometimes appear to give expression to little more than concrete, psychological forms that are generated by processes of a mythological nature. These mythologies are significant in as much as they contain the symbols that might be able to help individuals to make contact with the archetypes of the collective unconscious. Consequently, spiritual themes provide a person with psychological/mythological material through which she or he can work toward resolution of the problems and challenges of identity, the self, and personality that Dr. Jung believes are necessary for a successful completion of the developmental processes -- i.e., individuation -- that characterize the second half of life.

Dr. Jung is willing to allow for dimensions of reality -- i.e., meaning, the self, identity, self-realization, and personality -- that extend beyond the overly simplistic world of the libidinous energies and instinctual drives championed by Dr. Freud. Nevertheless, even if one agreed with Dr. Jung concerning the need to: Reclaim balance or integrate aspects of personality and self by revisiting the unconscious, nonetheless, a purely psychological approach might not be capable of doing justice to that which spirituality or religion might be attempting to direct the attention of human beings.

In a sense, just as Dr. Jung's theories add very important dimensions to, as well as complement, the work of people like Dr. Freud, something might need to be added to Jung's framework in order to reflect the richness and depth of Being/Reality that transcends the realm of the psychological. In many respects, Dr. Jung appears to be just as reductionistic, in his own way, as he seemed to find Dr. Freud to be, even though Dr. Jung certainly is offering a far richer and nuanced picture of the nature of the human being than Dr. Freud appeared to be doing.

Dr. Jung often spoke quite approvingly with respect to such themes as religious discipline. He wasn't saying -- like Karl Marx -- that religion was the opiate of the masses or -- like Sigmund Freud -- that religion was merely an illusory projection of an overly moralistic superego trying to cope with the many problems presented by a very resourceful and devious set of instinctual urgings.

Nevertheless, to some extent, Dr. Jung might have been favorably disposed toward religion for several reasons that had nothing to do with Divinity or our relationship with Divinity. For example, Dr. Jung considered religion to be a fully adequate mythological medium that provided the individual with a means of making contact with the archetypes of the collective unconscious.

However, the collective unconscious represents the cumulative wisdom of human experience concerning the completion of personality and development rather than necessarily being a repository of Divine wisdom. Consequently, one's contact with the archetypes of the collective unconscious is not necessarily a process of reaching out to, or for, Divinity, nor does one necessarily enter into dialogue with the archetypes for the purposes of coming to know, love, worship or serve God.

Instead, one makes contact with the archetypes of the collective unconscious with the intention of coming to know, enrich, balance and integrate one's sense of self, identity and personality. This is done in order to complete a process of psychological -- not spiritual -- development ... although Jungians, including the master, himself, sometimes seem inclined to use a spiritual-like vocabulary as a way of speaking about their psychological project.

One might argue that part of the wisdom that is psychologically inherited through the archetypes of the collective unconscious could involve the thoughts and emotions of previous peoples concerning the

properties that they believed a relationship with some transcendental, Divine Being should have if an individual were to successfully bring to completion the psychological project of creating a balanced and integrated personality and identity. However, the foregoing sorts of beliefs are not necessarily the same kind of thing as saying that such a Divine Being exists and that our attention and efforts should be directed toward making some kind of realized or enlightened contact with that Being rather than with the archetypes of the collective unconscious.

Another reason behind Dr. Jung's praising of religion and its framework of discipline might have been connected with his very healthy respect for, and wariness concerning, the tremendous powers he believed to be inherent in the realm of the collective unconscious. Jung had witnessed the overwhelming character of those forces and had experienced, first hand, that dimension's capacity to confuse, if not mislead, individuals who, either intentionally or accidentally, wandered into it.

Therefore, from the perspective of Dr. Jung, the rituals, practices, discipline and regimen of religion might be able to serve as so many psychological buffers between the individual and the forces of the collective unconscious. By exerting control over the individual's interior life, religions were, in effect – knowingly or unknowingly -- helping to protect individuals from potentially disastrous and destructive encounters with the collective unconscious.

If religious adherents were not prepared to undertake a serious journey into the realm of the unconscious, then from the perspective of Dr. Jung, those individuals might be better served if they were surrounded with a set of religious constraints and restraints that were likely to keep them out of harm's way. In other words, the practices, beliefs, rituals, art, and so on, of various religious traditions would provide the less venturesome of religiously inclined people with a limited, gradual, and somewhat superficial method for making contact with at least some of the archetypes of the collective unconscious through the symbols inherent in their religious traditions.

On the other hand, those same religious symbols might also serve as hints for the faithful with respect to the psychological wisdom that could be found by anyone bold enough to journey inwardly in a rigorous, sincere fashion. Yet, until such time as an individual was -- from a Jungian perspective – ready for a serious, inward journey, then, the symbols, myths, and other

aspects of a given religious mythology offered adherents some of the materials necessary for working toward completion of certain limited facets of the psychological tasks involving the self, identity, meaning, personality, and so on.

As far as the developmental challenges of the second half of life are concerned, Jungian therapy is intended to take the individual on a guided encounter with the forces and wisdom of the collective unconscious in a way that is both different from, as well as similar to, the modalities used in the mythological processes of religion. As such, not only did Jungian therapy provide an avenue for helping non-religious people to address the unfinished psychological business of developing the self, identity and personality in a complete and proper fashion, but his modality of therapy also could be offered to religious believers who weren't able to obtain the help they needed for tackling the problems surrounding the completion of the tasks entailed by psychological development within their own religious tradition.

Conceivably, Dr. Jung might have felt that his brand of therapy was a much more efficacious way of gaining access to, and deriving benefit from, the archetypes of the collective unconscious than was religion. In any event, and within certain limits, Dr. Jung might have been tolerant of, and somewhat positively disposed toward, religion simply because he felt it was trying, in its own way, to assist individuals to achieve some of the same kinds of goals concerning meaning, self, identity, personality, harmony, balance, integration and enrichment of the psychological soul, as he himself was attempting to do through his own therapeutic methodology.

Many individuals seem to want to take the modality of consciousness we use in everyday life or the modalities of consciousness that we tend to associate with abilities -- such as creativity, language, insight, and reasoning -- that we believe set human beings apart from the rest of animal or plant life and place those forms of consciousness at the very apex of a chart of evolutionary or cosmic accomplishment. However, few, if any of us, really understand how creativity, insight, reasoning, or language actually operates.

Consciousness -- the everyday-waking-variety kind of consciousness -- does not so much appear to generate the foregoing kinds of abilities as much as that consciousness seems to be a screening room for manifesting the results of talents and abilities that are transpiring in

some other realm or dimension. In reality, our work-a-day consciousness appears to be the very last to know what is going on within us.

Whatever it is that our everyday consciousness comes to an awareness of, then that awareness really only seems to give expression to a very partial, fragmented, shallow, and indirect sort of relationship with the centers of awareness that actually have the responsibility for regulating and governing a whole variety of complex operations and processes involving so-called 'higher' human functions and functioning. As such, the everyday consciousness in which we like to take so much pride is actually, relatively speaking, quite dumb and unconscious with respect to most of what is going on within us.

Only the human ego's inclination to appropriate the "unconscious" capacities and abilities as its own prevents us from realizing the absurdities inherent in our attempts to lay claim to those processes and functions that, for the most part, take place beyond the horizons of our everyday, waking consciousness. We seem to be zombies who operate from within a firmly entrenched delusional system that portrays our normal modalities of awareness as being the cat's meow of consciousness.

Conceivably, our everyday consciousness is really just a residual, trickledown effect of far more esoteric activities that are taking place beyond the horizons of our so-called normal, waking consciousness. In other words, our work-a-day form of consciousness is not so much an instance of emergent properties as it is an expression of a set of divergent properties of some sort that have become separated off -- like a dissociative mental condition or fugue state -- from its original source or context.

In some ways, the relationship of our everyday modes of awareness to the real consciousness that seems to be going on in some other realm or dimension of being is sort of reminiscent of certain science fiction movies or novels ... the ones where Earth gets visited by beings who are so far more advanced than humans are that the aliens either have great compassion for our pathetic condition and keep sending us anonymous gifts of consolation so we won't get too depressed about the rather abysmal nature of our waking consciousness, or, they adopt us as dumb but, on occasion, lovable pets and, every so often, give us trinkets with which we can amuse ourselves like kittens with a ball of string, or, they consider us to be only slightly different than the insect life on this planet,

but their moral values will not permit them to exterminate us and put us out of our misery.

In many respects, human beings have got the consciousness-unconsciousness distinction all inverted and twisted around. If one considers how impoverished our waking consciousness has become with our many routines, habits, biases, prejudices, psychological defenses, preoccupations with our fantasy life, and so on, one might be surprised that any of us can do much more than walk and chew gum simultaneously. Given the impoverished condition of the waking consciousness in which we spend so much of our time, the miserable state of the world is not all that hard to understand.

However, as problematic as the relationship is between the so-called unconscious and conscious domains of awareness, throwing the idea of the collective unconscious into the mix – as Dr. Jung does – creates a variety of additional problems. Among other things, for example, one might like to know where the collective unconscious is located.

If one says it is located in psychological space, whatever that is, then, the question just resurfaces in slightly different forms. Where is psychological space, and where can one find the collective unconscious in that space, and how do the contents of the collective unconscious gain access to such space?

Even if one were to argue that the regular forms of conscious and unconscious awareness are functions of certain kinds of brain activity, this option does not seem to be available to Dr. Jung in conjunction with the idea of the collective unconscious because he seems to want to distinguish between the mechanisms of biological and psychological inheritance. As a result, one returns to questions such as: Where is the collective unconscious, and how did it originate, and why, apparently, did only certain kinds of archetypal forms, rather than others, get deposited there, and what was the mechanism of the formation process of archetypes in which the particularized experiences of individuals became transformed into a generalized categorical form, and why should one suppose that the potential of the self is limited to the possibilities inherent in the archetypes, and why is there so much power and force associated with archetypes, and what precisely is the character and nature of that power or force, and how do we know Dr. Jung's interpretations of the significance, meaning and function of the archetypes are what he claims to be the case?

As one possible alternative to the psychological theories of Dr. Jung, one might keep in mind that there are mystical traditions (e.g., the Sufi path) that speak of a realm or world of symbols and similitudes that, on the one hand, addresses human beings through the language of dreams, and, on the other hand, constitutes a dimension apart from the physical/material world and functions as a way station, of sorts, with a potential for offering the individual exposure to many different kinds of spiritual or mystical experience. The foregoing traditions suggest one can commune with the spirits of prophets and saints in this world of symbols and similitudes and, as a result, be in a position to acquire, at least potentially, a great deal of spiritual wisdom and understanding through those sorts of encounters.

However, these same spiritual traditions also indicate that individuals can meet up with other kinds of very powerful entities in this world or realm of symbols and similitudes ... entities that are capable of leading one into spiritual confusion and error. Perhaps, some of the powerful forces encountered by Dr. Jung and some of his patients during the process of therapy were not purely psychological in nature but came from an ontological realm or dimension beyond psychology.

When one compares some of what Dr. Jung says about the nature of the collective unconscious -- especially in the context of his own harrowing experiences -- with what various mystical traditions relate concerning the nature of the world of symbols and similitudes, one might wonder if Dr. Jung was trying to impose the structure of his own psychological theory onto a dimension of reality that might have nothing to do with the collective unconscious or archetypes, -- at least not necessarily in Dr. Jung's sense of those ideas.

In a very fundamental way, Dr. Jung might have found himself in the middle of something he really didn't understand. However -- like most of us -- he simply tried to make coherent sense of his experiences and those of his patients in a way that was consistent with his philosophical and psychological predilections.

Of course, just as the ideas of Dr. Jung can be subjected to a variety of questions, so too, one can raise similar questions in relation to the aforementioned idea involving a world of symbols and similitudes. For instance, a person might ask: What is the nature of the world of symbols and similitudes if that is not physical or material in nature, and, if that world is

not physical or material in nature, then where is it located? Or, how did it come into being? Or, how does one gain access to it and under what circumstances? Or, why should one feel compelled to accept a spiritual interpretation of that realm, any more than one should feel compelled to accept Dr. Jung's psychological interpretation of his encounter with what he claimed was the realm of the collective unconscious?

Whether we are psychologists, philosophers, mystics, or scientists, we all are involved, more or less, in the same kind of quest. We all are trying to find out what the nature of the relationship is between our experiences and the structural character of the dynamics, processes, events and so on of the dimensions of reality that help make our experiences possible and help lend to those experiences certain kinds of differential character under various circumstances.

If one is sincere about exploring the reality problem, then one will not want to read something into experience or reality that doesn't belong there. At the same time, if an individual is sincere with respect to her or his investigation concerning the nature of his or her relationship with Being/Reality, then that individual does not want to exclude anything from, or read something out of, the book of reality if those phenomena are present in Being/Reality.

All of our methodologies, techniques, instruments, procedures, tests, questions, and modes of critical analyses are intended to try to discover whether our theories, hypotheses, conjectures, speculations, ideas, and so on, give accurate expression to, or are reflective of, our experiences, both individually and collectively. Moreover, irrespective of whether we are professional investigators or amateur sleuths, we tend to critically reflect on the ways in which other people describe and explain their experiences as measured against our own experiences and understanding of those experiences.

When discrepancies arise in this process of comparison, we tend to be confronted with a variety of possibilities and options. The other person's description or explanation might be problematic in some way, or our own description and/or explanation might be flawed, or both of our approaches might suffer from certain kinds of difficulties that might be either of a peripheral or essential nature, or each of our accounts might be right – each in its own way and within certain limits -- but we are referring to different aspects of the same phenomenon.

Dr. Jung agreed with Dr. Freud on some issues especially in relation to the nature of the problems, challenges and tasks of the first half of the developmental process. However, there were many aspects of Freudian theory that did not appear to match up well with Dr. Jung's own experiences or the experiences of many of the people Dr. Jung was seeing in therapy.

As a result, Dr. Jung went in search of a set of descriptions and explanations that were – for better or worse -- more satisfying to him, both conceptually and experientially, than could be provided by either a purely Freudian and/or biological account of psychological processes, dynamics and human possibilities. The collected works of Dr. Jung are his response to the questions and issues that bubbled about inside of him while he struggled to come to grips with what he believed was the relationship between the character of human experiences and the nature of the reality in which those experiences are rooted and out of which they develop.

As noted in passing earlier, Dr. Jung tended to be opposed to the inclinations of some people who wanted to borrow the symbols of another culture or mythology and try to import those symbols into a different mythological tradition or set of social/historical conditions. According to Dr. Jung, this act of transposing symbols constituted a potential source for considerable distortion, error, and confusion to enter one's quest for the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

Somewhat ironically, however, Dr. Jung himself might have been guilty of such a process of transposition by taking spiritual issues (e.g., individuation of the soul) out of context and placing them in a purely psychological framework. In doing this, he might have opened the gates for a great deal of error, distortion, and confusion concerning the nature of the reality or realities to which his psychological theory of archetypes attempted to make descriptive and explanatory reference.

Although an individual starts out on her or his spiritual journey in the world of forms, nonetheless, spirituality or mysticism points in a direction that might transcend the realm of forms. Therefore, even if one were to grant the existence of Dr. Jung's archetypes, they might be a purely formal manifestation of some further dimension of reality and, consequently, archetypes might not adequately address that which lies beyond the psychological mode of communication and understanding that is capable of

being given expression through one's entering into dialogue with those archetypes.

Just as Dr. Jung believed that individuals must actively participate in the hard work that is entailed by the process of individuation, so too, the religious, spiritual, or mystical journey is one that must be done with the full participation of the individual and not just through books. Neither Dr. Jung nor mystics believe that one can sit back in a rocking chair and speculate one's way to an understanding of how, and under what circumstances, worlds exist that might be neither of a physical nor material nature.

Dr. Jung advised individuals who wanted to encounter the realm of archetypes that they must do so under the guidance of someone who knew: The landscape, potential problems, and ways of moving about in the regions of the collective unconscious without becoming lost, confused or overwhelmed. The language used by mystics seems to say something very similar in nature, except they might be speaking about dimensions of reality that are quite different from the psychological realms for which Dr. Jung's theoretical framework appears to be attempting to provide a map.

One cannot replicate an experiment from the sidelines. If one wishes to seek to verify whether, or which parts of, Dr. Jung's understanding of things is correct, true, accurate, or tenable then, to some extent, one must follow in his footsteps. Furthermore, if one wishes to test the veracity of a mystic's understanding of the relationship between experience and reality, one must follow in the footsteps of an authentic mystical guide (and, unfortunately, there are many inauthentic spiritual guides).

Unfortunately, individuals do not possess enough time, energy, or resources to go about trying to replicate, test, confirm, or disprove everyone's understanding of their respective experiences. So, we all are faced with choices about which paths of replication, testing, and confirmation will be pursued.

Our conception of: Self, identity, meaning, purpose, fulfillment, harmony, human potential, truth, and reality becomes a complex function of the choices that we make concerning what we attempt to replicate, test, or validate. Trying to figure out whether we have chosen wisely or correctly in this regard is what often keeps many of us up at night.

Vision 2

The foregoing section (Vision 1) explored some of the ideas of Carl Jung in a, more or less, traditional fashion. In other words, although the foregoing section might have given emphasis to certain themes that other people writing about Dr. Jung might have de-emphasized, or while the foregoing section might have de-emphasized various issues to which other writings exploring Dr. Jung might have given emphasis, and despite the fact that I have thrown in some criticisms of certain aspects of Jung's perspective with which others might agree or disagree, nonetheless, most people would be able to recognize the basic framework of Carl Jung's theoretical framework in the foregoing pages. What follows is another way of engaging the work of Carl Jung that is much more controversial and presents a very different picture of Jung's perspective from the one with which most people – including so-called Jungians -- are familiar.

According to Richard Noll, author of *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement*, the supposedly autobiographical book by (allegedly) Carl Jung that is entitled: *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* is, to a large extent, an exercise in revisionist history. Dr. Noll indicates in his aforementioned book that with the exception of the first three chapters of *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*, along with a final section entitled "Late Thoughts" that were written by Carl Jung, most of the rest of the book was largely put together by, and constructed through, the efforts of Aniela Jaffé, an intimate of Carl Jung, as well several other close disciples of Dr. Jung, and, in addition, Dr. Noll notes that much of what Dr. Jung wrote for *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* was, subsequently, edited by Jaffé and others.

The latter book is intended to preserve the idea that Dr. Jung was some sort of a saint-like, holy person who was teaching people the wisdom of the ages, when, according to a great deal of historical evidence that has been brought together by Dr. Noll, Jung was, among other things, anti-Semitic (and Dr. Freud was both aware of, and commented on, this aspect of Jung), harbored racist attitudes, was sexually active throughout his life with a number of women who were not his wife, and fudged data concerning so-called evidence for the idea of the collective unconscious.

Memories, Dreams, Reflections paints a picture of Carl Jung as a person that came into contact with the most fundamental Ground of Being/Reality by means of his dreams, fantasies, ascetic retreats, reflective meditations,

and visions and, in the process, became a wise, holy man. The foregoing book gives voice to the idea that the experiences, thoughts, and understandings of Dr. Jung constitute a case study in the process of individuation in which a person – i.e., Dr. Jung – journeys into the realm of persona, archetypes, symbols, myths, mythology, animus, anima, the shadow, as well as the collective unconscious and becomes a fully realized, balanced, integrated human and, thereby, maps out the nature of the process through which other human beings might be able to do the same.

Dr. Noll depicts Carl Jung as an individual who was often deeply intrigued with issues involving cultural and biological heritage – as was true of many people at that time. He tended to identify with the German side of his ancestry, rather than the maternal, Swiss side of his family tree (which seemed to be laced with issues of emotional disturbance of one kind or another), and, he often appeared to be quite taken with the possibility that he was a direct descendant – although, perhaps, illegitimate – of Goethe by way of his paternal grandfather.

According to Richard Noll, Dr. Jung was someone who deeply identified with the Volk of his Germanic ancestry. The notion of Volk is filled with numerous currents of blood ties, pantheism, life energy, and a transcendent sense of spirituality – all of which impinged on the perspective of Carl Jung and his close followers.

Among other things, völkisch spiritual orientations gave expression to the idea that religious and mythological differences were rooted in the biology of various peoples. The Germanic ancestral tree – with which Jung identified – was often infused with ideas involving Aryan origins and the existence of Teutonic gods and religions that either pre-dated Judaism and Christianity or were independent of that Semitic tradition.

The foregoing Greco-Roman influences played a crucial, formative role during Carl Jung's early cultural and educational life. Many Germans – whether well educated or not – tended to be acquainted with various aspects of Greco-Roman mythology, and this included Carl Jung.

Germans were also much taken with the supposed purity of Greco-Roman culture and its emphasis on ideals involving rationality, truth, serenity, genius, and beauty. Those ideals were often filtered through, and modified by, the Romantic ideas (which gave emphasis to themes of individualism, emotion, nature, and glorification of certain aspects of the past) that were present in the writings of Goethe.

Nineteenth century German research on religion tended to distinguish between Semitic traditions (i.e., Judaism and Christianity) and spiritual traditions based on the Aryan culture associated with Greece and Rome. Jung believed there was a fundamental difference between Aryan-based religious traditions and Semitic-based religious traditions, and Dr. Jung was as drawn to the former as he was inclined to reject the latter.

Although Dr. Jung did not have a problem with the general idea of religion, nonetheless, he came to believe that the Judeo-Christian tradition was a Jewish disease that infected the minds, hearts, and souls of human beings and, thereby, prevented people from gaining access to their true spiritual heritage. As a result, according to Dr. Noll, Dr. Jung instituted a decades-long policy that sought to prevent Jewish individuals from taking an active part in their meetings and gatherings (in the form of a Psychology Club in Zurich), and, then, later on – in order to attenuate criticism to some degree -- adopted a quota system in which only a limited number of Jewish individuals would be permitted to actively participate in those gatherings.

Following Jung's break with Sigmund Freud (which began during a sea voyage to America in 1908 and came to a head in 1912-1913), Dr. Jung claimed to have had a vision toward the end of 1913 in which he supposedly was initiated into an Aryan mystery cult associated with the teachings of Mithras, an ancient tradition linked to Vedic, Persian and Roman religious systems that focused on the nature of the primordial covenant between human beings and the gods. During the process of initiation, he reportedly had become a god-like figure – the Aryan Christ – and, from that point forward, he considered himself to be a prophet whose mission was to usher in a new age of spirituality through which people – both individually and culturally – could become reborn and renewed in accordance with their inherent potential.

In other words, he believed he was the spiritual core around which an elite would form. Together they would develop their intuitive capacities for grasping essential truths concerning the nature of Being/Reality and, then, they would use their insights to construct a utopian philosophy of life (Lebensphilosophie) to which they would initiate others.

Consequently, in many respect, Jungian psychology – that is, analytical psychology -- is an elaborate mythology. Moreover, the persona of Jung plays the role of a key archetypal symbol at the heart of that mythology.

The essence of this mythology involves worship of the Sun that is a symbol for the God within each of us ... the source of life, light, and understanding -- and there are many symbols other than the Sun that represent the same idea. The hero becomes initiated into ancient spiritual mysteries, and, then, sacrifices himself – thus, the image of an Aryan Christ in Jung’s aforementioned December 1913 dream – in order to gain access to the primordial images that directly connect human beings with their ontological or existential Ground and, thereby, provide them with an opportunity to become a realized God-like figure.

One of the key concepts in the Jungian perspective involves the notion of an archetype, but this idea did not begin with Dr. Jung. In part, the archetype concept sprang from the work of Richard Owen, a renowned morphologist of the nineteenth century who was searching for the “Urtyp” or the primordial forms that governed the dynamics to which each species gave expression.

Prior to Owen, however, Johann Goethe already had introduced the idea of a science of forms – i.e., morphology – in the early 1800s. Moreover, Goethe’s approach to primordial forms was not restricted to biological organisms but extended into the realm of images, or “Urbild,” that constituted transcendent, eternal forces capable of shaping the natural world, including human beings, in fundamental ways.

‘Urtyp’ and ‘Urbild’ played important roles in the natural philosophy that was developed during the nineteenth century by, among others, Johann Goethe, Carl Carus, Richard Owen, and F.W.J. Schelling. Those investigators believed that human beings possessed a capacity for intuiting the primordial forces at work in the universe, and when that capacity was nurtured in the right way, the foregoing capacity became active and enabled a person to grasp the nature of Being/Reality.

Thus, Dr. Jung’s use of the idea of archetypes was rooted in a conceptual tradition of Romantic vitalism that came to prominence during the nineteenth century. That strain of natural philosophy was also the source of Dr. Jung’s idea of “active imagination” that involved a process of meditation (a means of accessing one’s intuitive capacities) that was intended to bring forth primordial contents of the unconscious in the form of images, dreams, and fantasies through which an individual sought individuation by integrating different, often opposing dimensions of personality.

Another one of the philosophical/religious currents that ran through the times and culture in which Carl Jung grew up was that of Friedrich Nietzsche – especially the Dionysian, trans-rational tendencies within the later Nietzsche that were willing to stand in opposition to tradition and authority in order to be able to give expression to one’s capacity for creativity and continuous renewal. Inherent in the foregoing tendency was the belief that the way to renewal would be led by the *übermensch* ... individuals, like Goethe, who already had succeeded in casting off the shackles of various forms of authority (e.g., religious, cultural, academic, philosophical, and political) and, therefore, were capable of showing others how to accomplish the same form of liberation and renewal. Dr. Jung’s writings are replete with quotes from, and references to, Nietzsche.

Carl Jung lived during a time in which there were many new elements within politics, art, literature, philosophy, and music that were surfacing. Issues involving sexuality, evolution, mediums, trances, mesmerism, positivism, mysticism, paganism, Volk-religion, and theosophy were set against an array of established values as the currents of modernity encountered the currents of traditional approaches to life, and people were caught between the dynamic push of progress and the static pull of traditional, conservative inclinations. Jung also grew up during a time when scholarship that was directed toward exploring the nature of the historical Jesus generated a great deal of skepticism toward Christianity in particular, if not religion in general (Nietzsche was just one individual who had been deeply affected by that research).

In addition to the work of Nietzsche, Carl Jung was also deeply influenced by the writings of Ernst Haeckel, a zoologist, who, among other things, had beat Charles Darwin to the punch – and Darwin acknowledged this priority -- with respect to the idea that human beings were descended from simian ancestors. Haeckel also originated the notion that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny” – that is, the biological development of any given human being tends to replay the evolutionary history of human beings in general.

The latter “Biogenetic Law” – i.e., ‘ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny’ – became part of a natural, pantheistic religion (termed Monism ... the integration of matter and spirit) that Haeckel constructed in which God’s presence is disclosed through every facet of manifested Being/Reality.

Science became the means through which to engage and come to know Divinity.

Haeckel's Monism – as was also true of Nietzsche's work – constituted a rejection of Christianity. It was one of many alternative responses to traditional forms of religion that arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and focused on some form of natural religion or natural philosophy.

Dr. Jung was greatly influenced by Haeckel's idea that human beings not only had a history of biological evolution but, as well, there was a phylogeny of the soul that needed to be taken into consideration. The unconscious – in the form of dreams and fantasies -- was the phenomenological gateway to the residues of that process of phylogeny.

Through the unconscious, Dr. Jung believed that it was possible to gain access to the realm of pagan traditions that existed prior to, or independently of, the rise of Christianity. In fact, Dr. Jung felt that Christianity constituted an obfuscation and distortion of those pagan themes and primordial forces.

A common element in many of the challenges to traditional, organized religion that arose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (e.g., Romantic forms of natural religion, Haeckel's Monism, and Nietzsche's philosophy) involved a quest for fundamental forms of renewal by re-establishing contact with the primordial, archetypal forces of Being/Reality. The ideas of Carl Jung resonated deeply with that sort of quest.

All of the foregoing traditions were seeking sources of spiritual inspiration that were independent of the Christian tradition. According to Richard Noll, one of the primary sources of extra-Christian spiritual inspiration for Dr. Jung were the works of G.R.S. Mead whose writings helped introduce Jung to Hermetic, Gnostic and Mithraic teachings, and, in the process, provided him with considerable material on which to reflect in conjunction with his ideas about the possible roles that archetypes and the collective unconscious might play in the lives of human beings when accessed through the process of active imagination during a person's project of individuation in the second half of life.

By the time that Dr. Jung established the Psychology Club in 1916, he had begun to weave together strands of evolution, heredity, vitalism, Romanticism, ancient pagan religious traditions, mythology, spiritualism,

occultism, Hermetic traditions, and Gnosticism into an integrated method for exploring and interpreting the nature of the relationship through which Dr. Jung believed that individuals were linked to Being/Reality. Jung was convinced that he had put together a system that not only would enable human beings to struggle toward having essential contact with the God/Sun within, but, as well, had devised a means that also offered individuals an opportunity to contact the dead ... indeed, following the founding of the Psychology Club in 1916, he often referred to the collective unconscious as the 'Land of the Dead'.

Eventually, Carl Jung rejected the form of Christianity that he – at least nominally – had accepted during the early part of his life. Among other things, he felt that God was not some transcendent Being as many Protestants considered God to be, but, instead, Dr. Jung felt that God was a palpable mystery that existed at the core of a human being.

Although Carl Jung completed medical training around the turn of the century (1900-1901), and, therefore, was well schooled in many aspects of the science of his day, over the course of his career he moved away from the mechanistic ideas that often dominated the world of science during his lifetime. Instead, he was committed to the idea of vitalism ... that is, a perspective that alluded to an elusive life-principle that could not be reduced to physics and chemistry and which he referred to as "soul".

The sea voyage that took place in 1908 when Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud traveled to America together and analyzed one another's dreams during the journey gave birth to the beginning of an ideological schism between Freud and Jung. Another set of events that began in 1908 also had a deep effect on the ideas and behavior of Dr. Jung, and these events involved his relationship with Otto Gross, a controversial individual from a respected family in Austria.

Gross was an avid promoter of Friedrich Nietzsche's teachings. In addition, politically speaking, he was interested in re-shaping German society and engaged those matters through an allegedly anarchistic perspective ... although anarchism means different things to different people.

Gross also was a physician and psychoanalyst. Initially, Sigmund Freud was quite impressed with the brilliance exhibited by Gross in, among other ways, some of the latter individual's writings on psychoanalysis, but as far

as the advancement and spread of psychoanalysis were concerned, Freud came to see Dr. Gross as being more of a problem than a possible asset.

One reason for Freud's rejection of Gross had to do with the latter's predilection toward – if not craving for -- morphine and cocaine. On a number of occasions, those addictions had landed Dr. Gross in psychiatric facilities – such as the Burghölzli in Zurich, and on one of these stays, Gross was assigned to Dr. Jung as a patient.

When the two individuals met, Dr. Jung was a relatively conservative, middle-class, Christian. Dr. Gross, on the other hand, was not only an addict but, as well, he was an individual who was actively committed to pursuing a licentious life-style ... indeed, he was rather infamous for his ability to persuade people to abandon sexual proprieties and engage in an array of sexual liaisons – including orgies – free from any sense of shame or guilt.

Although Dr. Gross was the client and Dr. Jung was the therapist, the two often switched positions during sessions that lasted twelve hours or more. By the time that Dr. Gross escaped from the hospital in order to re-engage his various addictions, Carl Jung had undergone a rather substantial transformation in perspective.

Prior to interacting with Otto Gross as a patient or client, the philosophy of Nietzsche played a large role in Jung's understanding of things. However, Gross not only was conceptually influenced by Nietzsche but, as well, he was actively engaged in putting those teachings into practice.

Otto Gross induced Carl Jung to abandon his previous commitment to bourgeois, Christian ideas concerning, among other things, sexuality during many, lengthy sessions. As a result, from that point forward, Jung became more licentious in his behavior – a tendency that was active throughout the subsequent years of his life.

During the foregoing transitional period in Jung's life, he had become immersed in the field of mythology. One of the themes that is given prominence in certain approaches to mythology – e.g., the work of Bachofen who was from Basel, Switzerland and promulgated his ideas during the mid-to-late nineteenth century – concerned the idea that early cultures were matriarchal rather than patriarchal in character and in those societies, polygamous arrangements often played a central role. Consequently, the mythology that Jung was engaged in reading at the time

Otto Gross was a patient who was also being reinforced by the tremendous influence that Gross's charismatic and brilliant personality was having on Jung's ideas about, among other things, issues of sexuality and Christianity.

According to Richard Noll, Carl Jung subsequently borrowed elements from Ernst Haeckel's ideas concerning the phylogeny of the soul and combined the latter notion with themes of: Vitalism, Bachofen's matriarchal-based mythology, as well as strands drawn from the Earth Mother cult in order to construct a theory of the unconscious in which the libido undergoes developmental changes. For Jung, the libido – as an eternal life force -- is tied to the presence of gods and is rooted in the collective past of human beings

By organizing his perspective in the foregoing manner, Dr. Jung has created an understanding of the unconscious that is larger than a single individual. Individuals are tied to the Divine and to their collective human past through the unconscious.

Apropos to the foregoing considerations, Dr. Jung interprets the hero myth as giving expression to the holy longing of the individual for the lost mother and most essential reservoir of human existence. The hero represents the unconscious in search of an end to its suffering state of exile from its Source ... a search that carries the hope of a state of rebirth and renewal that supposedly comes through reunion with that Source.

Dr. Noll considers Jungian analytical psychology to be a cult in the sense that it attempts to induce individuals who are seeking their essential selves to come under the influence of a charismatic prophet in the form of Jung, or his acolytes, who – allegedly -- has (have) been initiated into the mysteries of the unconscious. Seekers are taught the technique of introversion or active imagination by the elite group of leaders that allegedly permits seekers to journey into the deepest recesses of the unconscious – the realm of the mothers – commune with the forces that are present there and, then, are assisted by elite leaders to resurface in a redeemed state of renewal and rebirth ... that is, a completed condition of individuation.

However, there is no guarantee of success for the hero. In fact, one of the possibilities is that an individual's libido might be incapable of freeing itself from the realm of the mothers and, in the process, one's sense of self becomes annihilated, resulting in a psychotic state of one kind or another.

Whereas Sigmund Freud envisioned psychoanalysis as a means of analyzing the phenomenological products of biological processes, as well as a means of demonstrating how those products revealed different principles concerning the nature of biological development over the course of life, Carl Jung considered psychoanalysis to be a method for replacing Christianity – at least as generally understood in Protestant Europe – and, thereby, enabled an individual to follow myths back to their Source and, consequently, provided human beings with an opportunity to integrate different aspects of personality, as well as a means through which to experience rebirth and renewal in their souls. When Freud and Jung exchanged letters concerning such matters in 1910, Freud rebuffed Jung, indicating that he (i.e., Freud) was not interested in founding a religion.

After Freud and Jung finally parted ways (approximately 1912-1913) concerning the nature and function of psychoanalysis, Dr. Jung began to publically promote the idea that psychoanalysis – i.e., analytical psychology – offered human beings a form of redemption. However, in order to take advantage of that possibility, people had to rid themselves of their illusions concerning culture and religion.

Neuroses give expression to failed attempts on the part of individuals with respect to the process of individuation. In other words, when people were unsuccessful in their attempts to become integrated, whole human beings, neuroses would arise.

Analytical psychology was Dr. Jung's method for engaging those neuroses and assisting individuals to heal their souls. Analytical psychology was a method that helped people to excavate the material within the unconscious and learn how to differentiate between dross metals and real gold.

In order to succeed in that method, an individual had to be willing to make sacrifices. According to Dr. Jung, among the sacrifices a person needed to make was the discarding of any illusions and delusions one might harbor concerning Christianity and sexual morality.

From a Freudian perspective, Jung's analytical psychology might be considered to be little more than an extensive process of wish fulfillment. In other words, after being deeply affected by Otto Gross's licentious, anarchistic, Nietzschean perspective, Carl Jung wanted to be able to indulge himself sexually but be able to do so in a way that was free of any sense of guilt or shame and, therefore, Jung invented a conceptual framework –

namely, analytical psychology -- that would help him to fulfill his underlying sexual wishes in the desired manner, and he promulgated that system of wish fulfillment to others.

Of course, Dr. Jung didn't just want to indulge his sexual desires. He also wanted to redeem his soul by becoming one with Divinity. Consequently, he proposed the idea that one could become redeemed spiritually by taking an inward journey to the Land of the Dead (or the realm of the mothers) and, in the process, become a hero by making contact with the Divine that is within every human being and, thereby, achieve rebirth by sacrificing one's delusions concerning the nature of Being/Reality.

In 1914, both Dr. Freud and his colleague, Ernest Jones, criticized Jung's foregoing philosophical framework. The foci of their comments were directed toward the issue of narcissism, but, to a certain extent, those comments were made -- both directly and indirectly -- with Jung's God Complex in mind.

Dr. Jung, of course, did not consider himself to be self-indulgent narcissist who had become lost in a God complex of his own making. Instead, he believed himself to be a prophet who was working for the good of humankind by showing it the way to redemption, renewal, rebirth, and self-realization by making contact with the presence of the Divine within every human being through the techniques of analytical psychology.

Was Carl Jung a deluded, narcissistic, self-indulgent egomaniac who had convinced himself that he was a modern-day prophet who had made contact with the Divine? Had Carl Jung become entangled in a gigantic web of sexual wish fulfillment that he sought to justify through his ideas concerning archetypes, the collective unconscious, the shadow, mythology, Romanticism, the soul, Gnosticism, Hermetic teachings, matriarchal traditions, mysticism, spiritualism, as well as völkisch beliefs concerning Teutonic Gods?

Whatever the actual nature of Carl Jung's condition and purposes, he considered his own anomalous experiences, as well as the anomalous experience of others, to constitute evidence that served to substantiate his ideas. His faith in the truth of his perspective was based on that data.

A great deal of Dr. Jung's perspective concerning the idea of the collective unconscious and the supposedly universal nature of his ideas is based on a very small sampling of case studies compiled by Dr. Jung.

Furthermore, and unfortunately, despite Dr. Jung's claims to the contrary, it is often difficult to determine whether, or not, the individuals that were involved in their case studies actually had experienced, for the first time, certain myths and symbols through their own inward journey or whether the experiences of those individuals might have been contaminated by the religious, mystical, spiritualistic, philosophical, theosophical, and mythological ideas that were in the air (culturally, literarily, educationally, and popularly) during the late 1800s as well as during the first several decades of the twentieth century.

In fact, Jung's accounts of his own encounters with the forces of the unconscious might actually just be a function of the process of confabulation. In other words, Dr. Jung had been exposed extensively – with respect to literature, discussions, and lectures – to the idea of mythology, esoteric traditions, Gnosticism, Hermetic traditions, spiritualism, mysticism, Romanticism, vitalism, and so on. Consequently, one can't be sure whether, or not, Dr. Jung's reports concerning his own experiences during his inward journeys weren't the confabulated concoctions of his overly active imagination (and ambitions) ... constructions that he sought to pass off – perhaps in all sincerity – as actual encounters with the primordial realms of the unconscious when, in truth, those contents might only have been the experiences of a person whose seeking was being shaped by what he had read or heard from a variety of other sources. In other words, what Dr. Jung discovered during his inward journeys was nothing other than the unpacking of the hermeneutical baggage that he had brought with him during those journeys and which consisted of ideas, images, symbols, myths, and so on that were derived from material he had read, or conversations he had, or lectures that he attended, or speculations that he had concerning those matters.

After all is said and done, there are several questions that must be addressed in conjunction with the work of Carl Jung. First, one must consider whether, or not, he was sincere in his search for the truth concerning the nature of the relationship between himself and Being/Reality, or whether Dr. Jung's motives in this regard might have been corrupted by his desire to justify his own wish to pursue a licentious lifestyle without feeling guilty or ashamed concerning such behavior.

A second question – and this question is applicable to both [Jungian Vision 1](#) and [Jungian Vision 2](#) that have been outlined in this chapter –

revolves about the issue of whether, or not, Dr. Jung is right or correct with respect to his ideas concerning the nature of the relationship between human beings and Being/Reality. Irrespective of whether one engages Carl Jung through the filters of Vision 1 or Vision 2, if one is searching for the truth concerning the nature of the relationship between human beings and Being/Reality, then one would like to have some sense of whether, or not, the work of Carl Jung can assist one in that quest.

Dr. Jung took a lifetime to develop his ideas, and if one were to dedicate oneself to those ideas, then, one likely might have to spend a lifetime trying to: Explore, confirm (where possible), as well as apply those ideas within the context of one's life. If Carl Jung is right about things, then all would be well and good, but if he is wrong, then, one might waste one's life chasing delusions and illusions.

One term that might be apropos concerning the foregoing possibilities – and many other possibilities as well -- is the notion of caveat emptor. This means that the responsibility for determining the quality of that which one is buying rests with the individual who is doing the buying.

There might be a great deal at stake surrounding the choices one makes during one's search for the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. Scientifically, philosophically, religiously, politically, ethically, and mythologically there are so many candidates to consider, and, yet, the time one has within to which make one's choices is very limited.

Chapter 17: Masks of God – Part I

There are a certain number of commonalities that are shared by the theoretical frameworks of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung. Nevertheless -- and one will have to decide for oneself whether this is for better or worse -- Professor Campbell has introduced his own, unique set of twists to the idea of myth that appear to indicate his position is not merely a derivative of, or variation on, Jungian theory.

Professor Campbell himself indicated that although he held Carl Jung in great esteem, nonetheless, Professor Campbell did not consider himself to be a Jungian. Thus, while he respected Dr. Jung, Professor Campbell did not feel compelled to defer to the latter's theoretical judgments.

Professor Campbell maintained that myths had a metaphysical and ontological reality or significance. Therefore, myths did not merely give expression to a psychological realm of reality or significance.

In fact, Professor Campbell seemed to feel that therapy -- at least of the Jungian variety, and, maybe, other kinds as well -- might only be sought out by those who possessed no myth of their own. In a sense, one might even contend that Professor Campbell believed that the absence of myth in a person's life could have had a causal role to play in the development of various kinds of emotional or psychological problems that created a need for therapeutic assistance of some sort.

There is little doubt that Professor Campbell considered myth to be absolutely essential in the life of an individual. For him, myth was the key to understanding oneself and the nature of reality.

By contrast, Dr. Jung believed that the essential dimension of one's contact with the realm of the unconscious involved therapy rather than myth. Myth was just one means -- along with dreams, art and the active imagination -- that could be used as therapeutic tools to assist individuals to work toward healthy forms of engagement with the realm of archetypes.

Consequently, the role of myths for Dr. Jung was an option or possibility that could be pursued if desirable, but was not essential, or even necessary, to the process of therapy. For Professor Campbell, on the other hand, therapy was not only unnecessary but, as far as he was concerned, constituted clear evidence that there was an absence of myth in an individual's life, and, therefore, he believed that myth, not therapy, was the sine qua non of the human journey toward fulfillment of the self.

Professor Campbell was quite hostile to organized religion. Among other things, he felt that giving emphasis to the authority of the institution over the freedom of the individual placed entirely unnecessary obstacles in the way of those who were seeking to realize the purpose and function of myth in their lives.

According to Professor Campbell, the church, temple, synagogue or mosque did not lead to realization of the self. Myth alone made self-fulfillment possible since in myth one found the only wisdom that really mattered with respect to issues of self-realization and self-fulfillment.

Furthermore, Professor Campbell did not appear to believe any kind of mystical or spiritual practices -- such as chanting, meditation, fasting, or the like -- were required to be used in conjunction with myth in order for an individual to be able to pursue, or benefit from, the treasury of wisdom that allegedly was hidden beneath the surface of myth. If a myth were presented, or introduced, by the right kind of sage who helped one correctly interpret the meaning, significance, value and purpose of a given myth, then, the seeker had everything he or she needed in order to gain access to, and unlock the nature of, the realms of Being/Reality to which myth was calling one.

Dr. Jung tried to discourage people from getting too entangled with individual myths because of, in Jung's opinion, the inability of myths, when considered in isolation from a proper mythology, to help an individual bring to fruition a complete, balanced personality. Professor Campbell, on the other hand, encouraged individuals to give themselves -- mind, heart and soul -- over to, and completely identify with, a myth, because only myth had the capacity to open one to the essential nature of the self.

In some ways, Professor Campbell appeared to feel that humans were, to a degree, hard-wired with a potential for responding to the way myths called us to the realm of enlightenment and self-realization. In fact, he borrowed from the work of Konrad Lorenz and Niko Tinbergen in an attempt to suggest how this might be possible.

Both of those latter researchers spoke about the notion of 'innate releasing mechanisms'. These hypothetical systems were considered to be capable of generating species-specific behaviors when animals in which this mechanism were operative were presented with a particular stimulus capable of triggering the firing of such an innate releasing mechanism.

Sometimes the stimulus that served as the triggering device for the activation of the behavior controlled by an innate releasing mechanism was also innate. For instance, baby chickens will display a stereotypical flight/panic response whenever an object that casts a shadow shaped like a hawk is flown above or over baby chickens ... even if the object in question is not actually a hawk but only hawk-like in shape. Yet, if the shape of some other kind of non-predator, such as a pigeon or duck, is flown over the baby chickens, the same kind of flight/panic response is not elicited.

Apparently, in this foregoing context, there is nothing being learned through experience that shapes either the triggering stimulus or the character of the behavior being manifested through the firing of the innate releasing mechanism that regulates such behavior. The whole stimulus-release/response package is part of the biological equipment inherited by baby chickens.

There are other cases, however, in which a special kind of learning process, known as imprinting, occurs. Apparently, this kind of learning can take place only within a critical period of development that seems to vary with the species and form of learning that is being considered.

Yet, if one operates within the constraints imposed by this critical period for imprinting, one discovers that there appear to be different kinds of stimulus triggering relationships with some of the innate releasing mechanism that are operating within a given species. For instance, under normal conditions, certain relatively young birds exhibit what might be called a 'following response' when exposed to the stimulus of the mother's presence during a critical period for such learning that results in an offspring following the mother wherever she goes.

Nonetheless, if one substitutes a human being for the normal, species-appropriate mother during the critical period in which the imprinting of the 'following response' takes place for that species, then, the young birds will follow only that human being. The stimulus of a human image has been substituted for the stimulus of the species-appropriate mother, and, as a result, the human form – not the mother of the animal -- becomes the stimulus that is linked up with the neural, innate, releasing mechanism responsible for the 'following-response' during the critical period for imprinting such stimulus information.

According to Professor Campbell, human beings also possess, to varying degrees, innate releasing mechanisms within them. Moreover, Professor Campbell believes that humans might undergo an imprinting process in which a

certain kind of stimulus could be hooked up with a particular innate releasing mechanism.

For example, from the perspective of Professor Campbell, the symbols inherent in a given myth might be the stimuli that trigger the firing of some sort of innate releasing mechanism within us. These innate releasing mechanisms are the archetypes, and the behaviors that these archetypes regulate concern all of the emotions and actions that are appropriate to the journey inward to the realization of the self.

Professor Campbell believes that the people who create myths understand the nature of the relationship between the symbols that are implanted in a myth and the character of the underlying archetypes. Therefore, when people encounter the symbols inherent in a myth that has been constructed by someone with knowledge of the self and the unconscious, then, the archetypes within us will automatically release the appropriate sorts of emotions and behavior that are conducive to working toward realizing the unconscious wisdom with which the archetypes are associated and to which they give expression.

The archetypes -- such as birth, old age, the masculine and feminine, suffering, light and dark, as well as a variety of other themes of development and life -- are innate. On the other hand, the symbols in myths that trigger an archetype's capacity to release appropriate kinds of emotion and action can be variable and introduced through experience.

Presumably, different stages of development constitute so many critical periods in our lives. As such, we become open to the possible imprinting of certain forms of experience during different stages in which we become sensitized to the problems, challenges and possibilities of those way stations of development.

According to Professor Campbell, the symbols of myths are specifically designed to tie in with the learning that needs to take place during those critical periods involving themes related to archetypal patterns. Thus, when we encounter a myth, the symbols of the myth resonate both with our lived experience as well as with the underlying archetypes that are relevant to that experience.

A potential problem that is present at this point in the theoretical framework of Professor Campbell has to do with the way his discussion of archetypes is often couched in ambiguity. One is never quite sure whether archetypes are

inherited or acquired since -- from time to time -- he appears to speak in terms that allow for both possibilities.

Yet, if archetypes are acquired anew by each generation, as Professor Campbell sometimes seems to suggest is the case, then, one has difficulty understanding how those archetypes are connected (supposedly by means of some sort of releasing mechanism) to the great wisdom of the unconscious to which archetypes allegedly give expression and to which they are intended to call us back. If archetypes are acquired anew by each generation, one wonders why we should feel compelled, as Campbell insists we must, to consider archetype-driven myths as worthy of giving ourselves over to completely and, thereby, becoming identified with through our minds, hearts, and souls.

If archetypes are acquired anew with each passing generation, a certain amount of confusion is generated. This is because one is unclear as to why one should suppose that myths are completely sufficient unto themselves as the only means of helping a person to obtain self-realization and self-fulfillment.

Professor Campbell's theoretical framework might become much more consistent if archetypes were to remain as givens or constants, while symbols could be acquired anew with each passing generation. From such a perspective, the task of the creators of myth for any given generation, then, would become one of ensuring that the symbolic fertilizer that is distributed around the fecund ground of myths would be able to lead to triggering of archetypal innate releasing mechanisms that, supposedly, govern the emotions and actions that are crucial to an individual's inward journey toward the unconscious.

However, one question that tends to arise in conjunction with the foregoing considerations is the following one. If things are as automatic as Professor Campbell seems to suppose given his discussion of innate releasing mechanisms, then, why aren't more people self-realized and self-fulfilled?

In other words, presumably, when we encounter the symbols that have paired with myths and that have been designed by various sages specifically for the purpose of serving as triggers for the firing of the archetypal innate releasing mechanisms, then such a symbolic encounter should set in motion a series of steps ending with the release of the emotions and actions that are necessary for undertaking the journey inward. Yet, despite the presence of those myths and their wide dissemination through various kinds of mass media, many,

perhaps most, of the people who come into contact with those symbols don't seem to get swept along by a tide of emotions and actions that culminates in a successful completion of a journey of self-realization and self-fulfillment.

All of this seems to suggest several things. First, maybe human beings aren't as hardwired as Professor Campbell would have us believe on the basis of his use of Tinbergen's and Lorenz' notion of innate releasing mechanism in conjunction with archetypes.

Secondly, perhaps the journey inward is not as automatic as Professor Campbell sometimes appears to maintain is the case. Moreover, there might be many factors of experience, personality, and life-circumstances that could interfere with the way, and the extent to which, someone might respond to the symbols inherent in a myth.

In addition, and following from the foregoing considerations, Professor Campbell might be on somewhat shaky and contentious conceptual grounds when he attempts to contend that learning how to properly interpret the symbols of myth through contact with people who are capable of imparting that understanding is sufficient for the process of self-realization and self-fulfillment to occur. After all, Professor Campbell likely considers himself to be a person who understands the proper interpretation of myth, and, yet, despite the guidance he offers to: Students, readers of his books, and viewers of the multi-part PBS television series that delineated his perspective in some detail, many of the individuals who have been exposed to his guidance over a significant period of time haven't necessarily become self-realized and self-fulfilled.

None of the foregoing comments are intended to denigrate Joseph Campbell as a teacher or scholar. He appears to have been quite gifted in both areas.

Nevertheless, one is left wondering about whether, or not, innate releasing mechanisms actually are involved in any of this; and, whether, or not, the journey inward is as automatic as Professor Campbell sometimes seems to suppose; as well as whether, or not, having a correct interpretation, along with rational reflection, are sufficient tools for permitting an individual to successfully complete the inward journey?

Professor Campbell did go on record saying that he considered such things as institutionalized religion to be obstacles that encroached on people's ability to be free to pursue and respond to the teachings of myth. Furthermore, he

advised people to surrender to, and completely identify with, the dynamic of a myth and its potential for leading one to the unconscious and subsequent realization of the self. Conceivably, an individual's failure to heed the foregoing advice prevented people from benefiting from that which myth, and Professor Campbell's interpretation of myth, had to offer.

What does completely surrendering to, and identifying with, a myth involve? Is this just a matter of believing in, and accepting as true, what someone's interpretation claims is the truth concerning such a myth? Or, is something necessary beyond mere belief in, or acceptance of, the interpretation of a myth?

Should one become obsessed with a myth in order to properly identify with it? Should one become fanatical about the myth in order to surrender oneself to it completely?

One suspects that Joseph Campbell might say "No" to both of the foregoing possibilities. Yet, one is not at all clear about what one should be doing that might have some sort of practical or reasonable demeanor to it rather than pursuing myths through a process that has an obsessive or fanatical quality to it.

When Professor Campbell speaks about how the emotions that are released through the symbols associated with a myth supposedly elicit human responses, is this merely a matter of having emotions of a certain level of intensity? And, if so, what level of intensity is this, and why is that level of intensity considered to be appropriate?

Should the emotional intensity be just high enough to help motivate or inspire an individual to carry through in the realm of action? And, if one does not have this level of emotional intensity, then to what is one to attribute the problem?

Is the reason for such an inadequate emotional response due to an improper construction of the myth or an error in the nature of the symbols that were implanted there? Or, does the fault lie wholly with the individual who is encountering the myth? Or, should we consider the possibility that Professor Campbell's description of the nature, potential and power of myth is not what he claims is the case?

Should the myth-pursuing actions in which an individual becomes involved be limited to the sorts of things that Professor Campbell did ... such as reading about, interpreting, and reflecting on myths? Or, was Professor Campbell

mistaken in all of this and, in point of fact, other kinds of actions are required, and, if so, what are those actions?

Moreover, presumably, there were millions of people among Professor Campbell's students, readers, and viewers who felt about organized religion in the same way that Campbell did. Why haven't all these people become self-realized and self-fulfilled ... indeed, if this had been the case, wouldn't we be living in a much different -- presumably much improved -- society than the one we find around us?

For Dr. Jung, the unconscious was always unconscious and remained so even after one's encounters with it. One of the differences between Freud and Jung is that Freud believed a great deal of the contents of the unconscious were filled with repressed materials, whereas Jung considered the unconscious to contain archetypes that had never been conscious and really were not capable of being made conscious ... although those archetypes certainly could shape, direct and modulate the structural character of events transpiring in consciousness.

Professor Campbell, on the other hand, maintained that the unconscious consisted of materials that once had been conscious. However, for reasons he never seemed to make very clear, those unconscious contents were, now, removed from, or lost from, or separated off from our normal modalities of consciousness.

Indeed, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* – which Professor Campbell considered to be his most important work – spends a considerable amount of time exploring the hero's quest in relation to the aforementioned lost dimension of being fully human. According to Professor Campbell, the task of the hero is to reclaim, repossess, or rediscover that which human beings once consciously knew and understood.

In fact, the sages who are responsible for constructing myths are examples of the hero who have regained the lost wisdom. After having completed the first part of the mission, these heroes have set about consciously planting various metaphysical seeds -- in the form of symbols that are in a given myth -- with the intention of inducing others to take the inward journey to the unconscious and, thereby, also make conscious what had been hidden.

According to Professor Campbell, the basic story line in all hero myths is, essentially, the same. As one moves from one culture to the next, whatever differences occur in various hero myths are considered by Professor

Campbell to be relatively unimportant when considered against the backdrop of the basic teachings, purposes, and functions of these myths, and, as such, these differences are part and parcel of Professor Campbell's claim there is only one hero who is manifested in the form of a thousand different faces, both literally and symbolically.

The once and future hero – who, according to Professor Campbell -- is always a male figure – is -- through one means or another -- induced to leave behind the so-called normal world of everyday life and journey to another kind of realm, world, or dimension of being. In this new world, the hero encounters, and is exposed to, all manner of incredible, non-ordinary forces, powers and wonders.

At some point, the hero encounters challenges involving one, or more, facets of this wondrous, mysterious realm. Yet, following a struggle and, eventually, a triumph over that by which this individual is being challenged, the hero returns to the world of everyday, normal life as an enlightened being with gifts to bestow on those who had been left behind at the beginning of the journey.

The wisdom that the hero brings back from the journey is of two broad kinds. First of all, the hero comes to understand there is much more to both the world as well as to being human than the hero previously believed or understood to be possible. Secondly, the individual gains insight into the fundamental or essential nature of the world along with acquiring insight into the essential nature of being human.

According to Professor Campbell, the dimension of essential reality -- whether concerning the world or the individual -- gives expression to both sides of the same metaphysical coin. Within each of us, as well as within the world, a Divine principle is operative that is responsible for the identity and nature of, respectively, human beings and the physical/material world.

The hero returns from his journey with the knowledge that one does not have to travel to some other mysterious realm or world in order to be able to encounter the ultimate animating principle of Divinity. For the enlightened individual, some modality of Divine -- or ultimate -- reality can be experienced in the midst of the material, physical world.

Consequently, as far as gaining access to essential or ultimate reality is concerned, the material/physical world is not the barrier we often are led to

suppose it is. When properly understood, this material world is one of the means through which ultimate reality reveals itself.

Be this as it may, Professor Campbell, nonetheless, indicates that one only is able to come to the foregoing realization after having journeyed to, and gained insight into, the contents of the unconscious. An individual doesn't start with the external world, and, then, through an encounter with the world, that person brings enlightenment to the internal world. Rather, one starts with the internal world, and through engaging the inner world, one gains insight into the real and essential nature of the external world.

To be sure, according to Professor Campbell, a person first comes into contact with the echoes of the ultimate nature of things when that individual hears of, or reads about, the myths in the physical/material world since these myths contain the symbols that are capable of summoning one to the inward journey. However, these symbolic seeds only allude to such a possibility and must be properly interpreted before -- from the perspective of Professor Campbell -- a person can realize the meaning, value and significance of those myths.

During the hero's journey inward to the unconscious realms of the mind, the individual must face, and triumph over, the personal ego of the everyday, normal world. After this transformation has taken place, then the individual surfaces again with a new sense of self that is described as being egoless.

Professor Campbell considers the personal ego to be the source of all delusions, distortions, desires and problems to which human beings are vulnerable. Only by becoming removed, or detached, from one's sense of a personal ego did Professor Campbell believe the individual might be able to obtain ultimate enlightenment and, consequently, gain insight into the true nature of the self and the world.

By arguing in the foregoing fashion, Professor Campbell aligns himself with the perspective of certain aspects of Eastern religious traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. He tended to express, at least up to a certain transitional point in his thinking, a great deal of admiration for the manner in which the foregoing spiritual traditions gave emphasis to the issue of being egoless.

For the early Campbell, there was no individual as such. All that existed was the one essential, ultimate principle of Divinity ... a principle that was clothed in the guise of a thousand different outer faces of the hero.

This brings us to, yet, another essential difference between not only the orientations of Professor Campbell and Dr. Jung, but as well between Professor Campbell and almost all of modern psychotherapy. More specifically, one of the primary functions of psychotherapeutic intervention is to restore the individual to a state of healthy, ego functioning and consciousness.

For Professor Campbell, this goal was an oxymoron. Since the ego was the source of all our problems, then, by restoring the individual to ego consciousness, one could not possibly hope to assist a person to become psychologically or mythically healthy.

According to Professor Campbell, true health is rooted in the egoless self of an enlightened individual. Therapy, of whatever sort, could not accomplish this.

The process of enlightenment is to be achieved only through myth. This is the reason why Professor Campbell considered myth to be indispensable to the life of human beings since without myth Professor Campbell believed the individual had no access to: Ultimate nature, identity, the essential self, or fulfillment.

The foregoing considerations are also related to Professor Campbell's firm belief (at least prior to his trip to India) that modern civilization really has no contribution to make that is capable of adding to, or improving upon, the insights of ancient wisdom. Since the fundamental insight of that wisdom concerns understanding why the condition of being without an ego is to be preferred to living in the prison that is created by the ego, then, as far as Professor Campbell is concerned, all modern peoples can, and should, do is to agree with that wisdom and set about realizing its truth.

The hero of myth and real life is considered to be a hero for several reasons. On the one hand, the hero is prepared to engage in a hazardous, difficult journey or quest that most others in normal society are not prepared to undertake.

In addition, the motivations underlying the hero's quest are selfless ones. The hero wishes to share the wisdom with all of humanity.

According to Professor Campbell, the hero is tempted to remain in the new world of enlightenment. Apparently, there exists within the hero an inclination to completely surrender to this essential reality and, in the process, avoid having to be confronted with the duties and obligations that exist with respect to living amidst unenlightened individuals.

Consequently, the final stage of the hero's journey is to disengage the self from the new world to which he has traveled. This is not easy since the hero has begun to feel that he has finally arrived at his real home in the universe.

There are quite a few facets of Professor Campbell's excursion into the realm of the hero myth that entail problems of one kind or another. First of all, a lot of his analysis appears to involve considerable 20/20 hindsight.

For example, how does the hero know before the fact of the journey that it is going to be hazardous or difficult? For all we know, the guy has wanderlust or is bored and, therefore, is looking for some kind of excitement or stimulation.

In many, if not most, ways, the hero has no real conception of what he is going to encounter or find. As a result, one has difficulty understanding how to construe the foregoing quest as being the stuff of heroism.

Secondly, since the so-called hero doesn't know what lies in store for him, he (or she) hardly can be said to be undertaking the journey for the benefit of the rest of humanity. If anything, the quality of heroism only arises after the individual is confronted by the desire to stay in the new world, and, consequently, he has to struggle to overcome this latter inclination in order to return to the normal world and share his wisdom with the rest of his fellow human beings.

Moreover, once the individual returns to the everyday, normal world, he, supposedly, realizes the principle of Divinity is active in the normal world. Therefore, in reality, the individual has lost nothing by returning to the normal world since he brings the new world with him back to the so-called 'normal' world in the form of his enlightened condition.

This raises several other problems. If the individual truly had become enlightened in the new world to which he had journeyed, why didn't he understand that nothing would be lost by returning to the normal, everyday world from which he originally had set out?

Just as importantly, one wonders what 'desire' -- in the form of wanting to stay in the new world -- is doing in a, supposedly, egoless individual. If the individual were detached from everything, would this not include desire in all its hydra-headed modes of being?

Similarly, why would a, now, egoless individual, who allegedly had set out originally with the heroic intention of benefiting humanity, wish to avoid the responsibilities and obligations inherent in the normal world? If anything, one

might suppose the egoless individual is in a better position to carry out those duties without having to try to do so through the problematic qualities of selfishness, egotism, greed, and other debilitating manifestations of a personal ego.

Furthermore, until one reaches the fourth book of his *The Masks of God* series -- namely, *Creative Mythology* -- Professor Campbell consistently criticizes western individualism while, simultaneously, being an advocate for the egoless communalism to which he believes eastern traditions give expression. Yet, when considered from Professor Campbell's perspective, the qualities of a true individual have carried the day.

Someone who already is enlightened does not go on a journey seeking some missing aspect of being human. Such an individual would realize, as part of the wisdom of the condition of enlightenment, that there really is no other truth or missing element to discover since the enlightened state is described as being complete unto itself.

Moreover, one might suppose that someone who is egoless might not have to struggle with human weakness, ignorance, fear and desire. One assumes this battle already would have been won during the journey to an egoless condition and constitutes one of many benefits that ensue from enlightenment.

Presumably, the egoless being has no sense of sacrificing anything since what is most precious is carried within this individual. This would be true, even if, in contrast to Professor Campbell's hero, the normal world to which such a being returned were devoid of the principle of Divinity.

Ignorance, desire, and delusions are all qualities of the individual prior to enlightenment. However, so are the qualities of courage, struggle, and self-sacrifice that are necessary equipment for the difficult journey to become egoless.

A person starts out with little or no understanding of the meaning, significance, value or possibilities inherent in the journey inward, and, as a result, one cannot really call this kind of journey heroic. The nobility and integrity of heroism only begin to surface when the individual starts to encounter danger and difficulty on the journey and does not turn back, and when, in spite of that danger and difficulty, the individual sees, however dimly, the potential benefit -- that is by no means assured -- for oneself and all of humanity that is possible if one is prepared to struggle on and sacrifice oneself during a journey of hardships and hazards.

Furthermore, the enlightened person knows that people, in general, probably will not be inclined to undertake the journey toward realized selfhood after the hero has returned from successful completion of the quest, any more than they might have undertaken such a quest prior to his journey. The enlightened individual also might realize that each individual has to decide for oneself whether to respond to the symbols of the myth and/or the entreaties of the returned hero in order to step into the unknown and undertake the trip for himself or herself.

If anything, one might assume that since the hero knows the normal condition of human beings, he returns to the everyday world in order to serve as, among other things, a beacon of compassion, justice, love, and service ... not only for all of humanity but for all of being, whether animate or not. If people will not, or cannot, undertake the journey to self-realization, the enlightened individual owes a duty of care to them as a result of, among other things, the hero's recognition of the gratitude he feels for having had enlightenment bestowed on his being.

Nevertheless, while attending to the needs of humanity and creation, the enlightened person still might search for those individuals who could be induced to undertake the journey of discovery. If, and when, those individuals are located, the enlightened individual would attempt to encourage, assist and support that engagement of myth in whatever way is possible.

Professor Campbell maintains that the meaning of the hero myth is about the process of reclaiming or rediscovering the realm of the unconscious. Yet, nonetheless, one is not entirely clear that recovery of the unconscious is the actual goal of the hero's project of rediscovery.

The individual might find enlightenment, the self, identity and the true nature of the world after completing the journey of realization, but these are not necessarily found in something called the unconscious. The journey can be nowhere but from Divinity to Divinity ... the only difference being that at the end of the journey one understands this, whereas at the beginning of the journey one does not possess that insight.

People like Professor Campbell and Carl Jung appear to use the term: 'the unconscious', as a conceptual placeholder that is used for purposes of having something to which they can make reference when they are talking about the journey to selfhood ... in whatever way the foregoing journey might be conceived. In reality, however, the notion of the unconscious actually gives expression to everything about which they were ignorant and toward which

their efforts were expended in trying to probe the inner nature of that mystery.

When Professor Campbell visited India in 1954, he was completely revolted by, and disgusted with, what he observed there. In addition to the oppressiveness of the omnipresent poverty and caste system in India, Professor Campbell was horrified by what he considered to be that society's lack of respect for the individual.

Apparently, Professor Campbell had been so ensconced in the rarefied and idealized world of books, he didn't seem to have much awareness of what was going on around him in the everyday world. Why he should have been shocked by what he found in India is itself somewhat startling given that the history of the world almost everywhere, and pretty much most of the time, is replete with deep-rooted poverty, oppression, of one sort or another, and, as well, a rampant disregard for the rights and sovereignty of individuals.

This was so even in the America of the mid-1950s. Professor Campbell, seemingly, hadn't bothered to take a look at what was going on around him in those days in relation to Native peoples, blacks, women and other groups of impoverished and/or disenfranchised people living in America.

Whatever Professor Campbell might have written in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, his response to the plight of people in India hardly seemed to be that of an enlightened person who understood that the Divine principle was present in the material/physical world and was operating in accordance with its own essential reality rather than the expectations of Joseph Campbell. Presumably, the enlightened person might have understood that poverty, oppression and disregard for the individual are the inevitable result of the activities and understanding of people who were still very much attached to their personal egos.

Rather than permit those conditions to revolt and disgust him, he should have seen them as evidence in support of everything to which he was making reference in his books concerning the difference between realized and unrealized human beings and, consequently, why there was a desperate need for the hero's quest. Rather than running away horrified and disgusted, he should have exercised some compassion and tried to bring about changes, however small, with respect to those conditions.

Unlike Dr. Jung, who seemed to be prepared to risk himself by venturing forth emotionally and psychologically into what were, for him, uncharted territories,

Professor Campbell never actually took the journey into the unknown to meet, face to face, the tremendous forces that are present in the unknown. He was a brilliant scholar, but never appeared to be prepared, except in a broad conceptual manner, to follow in the footsteps of the hero about whom he spoke in such glowing and admiring terms in many of his books.

Carl Jung's works has the ring of an authentic explorer who, on the basis of personal experience, is trying – whether successfully or not -- to map out the new frontier. The fact he might have misunderstood some of what he saw or encountered doesn't detract from the boldness, courageousness, and even, at times, the remarkable insight of his efforts.

Professor Campbell's works, on the other hand, seem more like so many travel-logs in which the author is writing about places that are the subject of stories spun by other people who might have visited those locations but places to which the author has never traveled. The descriptions in these travel-logs might, or might not, be correct, depending on the accuracy of the original accounts on which they are based, but they are purely secondhand and not rooted in direct experience.

Reflecting on those stories, exotic places and courageous travelers can never be used as a substitute for the actual experiences that are derived from an authentic journey. Yet, in essence, Professor Campbell seems to be trying to argue that thinking about doing these things is the same as having done them.

Many people might be attracted to Professor Campbell's teachings because he appears to be offering something that we all desire. We want a way to become enlightened and self-realized that is purely conceptual and which can be accomplished without much struggle or any real sacrifice on our parts.

We want to be transformed, but we also are afraid of changing. We become intimidated by, and are afraid of, anything that promises real, essential sacrifice in our lives.

We claim to long to be egoless. Yet, at the same time, we desperately are hoping we can bring our ego along with us and that we won't be asked to check it at the threshold to enlightenment.

Irrespective of whatever other reservations one might have concerning the perspective of Carl Jung, one of the differences between Dr. Jung and Professor Campbell seems to be the healthy respect that Jung had for the complexity of forces at work in the unknown realms in which he was interested. Although there can be little doubt Professor Campbell had great respect for the wisdom

that he believed could be obtained by venturing into the unknown worlds beneath the surface of myth, Professor Campbell appears to have had less appreciation for the possible complexity of Being/Reality than appeared to be the case in relation to Dr. Jung.

Dr. Jung never believed the forces inherent in the world of archetypes could be tamed. Moreover, he believed there were dimensions that were transcendent to even the world of archetypes ... a world that he believed was itself beyond human abilities to master or comprehend.

Professor Campbell, on the other hand, often seems to give the impression that the hero is one who conquers and tames the forces encountered during the inward journey. While this might be true as far as one's struggle with one's own personal ego is concerned, the same cannot be said with respect to the principle of Divinity that is realized during the egoless state.

This principle of Divinity is not something that one masters or tames. In fact, one might be more accurate if one were to contend that the principle of Divinity is what enabled one to master and tame the unruliness and rebellious ignorance of the personal ego.

The hero's victory has been won while venturing forth in an unknown world. Yet, the victory is really over the enemy – that is, the personal ego – that the hero had brought with him from the everyday world into the realm of the new world.

Nothing of the new world has been tamed or conquered. The hero is a hero for facing himself and choosing Divinity over his own ego, even though, when all of this is looked at from the egoless side of things, then, perhaps, this decision process might be considered to be something of a no-brainer.

Professor Campbell calls on us to surrender completely to the forces of the new world. Carl Jung, however, advises caution.

Of course, Dr. Jung is warning us in to be cautious because he feels the ego must be protected from identifying too deeply with the realm of archetypes and, as a result, running the risk of the dissolution of identity and healthy ego functioning. Nevertheless, Dr. Jung also is warning us to be cautious because he knows, based on personal experience, that an individual is capable of being misled, confused and destroyed by some of the forces associated with the world of archetypes.

In a sense, Dr. Jung is counseling us to look before we leap, and if we do leap, we should take care not to leap too far. Professor Campbell, on the other

hand, seems to be advising us that in the context of responding to the symbols of myth, then, he who hesitates is lost, and, moreover, there is no such thing as leaping too far.

Dr. Jung's counsel is rooted in actual experience. Professor Campbell's advice seems to be based on little more than armchair musings concerning those issues.

Consequently, Dr. Jung's cautionary note is nuanced in a way that only comes from the benefit of lived experience, while Professor Campbell's theoretical encouragement lacks the modulating quality that is derived from having seen, in a direct fashion, that there are aspects of the journey, or facets of the forces encountered on this quest, that are quite independent of the ego, yet, nonetheless, are capable of leading one away from the condition of enlightenment. In other words, there might be good reasons why one ought not give oneself over to, or surrender to, certain forces and dimensions encountered during the inward journey in an indiscriminate fashion.

Not only does one's relationship with the external world have a potential for generating illusion and delusion, one's relationship with the internal world has the same sort of problematic potential as well. As a result, one would be well advised to exercise some degree of discretion before surrendering to the forces, powers and wonders that one runs into during one's journey.

The foregoing considerations lead to further questions concerning the perspective of Professor Campbell. These questions revolve about what appears to me to be an inconsistency in his view of the status of the world.

Sometimes, one finds Professor Campbell talking about the worthless nature of the normal, everyday world. At other times, he characterizes the 'normal' world as, ultimately, not being essentially different from the reality the enlightened hero discovers in the new world to which the hero has journeyed during his quest.

Surely, in all of this, the real nature of the world remains constant. What varies is the person's relationship to, and understanding of, that world's nature.

The everyday world is not what is worthless. What is worthless are our attitudes toward, and our ways of interacting with, that world.

Our ignorance – that is, our condition of being unenlightened – creates the illusion of a worthless world. Therefore, part of the wisdom that the returning hero has to share with humanity concerns the way in which human beings have

been inclined to devalue the true nature of the world due to the faulty understandings they are imposing on that world.

Thus, Professor Campbell might have been right to criticize, among others, Dr. Jung when those individuals sought to get their clients to hold on to ego-consciousness and to strengthen the role of the ego in everyday functioning. Yet, Dr. Jung might have been right – although, perhaps, for the wrong reasons – to treat the everyday world as real rather than illusory or worthless as Professor Campbell sometimes seems inclined to do ... at least prior to the fourth book of *The Masks of God*.

On the other hand, Professor Campbell might have been right to argue that the principle of Divinity is actively present in the everyday world. The nearest which Dr. Jung comes to any of this – and this is not really near at all – is when he acknowledges the possibility that the individual might project archetypal elements from the realm of the collective unconscious onto different facets of the external world.

Nonetheless, one of Professor Campbell's conceptual shortcomings could be that he didn't necessarily understand what he was saying. Indeed, perhaps a major reason for that misunderstanding is because his theory appears to have been uninformed by actual mystical or spiritual experiences.

In any event, one finds some signs of the inconsistent status of the world within Professor Campbell's framework when one reflects, a little, on his reaction to his experiences in India. If Campbell really understood what he was saying about the true nature of the world, then, as indicated previously, he would have put his trip to India in proper perspective.

When people devalue the true nature of the world, they automatically are prepared to devalue the people who live in that world. Furthermore, when people devalue their own true nature and, as a result, become entangled in the machinations of their personal egos, then those individuals also are likely to be inclined to devalue the true nature of both the world as well as the true nature of other human beings.

Furthermore, professing to believe in the teachings of a religious or spiritual tradition is not the same thing as sincerely living in accordance with those teachings. Professor Campbell, however, often seems to feel the realm of mere belief will somehow guarantee the realization and implementation of what is being professed.

When Professor Campbell went to India and saw that true, sincere action did not necessarily follow from belief, perhaps he was shaken concerning his own understanding of things. After all, if everything worked the way his theory claimed it did, then, Professor Campbell might have questioned why oppressive, impoverished and individual-devaluing conditions were possible in a land that, supposedly, was the origin for the notion of egoless enlightenment that played such an important role in his book: *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*.

Seemingly, those experiences would have had some very problematic implications for his teachings. If he wished to continue to maintain that all one needed in order to gain access to enlightenment was to obtain, with the help of a sage, a true interpretation of the symbols inherent in a myth, then, how does Professor Campbell explain the social conditions he discovered in India ... a country where there was a wealth of symbol-laden mythic material, as well as, presumably, the sages that were necessary to provide correct interpretations of, and guidance concerning, the significance, meaning and value of that material?

His time in India proved to him that a basic operating principle of his theoretical approach to myth was contra-indicated by actual experience. Ironically, rather than understand the symbolic significance of his experiences in India, Campbell seemed to hold the East's teachings at fault rather than consider the possibility that the individuals with personal egos were the ones who had the responsibility for taking up the quest of the hero and, then, after having successfully completed the inward journey, would proceed – hopefully – to live in accordance with the holistic understanding brought forth through the condition of enlightenment.

According to Professor Campbell, the supposedly ultimate significance of the hero myth was the oneness of reality. On the one hand, enlightenment joined the visible and invisible worlds together and considered them to be different aspects of one and the same active principle of Divinity. Moreover, self-realization provided the insight that fused the world of consciousness with the unconscious realms and demonstrated them to be so many expressions of the same underlying reality.

Yet, ostensibly, Professor Campbell was not able to reconcile the facts he learned on his trip to India with the principle of unity that he alleged to be at the heart of the meaning of the hero myth. This left him with a huge theoretical problem, since if the hero myths were not about the unity of being -- as his trip

to India seemed to lead him to believe might be the case -- what did the hero myth mean?

There is a dimension in the teachings of Professor Campbell that is not necessarily present in Dr. Jung's theoretical framework. More specifically, for Professor Campbell, symbols do not just have a psychological meaning -- as is, by and large, the case for Dr. Jung -- but, as well, symbols also have a metaphysical and ontological meaning for Professor Campbell.

Professor Campbell is not interested in just putting forth a correct theory of the nature of myth. Campbell believes his theory of myth correctly reflects the structural character of the reality or ontology of the universe and human beings.

Therefore, symbols are rooted in something more than the realm of psychology. Symbols are rooted in ontology as well.

In this respect, one of the major theoretical problems confronting Professor Campbell is the following one. How can he demonstrate that his experiences in India are consistent with a theory of myth that, apparently, Professor Campbell believes does not, cannot, or should not, allow for the sort of social conditions that he had witnessed during his trip to India? Indeed, if Campbell had not recognized the presence of the foregoing problem, then one might hypothesize that he would not have responded in as negative a fashion as he did following his trip there.

As far as psychological symbolism is concerned, Professor Campbell can continue to construe the meaning of the hero myth, along with other varieties of myth, as being one of unity. However, he seemed to have difficulty continuing to do this with respect to the meaning of the metaphysical or ontological symbolism that, supposedly, was inherent in myth.

Whereas prior to his trip to India, he had tended to heap scorn upon both the idea of individuality as well as the Western way of life that encouraged it, nonetheless, after that trip, Professor Campbell -- at least in his private conversations -- had begun to extol the virtues of individuality. Yet, this apparent transition in his feelings and attitudes was not reflected in his writings.

For example, during the first three volumes of *The Masks of God* -- which were published about a decade, or more, after his trip -- he not only continued to champion the Eastern model in which the individual seeks to realize her or his essential unity with the cosmos and the Divine principle that animates the

cosmos, Professor Campbell also continued to castigate the West for its childish preoccupations with the self-centered world of individuality.

Up until the fourth volume of *The Masks of God* series, Professor Campbell was able to give the public impression that there was a theoretical consistency that was present throughout his previous writings. He accomplished the foregoing form of image management by propounding a psychological interpretation concerning the significance of all myths, in general, and the hero myth, in particular.

In other words, Professor Campbell appeared to still believe that the psychological meaning of myths was, and continued to be, the underlying unity of all of reality. Nonetheless, beginning in 1954 (following his trip to India), the role of individuality became the heart and soul of the human condition, and, therefore assumed more importance in his thinking than did the idea of becoming egoless.

Professor Campbell's *Creative Mythology* book in *The Masks of God* series introduced a major shift in the ontological side of his theory that he never adequately explained. In this final book of *The Masks of God* series, the character of the hero changed in certain fundamental respects and departed significantly from the Eastern model of the hero that Professor Campbell had been psychologically, but not ontologically, championing since his return from India.

In point of fact, the *Creative Mythology* book in the aforementioned series of volumes provided Professor Campbell with an opportunity to heal an ontological wound that had been festering for the thirteen or fourteen years that had passed between his trip to India and the publication of the fourth book of *The Masks of God*. One might even speculate that the four-book series could have been undertaken by Professor Campbell with the implicit intention of providing a progressive, if not evolutionary, understanding of his conceptual transition from, on the one hand, primitive, oriental and occidental traditions of myth, to, on the other hand, the modern world in which creative individuals, rather than mystic sages, were responsible for generating new myths capable of calling people to discover the wisdom of the unconscious.

In doing so, the nature of: Modern wisdom, the modern meaning of unity, and the character of the modern hero would have changed considerably from that of the other three kinds of myth-driven cultures that had been explored in the first three books of *The Masks of God*. Nevertheless, at the same time, an ontological dimension would have been re-introduced into the theoretical

framework that could have permitted Professor Campbell to not only forget, if he wished, about his experiences in India, but actually could have validated those experiences as necessarily pointing in the direction of the importance of the individual over that of an oppressive, marginalizing and impoverished communalism of the ancient worlds, whether primitive, oriental, or occidental in nature.

In the context of Professor Campbell's conception of modern myth, wisdom is no longer a matter of the Divine enlightenment and concomitant self-realization that becomes possible through an egoless individual. From the perspective of the modern myth, wisdom becomes the province of those individuals who can create the kind of symbols and myths that are capable of engaging the emotions, understandings, and actions of modern humans and, thereby, induce us to explore and realize all of the life-potentialities that are within us but which, up to this point in our lives, have not been reclaimed from the unconscious.

The ontological unity proposed by the modern creator of myths is that of becoming reintegrated with our psychological and biological nature and, among other things, the inherent capacity of this nature for loving others. The love being referred to by Professor Campbell is neither the libidinous desire of Eros, nor the brotherly/sisterly love of agape, but the courtly form of love – amour – that he considers to be a dynamic combination of both Eros and agape and, yet, also involves something more.

For Professor Campbell, amour is to be considered an end in itself. In addition, Campbell believes, amour ennobles, if not redeems, individual character through its qualities of courage, temperance, courtesy, loyalty, aesthetic sensitivities, conscience, as well as conscientiousness.

In the mythic worlds of 'Primitives', 'Orientals' and 'Occidentals' (the focus, respectively, of the first three books of *The Masks of God* series of volumes), the journey toward the death of the ego – and, therefore, the death of that which drives the individual excesses that are responsible for introducing a variety of problems into the world – is the path to enlightenment. However, in the modern world of creative mythology, one's willingness to risk physical death -- which is the price one often must pay for realizing, and acting on, amour -- becomes the path to enlightenment.

According to Professor Campbell, amour brings a balance to life that combines properties of other-worldliness and this-worldliness. As such, amour is said to allow one to realize the immanence of the Divine in the physical/material

world because those who have surrendered to this dimension of their life-potential come to understand the true nature of both themselves and the world, not as a function of what some institution, like the Church, assumes one should be, but as a function of what we are in reality.

Consequently, Professor Campbell believes, and/or affirms, the value and reality of the physical world in a way that is absent from, if not denied by, the other kinds of mythic world that are explored in the first three books of *The Masks of God*. Accordingly, in the realm of creative mythology, one finds enlightenment and self-fulfillment by undertaking one's journey in the material world rather than by traveling to some other non-material realm.

The hero of the modern myth is no longer the one who goes to a wondrous, mysterious world and gains the sort of Divine enlightenment that permits the hero to become absorbed into the whole and, in the process, reveals that the everyday world to be worthless and illusory. According to Professor Campbell, the hero of the modern myth is the artist, the creator and the innovator who strives for individual attainment and is willing to believe in the authenticity and legitimacy of her or his own, unique experiences and understandings, rather than in the arguments of authority issued from religious, political, or cultural institutions.

The individuality and originality of the modern hero are contrasted with the inflexibility and conformity of the three other mythic worlds. The modern hero is a liberator who is seeking to place faith in oneself and one's own creative understanding of personal experience, in order to fill the vacuum left by, according to Professor Campbell, the failing and oppressive orthodoxies of the primitive, oriental and occidental worlds to which individuals were subordinated previously.

By the end of *Creative Mythology*, Professor Campbell believes he has returned to, and restored to prominence, all of the most important themes of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* such as: Universality, the mystical, selfless sacrifice, and a hazardous or dangerous journey inward. In reality, however, Professor Campbell might only have succeeded to resurrect and entrench the very same personal ego that the aforementioned book (i.e., *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*) had counseled human beings to eliminate from their lives.

In effect, Professor Campbell might have universalized the false self at the expense of the true self. Moreover, the selflessness that Campbell believes he has introduced into the realm of creative mythology might be nothing more than the delusions of the false self as it attempts to rationalize what are the largely self-serving, selfish, and self-centered activities of the ego.

Amour is the ego manifesting itself through a new mask. Amour is the ego with a thousand faces.

Moreover, by drawing attention to the realm of magical enchantment that is an important theme in his notion of creative mythology, Professor Campbell feels he has revitalized myth with the mystical dimension that was present in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Unfortunately, he apparently fails to understand that there is a huge difference between the mystical and the magical and, as such, the two realms do not necessarily have anything to do with one another.

The magical covers a spectrum of possibilities. At one end of this spectrum are all of the strange, weird, mysterious, phantasmal creations of poets, novelists, artists and musicians that invite the audience to explore all manner of possibilities that can be constructed through the magical nature of conceptual, experiential, and emotional combinatorics.

At the other end of the spectrum of the magical are the tricks and illusions of those who today are passed off as magicians. However, this end of the spectrum also includes those individuals who actually have the capacity to draw upon a realm of reality in which there are certain, limited powers capable of generating non-ordinary physical phenomena.

Mysticism has nothing to do with the magical in any of the foregoing senses. Mysticism is now, and always has been, concerned with helping the individual to know one's essential relatedness to Divinity, as well as to realize one's unique capacity to give expression to that essential relatedness.

Mysticism is not about the phantasmal or conceptual exploration of that which is alluring, inexplicable or mysterious in some phenomenological sense. Mysticism is not about magical powers or the creation of illusions or the learning of tricks.

Mysticism beckons us to our essential nature and identity. For those willing to undertake the mystical journey and stay with it until the end of the line, mysticism offers the possibility of being able to come as close as human beings are capable of understanding with respect to the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

Professor Campbell tries to contend that the hero of creative mythology is someone who, like the main focus of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, undertakes a journey of self-discovery and self-realization involving various kinds of hazard. For instance, by resisting the authority of religious and political

institutions, the modern hero opens himself or herself up to the possibility of encountering different kinds of danger -- physical, emotional, financial, and social – that are created by the forces to which the creative individual stands in opposition.

Apparently, Professor Campbell has forgotten that in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the individual who undertook the inward journey encountered no greater danger than his own ignorance, selfishness and oppressiveness. Indeed, the dictatorship of the ego or false self is far more elusive, tricky, ruthless, and difficult to overcome than is any external dictatorship.

Furthermore, acts of defiance, per se, do not guarantee that either truth or justice is being served through such resistance. Defiance becomes a heroic act only when truth and justice are being served in the context of: furthering the essential interests of the individual, family, community, and all of creation.

All too frequently, defiance is an act of the ego or false self. More often than not, rebellion is merely a sign of the ego looking after its limited, non-essential, vested interests, and that rebellion is directed against those who are doing likewise but who have the advantage of being in power.

Among other things, one of the characteristics of the false self is to attribute to itself what, in reality, does not belong to it. In the mythic world of the modern hero, the artist considers herself or himself to be the creator, and, yet, the artist has absolutely no idea of: Where her or his creations come from, or how they come into being, or what they really mean.

All the false self knows is that it was present, in some fashion, when the creative or innovative impulse came. Like a country that flies its flag over unknown, but desirable, territory, or like a squatter who lays claim to property simply because the individual is too lazy to make the effort necessary to discover whether there is another person who owns the property being claimed, the false self grabs hold of the products of creativity as if they were its very own possessions.

In *Creative Mythology* Campbell has constructed a framework that, ostensibly, meets all the criteria that he considers to be characteristics of a modern hero. Explicitly, he admires the writings of Thomas Mann and James Joyce, as well as *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach and *Tristan* by Gottfried von Strasburg.

Implicitly, however, Professor Campbell might be admiring himself, because, like these other modern heroes, he has succeeded in creating, and

giving expression to, the myth of the modern hero as the consummate individualist. The modern hero is someone who thinks for oneself on the basis of one's own evaluation and authentication of one's experience and, as a result, such an individual is willing to stand up to, and defy, the authority of the institutions that seeks to prevent the free exercise of that individuality.

The modern hero is one who is prepared to explore the depths of amour against all opposition to such a project, and this modern hero is, if necessary, even ready to risk physical death in order to live in accordance with amour. In reality, the modern hero – due to an inversion of the direction of transformation undergone by the hero of a thousand faces – is willing to exchange the infinite domain of Divine wisdom for the limited domain of purely human experience, and, then, the modern hero feels duty-bound to proselytize this inversion through the creation of myths that attempt to justify the foregoing sort of exchange as being a good bargain.

Consequently, in Professor Campbell's book: *Creative Mythology*, the whole character of metaphysics and ontology changes from what had been the case in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In modern metaphysics, the Divine principle – which, for the hero-of-old, animated and unified the individual and the cosmos – has been supplanted by, if not sacrificed to, the anthropomorphic principle in which everything becomes a function of, and reduced to, the modern hero's interpretive ignorance and arrogance concerning: Divinity, the nature of the universe, and the essential character of the human being.

Everything created by the modern hero might carry the signature of individual uniqueness. Yet, there is no guarantee that any of this creative uniqueness reflects aspects of reality or truth beyond the existential reality of the individual's own description and interpretation of his or her experience.

In the modern myth, truth becomes a tautology in which conclusions concerning reality merely reflect the assumptions of the creator of a given myth. Ontology becomes a function of the biases and prejudices that color such creative understanding ... biases and prejudices that give expression to the limited, but endlessly changing, horizons of conceptual and emotional moods of human beings.

This creative process might lead to a correct or accurate rendering of individual perceptions. However, there is nothing necessitating that such

perceptions constitute an accurate or correct reflection of what the ultimate or essential nature of the cosmos or the human being entails.

Instead of aspiring to the infinite heights to which an egoless enlightenment and absorption in Divinity invites us, the modern hero insists on not only on individualistic separation from Divinity, but wishes to limit the Divine to what we create in our own image within very finite psychological, emotional, sensory and material realms. Whereas the hero of a thousand faces found Self-sufficiency through being unified with the Divine principle, the ego of a thousand faces finds self-sufficiency through its own creative musings.

In *Creative Mythology*, Professor Campbell does retain many of the general themes of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, but he does so at a great cost. He has jettisoned the substantive heart, soul and spirit of the latter work merely to save the appearances of an outer, superficial, and theoretical consistency in thought concerning the psychological and ontological meaning of myth and its symbols.

Chapter 18: Masks of God – Part II

During the first book of *The Masks of God* – a volume that deals with primitive mythology – Professor Campbell goes through what appears to involve some rather intricate conceptual contortions. More specifically, on the one hand, hunter and planter societies are respectively distinguished by their patriarchal and matriarchal orientations, and, yet, on the other hand, those same two societies also are considered by Professor Campbell to be masked expressions of one another since they both, purportedly, are rooted -- each in its own way -- in beliefs of mystical union, immortality and self-sacrifice.

However, the meaning of: Mystical union, immortality, and self-sacrifice in each of the foregoing two sorts of societies might not give expression to the same sort of understanding. Consequently, the first book of *The Masks of God* -- which Professor Campbell contends gives expression to an alleged similarity between matriarchal and patriarchal societies -- might actually disguise a fundamentally different approach to themes of existence that constitute a reflection of the divergent values of matriarchal and patriarchal societies.

One of the central motifs throughout the four books of *The Masks of God* is that despite the differences in the story lines in primitive, oriental, occidental and creative mythology, underlying them all is a belief in, or an acceptance of, the mystical oneness of all things. Although there might be a general sense in which Professor Campbell's foregoing contention could be quite correct, nonetheless, his arguments in that respect also are quite misleading because one is talking about very different ideas concerning theories on, and conceptions of, just what the nature of the mystical is, or what sacrifice involves, or what immortality entails.

Freud, Jung and Campbell all talked about the unconscious, so one can say, correctly, that underlying all of their theories is a belief in the unconscious. Yet, all three of those individuals are engaged in very, very different kinds of hermeneutical activities with respect to the uses to which they put the notion of the unconscious.

Consequently, just as one is not necessarily saying anything very interesting or important when one suggests that the foregoing three individuals are bound together by their common interest in the unconscious, so, too, one might not be saying very much that is useful when one argues -- as Professor Campbell does -- that all forms of mythology are, at heart, or in essence, about the mystical oneness of every manner of being. If anything, one is

obscuring the fact that these various modalities of mythology (e.g., primitive, oriental, occidental and creative) actually are giving expression to competing theories of symbolism, metaphysics, and ontology.

Matriarchy and patriarchy are not disguised versions of one another unless one can demonstrate that matriarchy and patriarchy, ultimately, are describing, explaining, and engaging reality in, more or less, the same way. To that end, Professor Campbell does not seem to put forth a very plausible case.

Such competing mythologies are not so much a matter of various masks that give differing expression to the same underlying Divine reality. Rather, they are conceptual glass slippers in search of some ontological foot capable of snuggling nicely into the structural parameters of the proffered wearing apparel.

Furthermore, which, if any, of the foregoing slippers constitutes a proper fit with respect to Being/Reality into which human beings are trying to slip various modalities of mythology is a separate issue? Consequently, not only are we unsure whether, or not, the respective mythologies are being offered to the correct ontological counterpart to the fair Cinderella -- rather than her ugly stepsisters -- we are not even sure whether, or not, the slipper might merely be a figment of our imagination with no ontological referent to which it actually applies.

Interestingly enough, in the book on Oriental mythology, there are certain places in that work in which Professor Campbell seems to wander away from the idea of trying to treat matriarchy and patriarchy as disguised or masked versions of one another. Instead, he suggests there is a fundamental dichotomy between, on the one hand, those peoples -- such as in the East -- who advocate the unity of the human and the Divine, and, on the other hand, those peoples -- such as in the West -- who tend to insist on a separation between the human and the Divine.

Professor Campbell argues that this essential psychological and metaphysical orientation concerning the issue of accepting or rejecting distinctions between the human and the Divine is a fundamental shaping factor in the structural character of the mythology that arises out of any given people. He believes all other distinctions and differences, including those between matriarchy and patriarchy, are secondary to, and derivative from, this inclination to make, or reject, distinctions involving the human and the Divine.

What Professor Campbell does not seem to make clear is why, on the one hand, there should be an inclination in cultures influenced by patriarchy to accept distinctions concerning the human and the Divine, whereas, on the one hand, amongst those peoples that are considered to be under the sway of matriarchy, there supposedly exists a tendency to reject those distinctions. One possible explanation concerning the foregoing issue is that, somehow, the original decision concerning the acceptance or rejection of distinctions between the Divine and the human is, perhaps, biologically driven, but, if this were the case, then this doesn't necessarily explain why some men would be willing to accept a matriarchal orientation or why some women would be willing to accept a patriarchal orientation.

Another possibility is that the original decision to accept or reject the aforementioned distinctions was purely a matter of metaphysical preference concerning what various people believed to be the true character of ontology or reality. As such, the further choice of patriarchy or matriarchy could have been a function of considering which of the two underlying metaphysical possibilities was most conducive to supporting a certain kind of psychological and social life-style ... i.e., patriarchy or matriarchy.

If the latter possibility were the case, then each kind of psychological/social orientation would have gravitated toward the metaphysical system that best reflected its way of looking at, or responding to, the themes of existence. Yet, once again, there is still the problem of why some men would be inclined to matriarchy or why some women would be inclined to patriarchy.

Of course, one could make everything a matter of the socialization process that occurs in the kind of community into which one happens to be born. However, such a possibility would not necessarily account for how either matriarchy or patriarchy came into being in the first place.

If, as many believe is the case, planter societies tend to exhibit qualities of matriarchy, whereas hunter societies tend to be characterized by properties of patriarchy, then, the values of matriarchy and patriarchy don't necessarily reflect biology so much as they might reflect the social arrangements that, to some extent, are forced upon a people by the contingencies associated with survival. On the other hand, there does not necessarily appear to be anything that is inherently contradictory about having a 'patriarchal planting society' or a 'matriarchal hunter society', so, once again, we face the problem of origins in relation to matriarchy and patriarchy and why different people become influenced by those orientations.

Another possibility is that the entire discussion involving the allegedly qualitative differences between matriarchy and patriarchy might actually give expression to a false dichotomy. Maybe, neither of these orientations – i.e., patriarchy or matriarchy -- is good or bad in and of themselves, but, instead, perhaps we need to take a look at whether an individual or society is approaching patriarchy and matriarchy through the essential, spiritual self, or the false, worldly self.

For example, traditionally -- possibly stemming from Bachofen's work -- there are often various stereotypic qualities associated with matriarchy and patriarchy. More specifically, among other things, the values of matriarchy are said to involve: Egalitarianism; selfless immersion in a greater whole -- both cosmically and socially; sharing; peacefulness; a sense of changelessness or timelessness; as well as an awareness of, and cooperation with, the cycles of nature, while the values of patriarchy are said to consist of: Religious, family, and social arrangements that are hierarchical in nature; ambition; self-centeredness; a lack of respect for, and a tendency to disrupt, the cycles of nature; a sense of temporality, along with a concomitant notion of progress, and, finally, a proclivity for activity and fighting.

Spiritually speaking, what the foregoing arrays of values actually mean might depend on whether they are being interpreted through the eye of our true, essential selves or through the eye of our false, constructed selves. As such, the aforementioned listed qualities could have a potential for being either assets to, and expressions of, realization of the true self, or these same values could be antithetical to that sort of realization and, therefore, would be an ally for the pursuits and interests of the false self.

Consider, for example, the matriarchal quality or value involving a sense of changelessness. Viewed from the perspective of the true self, this quality might reflect the constancy of eternal spiritual verities concerning what, in essence, we are and what our relationship with the rest of being is. Yet, considered from the perspective of the false self, changelessness becomes a function of dogma, inertia, self-satisfaction, rigidity, and resistance to necessary changes in our lives.

On the other hand, if we take a similar look at the value or quality in patriarchy that might be considered to be the corresponding counterpart to matriarchal changelessness -- namely, activity or, perhaps, change -- we could arrive at the following perspective. More specifically, from the vantage point of the true self, change becomes the medium of transformation through which we

overcome our tendencies to remain entangled in the world and, by this means, move toward the realization of our spiritual potential. Alternatively, from the perspective of the false self, change becomes the means of serving the desires, whims and interests of our worldly inclinations.

Let's run another set of corresponding matriarchal and patriarchal values or qualities through the filters of the hermeneutical lens that is being suggested here. For example, a good test case might involve taking a look at the egalitarianism/hierarchy pairing.

Viewed from the perspective of the true, spiritual self, the matriarchal value of egalitarianism reflects a belief in the essential equality and oneness of all people -- if not of all being -- as constituting so many manifestations of the Universal Soul. Considered in this way, everything has a sacred dimension to it and must be accorded an appropriate modality of etiquette or moral consideration that is in concert with any given thing's reflection of, and role in, the cosmic scheme of universal being.

When, however, one looks at the idea of equality from the orientation of the false self, then this value assumes an aura of relativism in which all ideas, values, beliefs, goals, purposes, desires and agendas are, more or less, the same. If things are considered from that viewpoint, then one has no right or basis to make any distinctions about the superiority of some points of view over that of others ... indeed, the perspective of the false self is judged to be as legitimate as the perspective of the so-called true self.

Another possibility in the aforementioned regard is that when the notion of egalitarianism is engaged through the false self, all individuality must be extinguished or denied as contrary to the alleged priority of the collective spirit over that of the individual. This is one of the ideas that horrified Professor Campbell and against which he sought to rebel following his journey to India.

On the one hand, hierarchy, as viewed by the true self, is a recognition and acceptance of the fact that, among other things, there is a difference between illusion and reality, and there is also a difference between truth and falsehood. On the other hand, there is an understanding that we did not create ourselves nor our abilities, but, rather, these were gifts bestowed upon us through a Ground of Being that has, at the very least, ontological priority over us.

Engaged from the foregoing perspective, life gives expression to an opportunity to participate in, and come to realize our rootedness in, that Ground (i.e., Being/Reality) through the largesse of that Ground and not through any virtue of our own independent of that Ground. There is a logical and ontological priority possessed by that Ground that we do not have and, as such, whatever sense of hierarchy that might exist derives from that metaphysical fact.

Humans are the ones who are caught up in illusion, not the Ground. The Ground has merely made illusion a possibility, like a spider spinning a web in preparation for the possibility of the hapless victim who makes a bad life-choice.

From such a viewpoint, human beings are the ones who have to struggle to make the journey inward in order to realize our essential oneness with Reality or Divinity. Divinity already knows what we have not yet come to understand.

The foregoing several points attest to nothing except the following. On a certain level, and from a certain perspective, there might be a need for human beings to acknowledge the possibility that legitimate, hierarchical distinctions can be drawn between the One Who makes our origin possible and, as a result, human beings are the originated and the ones who must struggle to dispel the illusions generated through the agency of the false self.

Nevertheless, to appreciate the nature and significance of metaphysical hierarchical relationships in the foregoing sense does not, in and of itself, automatically preclude the possibility of speaking about our essential identity with, and rootedness in, Divine reality. The issue need not be restricted to an either/or choice but could involve a much more complex arrangement than the logic of the sort of choices outlined earlier permits one to consider.

Viewed from the perspective of the false self, hierarchy tends to be colored by that self's presumed, but unverifiable and unjustifiable, right to dictate to others concerning the nature of metaphysical, social, political, cultural, family and personal relationships. In such a case, the false self arrogates to itself the role of Divinity and, consequently, is inclined to invert what might be the true metaphysical order of things.

If one explores the allegedly contrary pairings of matriarchy's supposed tendency to cooperate with the cycles of nature versus patriarchy's so-called

inclination to ignore, if not disrupt, the cycles of nature, then, one also can treat that pairing in a way that is consistent with the foregoing analysis. In other words, once again, one might argue that whatever differences one believes might distinguish matriarchy and patriarchy, those differences are not a function of either matriarchy or patriarchy, per se, but are a function of the nature of the self -- i.e., whether in the form of the 'true' or 'false' self -- through which individuals or communities engages these pairings.

Thus, when the notion of cooperation with the cycles of nature is approached through the understanding of the true self, the individual recognizes that one has a duty of care to live in harmony with the manner by which the Truth or Reality underlying nature is being manifested through, or reflected in, the principles and laws and etiquette inherent in the structural character of nature. To neglect or deny these duties of care is done at one's own peril.

At the same time, one cannot suppose that the cycles of nature are restricted merely to the physical, material and biological world. There might be various psychological, emotional and spiritual cycles of nature to which one owes continuous duties of care as well.

On the other hand, although the false self might also recognize the existence of a duty of care to the cycles of nature, these cycles would be filtered through the desires, whims, interests, goals, purposes and fantasies of the nature of the false self. As far as the false self is concerned, all other cycles of nature have value only as a function of the manner in which they can be made subservient to the cycles and rhythms of the false self.

Moreover, the false self might be quite prepared to acknowledge the existence of, and live in harmony with, the cycles of nature, but this appreciation is restricted to biological, material and/or intellectual considerations. This sort of cooperation is a function of the false self's desire for a healthy, sustainable existence as well as a desire for the continuation of the sort of high quality of life that sound ecological surroundings might make possible.

The notion of a disruption of the cycles of nature -- which is said, by some, to be stereotypically characteristic of the patriarchal orientation toward existence -- also can be viewed in terms of its potential for either constructive or destructive ramifications. As before, the difference is a matter of which self -- the true or the false -- is in control of the situation.

When the true self considers the nature of the false self, then, spiritually speaking, the individual has an obligation to disrupt the cycles of nature

operating through that false self. One does not have a duty of care to live in harmony with the false self, but, rather, one has a duty of care to oppose and resist the inherent tendencies of the false self to wreck havoc on, and exploit, all other cycles of nature.

Furthermore, the rest of nature does not have any more priority over us than we have priority over it -- except, in the latter case, to the extent we have been given the spiritual capacity, and concomitant duty of care, to minister to the needs of the cycles of nature and, therefore, establish harmonious relationships with, and through, Being/Reality. Just as Being/Reality serves us, so too, we must serve Being/Reality and help to keep things as balanced as possible across all cycles of nature.

In one sense there always will be a certain tendency of various aspects of nature to encroach upon the lives of human beings, just as there is a reciprocal tendency of human beings to encroach upon the different facets of nature. Our job -- and this is a duty of care that nature is not obligated to observe except, perhaps, through Divine permission -- is to do justice in maintaining a proper (that is, spiritual balance) between the foregoing two modalities of encroachment.

One also could consider disrupting the cycles of nature from the perspective of the false self. This self does not think twice about its absolute, automatic, and completely presumed right to interfere with, and disrupt, nature in any way it chooses and for whatever reasons it desires.

The false self recognizes no duties of care with respect to the cycles of nature. Instead, nature must be subdued and made to serve the goals, purposes and projects of the false self.

Finally, let's take a look at the pairing of the values of selflessness and self-centeredness that are said to reflect, respectively, qualities of matriarchy and patriarchy. As before, the issue is not straightforward.

Engaged through the understanding of the true self, selflessness gives expression to the desire for, and realization of, a disappearance of the pettiness, greed, anger, lust, jealousy, hostility, pride, envy, desires, and insensitivity of the false self. As if obeying some spiritual version of a Pauli-like exclusion principle, the false self and the true self cannot simultaneously occupy the same realm of consciousness, and, consequently, one dimension of the true self is to work toward the dissolution of the false self's reign over the affairs of the individual.

With the ascendancy of the true self, comes the understanding that only the real Self, or Divinity, has the right to say 'I'. The condition of selflessness is an acknowledgment of that Reality.

Yet, in the hands of the false self, selflessness becomes a denial of both the Divine Self as well as the capacity of one's own true, essential, spiritual identity to reflect and, in a sense, be aware of and know the nature of that Divine Self. Moreover, since the false self acknowledges no essential reality, the endlessly changing states, moods, desires, whims, goals, purposes, interpretations, beliefs, values, motivations and interests of the false self all give expression to a selflessness that is the exact opposite of the sort of selflessness that is sought after spiritually.

If one considers the quality of self-centeredness, that is thought, by some, to be a feature of patriarchy, then from the perspective of the true self, such a quality merely points to a basic truth concerning our metaphysical nature. If we are to function properly and harmoniously with respect to the nature of Being/Reality, then: The ecology, our communities, families, and ourselves – everything -- must be centered on the Self of Divinity that is reflected, to varying degrees, in our own true selves.

The foregoing sort of Self-centeredness, is, of course, very different from the self-centeredness that is characteristic of the false self. The latter is deserving of our condemnation and needs to be opposed.

So, if the foregoing way of engaging things (i.e., in terms of the true and false self) is correct with respect to its analysis of various quality pairings that are associated -- at least in the minds of some individuals -- with matriarchy and patriarchy, then a person might be moving in a problematic direction if he or she tries to use the matriarchy/patriarchy axis as a framework for analyzing metaphysical, social, political, cultural or educational issues. The deeper -- and heuristically more valuable -- framework concerns the dichotomy between the false self and the true self and, depending on how one chooses to proceed, the potential impact that the false self or the true self might have on one's understanding concerning a variety of issues involving: History, economics, science, political science, education, law, and so on.

Both matriarchy and patriarchy have multiple dimensions for accommodating either the false self or the true self. To label some perspective as patriarchal or matriarchal is not enough to understand what is going on.

One must see which dimension -- the true self or the false self -- is operative. When one has done this, the qualities or values associated with matriarchy and patriarchy might begin to make more sense as far as being able to identify the character of the dynamics being given expression through those values or qualities is concerned.

The foregoing analytical framework also allows one -- if one likes -- to dispense with Dr. Jung's idea that part of one's psychological or spiritual task is to try to balance masculine and feminine components within us. Rather, the true self of both women and men entails a variety of capacities, dimensions, and facets that are able to be active relative to certain levels of reality while, simultaneously, being receptive relative to other levels of reality.

The issue no longer would be a matter of: When, or under what circumstances, we should exercise our masculine or feminine sides, nor would one necessarily even have to struggle with trying to understand what is meant, metaphysically, by masculinity or femininity. Instead, for both women and men, the task becomes a matter of knowing when, and in what way, to be in a properly spiritual active mode -- as a function of the true self -- and when, as well as how, to be in a spiritually appropriate receptive condition (also as a function of the true self).

During one section of *Occidental Mythology* (Book III of the *Masks of God* series), Professor Campbell makes reference to a Biblical passage concerning God's creation of males and females in the image of Divinity. Professor Campbell deduces from those verses that God is both male and female.

Professor Campbell, consequently, considers Divinity to be androgynous in nature. Subsequently in *Occidental Mythology*, Professor Campbell maintains that androgyny is actually an alternative form of matriarchy.

One possible difficulty with the foregoing perspective is that Professor Campbell never seems to consider the possibility that there might be a difference between Divinity and the image of Divinity. For example, just as one would not consider the image in a mirror to be the same as the reality that is being reflected, so too, one cannot necessarily suppose that Divinity and the image of Divinity are necessarily the same, although, obviously, in each case there is a relationship between image -- or reflection -- and reality.

Some mystical traditions distinguish between Divine Essence and Divine manifestations such that although the former makes the latter possible, nonetheless, one cannot use the structural character of the manifestations as a

basis for drawing conclusions about the nature of Essence, except in a very limited sense. According to this perspective, manifestations don't say anything about Essence, per se, except that the latter has the capacity to bring these sorts of manifestation forth.

Therefore, for example, from the fact there are male and female forms in the realm of manifestation, one is not necessarily justified in concluding that the nature of Divine Essence also is male and female in character. All one really can say is that Divine Essence has the capacity to generate those differential forms.

From the foregoing perspective, the precise nature of the relationship between manifestation and Essence remains a mystery even though, quite clearly, the two are related since manifestation would not exist if not for Essence. Nevertheless, Essence would continue to be Essence even if manifestation never saw the light of day.

We know about Divinity only by means of what is revealed through our experiential relationships with manifestation. In other words, we attribute certain qualities to Divinity on the basis of the kinds of relationship that seem to be given expression through manifestation.

We say, for instance, Divinity is compassionate, loving, aware, forgiving, kind, merciful, patient, just, wrathful, generous, independent, imminent, transcendent, knowing, rich, and so on, because we believe we have experienced these relationships ourselves, or we are told about them through the experiences of others. If we speak collectively, then the foregoing attributions constitute a conceptual image we have of Divinity.

In various books of sacred scriptures or revelation, God also is said to speak about a spectrum of attributive qualities associated with Divinity that describe different dimensions of the relationship between, on the one hand, creation in general -- or human beings in particular -- and, on the other hand, Divinity. If one accepts those books as Divinely given, then, Divinity is describing Divinity for the purposes of disclosing to human beings certain dimensions of the relationship between manifestation and Divinity.

For instance, Divinity is pointing to Itself as the Source for That which is responsible for, among other things, the creating, originating, and generating of the manifestations that assume variable forms or modalities of expression in the realm of phenomenal Being. As such, the connection between Divine Essence and creation is described in terms of the context of the

Divine attributes that establish the parameters of human existence and that have been made possible by Essence. In other words, Divinity is not describing Essence per se, so much as Divinity is describing what Essence can do, and has done, in the realm of phenomenal manifestation.

When God is said to speak of creating human beings in the image of Divinity in the foregoing scriptures – and, we are presuming, for the sake of argument, that those scriptures are revealed in some sense – then, this might only mean that human beings come forth as a function of the attributes or capacities that God has exercised in order to relate Essence and manifestation. Just as the conceptual image that human beings have of Divinity is based on their understanding of the character of the complex network of attributive relationships that they believe links Divinity and humanity, so too, in a similar fashion, one might say that some of the images of possibility made possible by Essence are given expression through what God discloses about Divinity by means of books of revelation, prophetic missions, the teachings of saints, veridical dreams, together with certain kinds of mystical or spiritual experience, that concern the spectrum of qualitative attributes through which Essence links creation to Divinity.

If the foregoing were true, then there might be a double sense to the notion of human beings having been created in the image of Divinity. On the one hand, our origins arise out of, by means of, and through the expression of, an array of Divine attributes or capacities.

Here the emphasis – with respect to the phrase of: “being created in the image of God” -- is being given to ‘in’. Our origins are in the Divine image formed by the dynamic of the attributes that God uses to bring forth the phenomenal manifestations of Being/Reality.

On the other hand, and in conjunction with the nature of our created origins, we have within us all the Divine attributes that Essence uses to link manifestation to Essence. Here, the emphasis is being given to the structural character of human potential as an image that reflects the Divine attributes being used to give expression to the manifested nature of a human being.

Furthermore, when the image that human beings have of Divine attributes matches or reflects the actual character of the image of ‘attributive-Divinity’ that the Divine Essence has disclosed through revelation, prophets, saints, dreams and spiritual experiences, then, the two images reflect one another. Mystics have said that when one understands the reality of these reflective images, one comes to realize the essential nature of being human.

Maleness and femaleness are qualities rooted in the attributive relationships God uses to link Essence and human beings. As such, these qualities reflect properties involving the realm of Divine attributes or capacities rather than properties of Essence.

There are males and females because Essence has the capacity of establishing these qualities within the context of the Divine exercise of attributive capacities through which manifestation makes its appearance. Therefore, in point of fact, on the basis of manifested qualities, one can say nothing about the actual nature of Essence except that Essence gives evidence in the realm of created being of having the capacity to bring forth manifestation with the variable qualitative forms, properties, attributes and so on which are characteristic, in the present case, of females and males.

For many years, there have been certain individuals who would like to reduce mysticism to being some sort of emergent property of brain or mental functioning. In other words, techniques involving chanting, meditation, breathing, contemplation, fasting, focusing, various methods of mind control, self-hypnosis, use of imagery, different kinds of body-energy systems, sensory deprivation, and so on, are often recommended, or undertaken, for the purposes of altering brain chemistry; and/or, brain electrical activity; and/or, alleged right brain/left brain lateralization capabilities; and/or the flow of certain kinds of energy through the brain.

Unfortunately, some, if not many, of the foregoing individuals -- both among the ones who recommended, as well as among the ones who do the undertaking of those practices -- confuse the notions of correlation and causation. They tend to assume that whatever changes might come about on various levels of brain activity, then, this means that those changes are necessarily the primary target of the techniques that are being used.

Furthermore, those people tend to assume that any altered states of consciousness that arise in conjunction with the use of those techniques serve as evidence that altered states of consciousness are a function of altered brain activity. Apparently, many people never stop to consider the following possibility: Whatever changes in brain activity that occur -- subsequent to implementation of one, or more, of the foregoing kinds of technique -- those changes not only might be just a residual, peripheral, or secondary effect of those techniques, but that, as well, those changes in brain activity do not necessarily

cause those altered states but, at best, might only be correlated with those changes.

A further problem here is due to a failure, on the part of some people, to differentiate between techniques whose effects might be limited to the realm of the brain or the mind and techniques that entail dimensions of the individual extending beyond, or transcending the spheres of influence of either the body, the brain, or the mind. Unfortunately, just as many people want to attribute everything to the unconscious without any appreciation of the nature of either the unconscious or the reality of that which is being attributed to the realm of the unconscious, so, too, many people want to restrict mysticism to the realm of the brain or the mind, despite the absence of any real understanding of what either the mind or mysticism actually involve.

This tendency to psychologize mysticism has led to a great deal of misunderstanding and confusion concerning the nature of not only the mystical path but also the nature of the human being as well. Although the discipline of trans-personal psychology might have broadened the horizons of the traditional approaches to psychology, at the same time, this discipline is trying to appropriate or incorporate a reality -- namely, mysticism -- that might have very little to do with psychology, brain, or mind -- however these might be construed -- except to the extent there might be a trickle-down effect ensuing from mystical practices and realization that help orient various aspects of brain or mind functioning.

Presumably, one of the reasons for conflating the mystical and the psychological concerns a variety of modern ideas concerning the alleged source and character of consciousness or awareness. For example, many people want to make consciousness a function of, or expression of, the activities of the brain or mind and, therefore, these individuals tend to believe any change in awareness is necessarily tied to brain or mental activity.

Apparently, those individuals have not considered the possibility that awareness or consciousness might be a phenomenon that is quite separate from mental or brain activity or that brain activity participates in consciousness only according to the nature of the brain's capacity to do so ... and the nature and extent of such a capacity is presently unknown. Altered states of consciousness or processes of consciousness-raising are not so much a matter of a change in consciousness as they are transformations in the manner through which the dimension of consciousness is engaged.

When we come under the sphere of influence of different modalities for accessing various dimensions of the quality or attribute of consciousness, the nature of our phenomenology changes. Consciousness, nevertheless, remains what it always was and is.

Considered from the foregoing perspective, the idea of mindfulness is really a misnomer. The appropriate term would be 'aware-fullness', and focusing the capacities of the mind provides only one modality of aware-fullness.

The mystical path involves, among other things, a journey to, and through, various realms of aware-fullness. Each kind of aware-fullness gives expression to a qualitatively different kind of engagement of, and understanding of, the nature of the relationship between Divinity and the human being.

The image of Divinity should not be restricted to -- or only made to be a function of -- mental, neurological, or conceptual activity. In fact the mystical realm encompasses a complex array of different modalities of aware-fullness, each of which engages the nature of Divinity in an entirely different, but complementary, manner.

The mind, the heart, the spirit, together with other kinds of interior modalities of aware-fullness, all must be realized in an appropriate fashion in order to have an image of Divinity that is able to accurately reflect some of the potential of Divinity that is being given expression through the Divine attributes or capacities -- when collectively considered -- that generate, shape, modulate, control, color, and orient different realms and levels of manifested Being or Reality. In addition, eventually the foregoing modalities of aware-fullness occur in the context of one's true self or true self-identity -- such that when the individual becomes Self-realized, that person comes to understand there is only one real Self Who is engaging the multiplicity of attributes being given expression through the image of manifested Divinity in accordance with the unique, reflections of as many different modalities of, and capacities for, aware-fullness as there are human beings, irrespective of whether these individuals are realized or not.

Conceivably, whether or not human beings become self-realized might not make any difference as far as the purpose is concerned for which manifestations were brought into being and given expression. All conditions of aware-fullness through which Essence and manifestations are related are unique in the manner in which they engage and reflect a potential of Divinity, and if

this were the case, then there is nothing that human beings could do that would undermine the spectrum or array of modalities and capacities of aware-fullness being exhibited.

From the human side of things, nonetheless, the issue of self-realization makes all the difference in the universe. We can spend our existence stuck in some limiting, incomplete, and, therefore, distorted and illusory modality of aware-fullness -- such as a purely material or sensory or biological or conceptual condition -- or we can spend our existence struggling toward, and God willing, realizing the full extent of the human potential for uniquely reflecting the image of Divinity, made manifest through Essence, by seeking to have all our spiritual modalities for aware-fullness brought on line.

Divinity provides the metaphysical opportunity and sets the ontological stage through which the human drama is to unfold. We make our choices concerning the kinds of aware-fullness and extent of our spiritual capacities that are to be realized.

The goal is not so much a matter of raising consciousness, but to change the character of the kind of internal modalities for engaging awareness concerning the Self to which we have access, and, therefore, both to alter, as well as to complete, the ways in which the Self is engaged, experienced, known, and so on. Becoming aware of awareness -- that is, becoming mindful -- might not be enough because the Self is much, much more -- indeed, perhaps, infinitely more -- than either awareness of awareness or the mind ... although, naturally, that awareness and the mind are partial expressions of what is made possible through the Being/Reality of the Self.

A number of years ago, a neurologist by the name of John Lorber did some experimental work in England involving hydrocephaly. This condition arises when, for whatever reason, the flow of cerebral-spinal fluid is blocked in such a way that the fluid begins to become trapped in one or more of the ventricles or cavities within the brain.

Generally speaking, if the cerebral-spinal fluid accumulates in the ventricles of the brain, it begins to exert pressure in an outward direction toward the skull. Eventually, if allowed to continue, the brain literally gets squeezed almost out of existence and, as a result, becomes compressed to just a few millimeters, or so, in size, around the inside of the skull.

Usually, the end result of this process is a severe form of irreversible retardation known as hydrocephaly. Lorber, however, stumbled onto what appeared to be some exceptions to the foregoing general rule.

After running some brain scans in conjunction with a number of his patients that had been diagnosed with hydrocephaly, he found that the brains of some of his patients had been compressed, as one would expect, to an extremely thin layer along certain interior portions of the skull. Yet, amazingly, these patients were not severely retarded but were fully functioning, intelligent human beings ... and at least one of whom had obtained an honors degree in mathematics from Cambridge.

This might have meant one of two things. Either having a brain gets in the way of doing mathematics -- which might be why so many of us have difficulty with mathematics -- or one might not need a brain to exhibit intelligence. (There was an article published in the prestigious journal *Science* about John Lorber's work on hydrocephaly. The article raised the question of whether, or not, human beings need a brain to think.)

No one knows why it should be the case that some people, who exist more or less without a brain, are severely retarded, while other individuals, who appear to be in the same condition, are not similarly retarded. Some people have speculated the difference might be a matter of how quickly or slowly damage to the brain occurs, and as a result, if the damage accrues slowly, rather than quickly, then, there might an opportunity for some sort of transfer of effective functioning to what remains of the brain that might not be possible when a relatively quick compression of brain matter takes place.

Whatever the explanation turns out to be, one has difficulty looking at the significance of brain functioning in the same way after learning about Lorber's findings. Indeed, the relationship between, on the one hand, intelligence and consciousness, and, on the other hand, neurotransmitter chemistry, neuronal functioning, and brain electrical activity, might not be quite as clear-cut as some psychologists and neurophysiologists would have us suppose is the case.

In addition, in the light of Lorber's findings, one might have trouble trying to argue that consciousness is an emergent property that arises from the activity of billions of neurons and/or their synaptic connections. When most of these synaptic pathways have been destroyed and when neuronal functioning has been severely disrupted, if not entirely compromised, and, yet, nonetheless, consciousness or awareness remains intact, at least in the

case of some people with the condition of hydrocephaly, then, the idea of treating consciousness as an emergent property of a certain level of complexity in brain activity seems to lose much of its appeal, if not, logical force.

Just as there is a tendency among some individuals to reduce the realm of the mystical to being a function of brain activity, so too, there is a very strong parallel trend to isolate or remove various practices from their original, spiritual and mystical environments. Quite frequently, individuals seem to have no sense of the ecological character of spirituality or mysticism, and, as a result, they seem to suppose they can venture into a variety of different mystical ecologies and extract different practices from those ecologies and transfer them as techniques back to a completely artificial and rationally fabricated ecology of modern mysticism.

Many years ago Jacques Ellul had warned -- although not necessarily in the context of mysticism -- about the tendency of modern, technological societies to try to make a technique of everything, or reduce everything to technique. In the process, individuals who are exposed to, and become entangled with, this world of techniques, and its concomitant thinking, become impoverished in a variety of ways because the humanity of these individuals becomes limited to, and a function of, the logic of machines.

According to Ellul, when human beings come under the sphere of influence of technique, then this influence adversely affects our political, economic, educational, and social forms of organization. This same sort of thinking seems to become increasingly evident in a great deal of modern literature and movements dealing with altered states of consciousness, mysticism, spirituality, trans-personal psychology, and the so-called expansion of consciousness.

Inherent in the logic of machines is the idea one can substitute, in an endless fashion, machine parts without adversely affecting the functioning of the machine in which the substitutions are made. Also inherent in the logic of machines is the idea that one can cannibalize machines as required and take from those machines whatever one likes and use the parts in another context and for other purposes than was the case with the machine or machines from which the parts were cannibalized.

The logic of machines involves the belief one can move machines anywhere, and they will operate in the same fashion as they did in the original setting with, at most, only minor adjustments having to be made. The logic of machines has little regard for the subtleties, richness and complexities of ecology.

Today, we find all manner of so-called psycho-technologies that purport to have the ability to deliver us to self-realization, wholeness, ultimate reality and so on. Many people report having derived benefit, insights and intense kinds of experience through the techniques that are employed by those psycho-technologies.

What the foregoing individuals might not understand is that deriving benefits, gaining insights, or having experiences is not necessarily the same thing as realizing the true nature of our identity or activating all of the potential of our essential capacities for the different spiritual modalities of aware-fullness. If one does not know who or what or why one is, and if one has not realized the full spiritual potential of the human being, how can one assign a meaning to the significance of the benefits, insights or experiences that have accrued to one through following some set of techniques?

When one has had a powerful insight or experience, all one can say is that it was unlike anything one has had previously. Where those insights or experiences actually weigh-in when measured by the exacting standards of the grand scale of Reality or Divinity is a question that ought to be asked but often is not.

Instead, many individuals often tend to treat the foregoing sorts of powerful, never-before-encountered experiences, or insights, as if they are all that Being/Reality has to offer. Such people often seem to assume -- following the use of the techniques associated with a given psycho-technology -- that, surely, there couldn't possibly be any more than what has been experienced or understood, or thought to be experienced or understood.

For years now, the field of biological ecology has steadily been revealing the damage that human beings do to the environment by applying all manner of techniques to our physical/living surroundings without having any understanding of what we are doing or without any appreciation of the nature of the destructive effects that will be entailed by what we do. Truly, we are those who need to be forgiven, for we know not what we do to, among other realities, the ecologies of the Earth and the residents of these ecologies ... including ourselves.

What many individuals do not appear to consider is the possibility that in the realm of spiritual ecology, things might be even more complex, subtle, rich, and interconnected than they are on the level of material/biological manifestations and phenomena. Yet, people are so preoccupied with technique

and psycho-technologies, they fail to understand the damage they are doing to themselves and their surroundings.

In legal circles there is a well-known saying to the effect that the non-lawyer who tries to serve as his or her own counsel in matters of law has a fool for a client. Similarly, in the realm of mysticism, anyone who tries to serve as her or his own spiritual guide has a seriously deluded idiot for a disciple.

In fact, one of the most important ecological principles of the spiritual realm is to find a guide who is an accomplished and realized veteran of the territory into which one wishes to venture and who will be able to help one avoid harming oneself or doing damage to other aspects of that ecology. This is considerably easier to say than to do since there are a lot of counterfeit guides who are running about here and there in many parts of the world.

The ecological character of the guide herself or himself is underlined by the following point. Spiritual techniques by themselves have an extremely limited efficacy, and can have detrimental ramifications, unless done in the context of a sincere and loving relationship of reciprocity between guide and the spiritual seeker.

Among other things, the guide is sort of a catalytic agent with respect to the kind of impact that various practices have upon the individual. As is the case in biochemistry or chemistry in which reactions either would not take place at all, or would do so extremely slowly and probably not to completion, in the absence of catalytic assistance, so, too, in the spiritual realm, in the absence of the catalytic influence of an authentic guide, a person is not likely to get very far on the mystical path, irrespective of the amount of time an individual might invest in the performance of different, supposedly, mystical practices.

Spiritual techniques, in and of themselves, have very little to offer. Techniques only become proper mystical practices when embedded in an appropriate spiritual ecology.

Some individuals employing mystical practices that have been extracted from a proper spiritual ecology -- including the presence of a true guide -- might undergo various states of non-ordinary experience and, subsequently, conclude that those techniques have retained their efficacy. What those people might not understand is there is a difference between, on the one hand, having experiences and, on the other hand, becoming transformed in a permanent fashion such that one comes to realize the nature of one's true

identity and such that all one's modalities for aware-fullness, in relation to one's relationship with Divinity, become active.

Divorced from an appropriate spiritual ecology, techniques become so many toys in the hands of those who play around with them. Like children, these people can incorporate the use of spiritual toys into a world of imagination that entails various kinds of fantasies about the sort of activity in which they are engaged, but in the end, the whole thing is still a matter of make-believe.

In addition, just as all too many individuals have a tendency to reduce the mystical path to being a function of either unconscious, or mind/brain, activity, or some combination of the two, there also are any number of individuals who try to limit the mystical realm to an array of processes that involve the generation, transmission, accumulation, focusing and control of energy of one kind or another. Although one might have difficulty understanding how there could be realms of Being that are entirely independent of considerations of energy of whatever kind, nonetheless, if one listens carefully to what the mystics are saying about the nature of the Self or different modalities of knowing, experiencing and engaging the Self, then, one might begin to realize that one cannot suppose all references to subtle realities or essences are necessarily alternative ways of speaking about different forms of energies.

In any number of ways, individuals who have become fully realized masters – we are presuming for the sake of argument – have indicated there are tremendous, qualitative differences between, on the one hand, levels of Being/Reality in which energies, of one kind or another, are operative, and, on the other hand, levels of spirituality that are closest to our true Selves and essential capacities. This is not intended to deny the reality of various species of subtle forms of energy beyond the physical realm, but is intended, instead, to give emphasis to a major principle of the mystical path which stipulates that even in conjunction with the most subtle forms of energy, there are distinct metaphysical boundaries within which those energies are operative and beyond which other modalities of Being come into play that are not a function of energies of whatever description.

Whether one is talking about: The carriers of force, or bosons, of quantum physics; dissipative structures in the context of the brain's electrical fields; the boiling energy or Num of the !Kung people in the Kalahari; ch'i; prana; psi; the property of nefish described in the tradition of the Kabbalah; the serpent fire of kundalini yoga; or auras of whatever variety, these manifestations of energy -- however related to, or separate from, one another, they might be,

and however powerful they might be in their own spheres of relevance -- there might be realms of Being/Reality that cannot be reduced to, or be made functions of, the sort of spectrum of energies being alluded to in the foregoing discussion. The authentic masters of the mystical path have been very clear in warning human beings not to use the lesser to explain the greater, and, in point of fact, all manner of energies are very much limited manifestations that are made possible by a Being/Reality that is both imminent within, as well as that which totally transcends, and, therefore, is completely unlike, that sort of phenomena.

Thus, when the realized masters of the mystical path speak of the 'glance' of spiritual Grace that transforms the spiritual condition of the disciple, they are not necessarily referring to a form of energy ... whether of a gross or subtle nature. Moreover, the Self or one's essential identity is not necessarily the most subtle energy field in a series of ethereal fields ... with the physical, biological body being the most dense, visible modality in such a series.

Similarly, spiritual light is not necessarily a manifestation of certain kinds of subtle energy. Although spiritual light -- like the physical light that is generated through electromagnetic phenomena -- has the capacity to illuminate, and, in the process, make certain facets of reality visible to the appropriate modality or instrument of spirituality that is sensitive or receptive to the nature of its illuminating qualities, nevertheless, the capacity of spiritual light to illuminate is not necessarily based upon the field properties of some kind of mystical counterpart to the exchange of photons that is said to take place in processes of quantum electrodynamics.

Individuals who pursue the mystical path with the idea of learning techniques that permit them to exercise control over, or exploit, the potential of, various kinds of energy, are really engaged in something other than mysticism or spirituality, even though they might use those terms to describe or refer to what they are doing. The goal and purpose of the mystical path lies far beyond those sorts of superficial and limited consideration.

Chapter 19: Free Will and Choice

In 1965 an article by two researchers – H.H. Kornhuber and I. Deecke – appeared in the psychological literature. The article described a study that explored correlations between voluntary movement and electrical activity in the scalps of human subjects.

Subjects were asked to move their finger from time to time in a voluntary manner. Muscle movements were recorded through electromyography.

During the experiment, measurements of electrical potential in the scalps of the subjects were recorded by means of sensors attached to their scalps. These recordings were made on a continuous basis throughout the experiment.

Each trial in the experiment consisted of up to a thousand finger movements per subject. As indicated earlier, electromyography was used to accurately measure the onset point for muscle movement in the fingers of the subjects.

Because the measurement of electrical potential activity in the scalps of the subjects was being measured on a continuous basis, the researchers were able to record that activity before, during, and after any given movement of a subject's finger. These measurements were averaged out across subjects.

The researchers discovered that, on average, 0.8 seconds prior to any given instance of voluntary finger movement, electrical potential activity took place in the scalps of their subjects. The researchers termed this phenomenon the "readiness potential".

The measured profile of the electrical potential taking place in different parts of the scalp was as follows. About 90 milliseconds prior to the movement of a finger, the negative electrical potential reaches a maximum value and, then, drops slightly (that is, in a more positive direction) prior to the voluntary finger movement of a subject.

Around 50 milliseconds prior to a finger movement, there is an identifiable facet of electrical potential associated with one of the sensors on the scalp. This occurs in conjunction with the activation of an area of the motor cortex that controls finger movement and in a subsequent article was termed "the movement potential".

Consequently, first there is electrical potential activity in the scalp at around 90 milliseconds prior to finger movement – indicating the presence of the readiness potential. This is followed approximately 40 milliseconds later by another expression of electrical potential in the scalp indicating that the motor cortex is being activated to bring about finger movement.

In other words, first there is a generalized electrical readiness in preparation for finger movement. This is followed by the activation of a specific area of the motor cortex that controls finger movement.

The Kornhuber/Deecke experiments were hailed by many psychologists, together with an array of other scientists, as having established neural correlates for conscious, voluntary behavior. One could empirically follow changes in the electrical potential of the scalp as voluntary behavior emerged.

However, the foregoing experiments raise a few questions. For example, what caused the readiness potential to occur approximately 90 milliseconds prior to the movement of a finger, and what led to the activation of the relevant area of the motor cortex about 50 milliseconds prior to the movement of a finger?

How did the decision to move a finger induce both the readiness and movement potentials to become active? Where, when, and how did that decision process take place?

Beginning in 1983 and continuing on into 1993, Benjamin Libet led research groups that sought to explore precisely when subjects became conscious of the decision to make a finger movement. In order to accomplish this, the researchers needed to find ways of precisely measuring different stages of a person's decision to move his or her finger.

As was the case in the Kornhuber and Deecke experiments that were carried out nearly two decades previously, Libet used electromyography to measure muscle movements and electroencephalography to measure electrical potentials in the scalps of subjects. In addition, subjects were seated facing a clock that consisted of an oscilloscope in which a dot moved in a circular, clockwise motion on the screen.

The dot completed its circuit in 2.65 seconds. Surrounding the circular movement of the dot were graduated markers that were divided by increments of 107 milliseconds.

Subjects had to do two things simultaneously. More specifically, subjects had to decide when to move their fingers, and, as well, they had to note where the dot was in its circuit of the clock face.

Three measurements were recorded. These were labeled the 'W', 'M' and 'S' series of measurements.

'W' measurements reflected the time on the clock when subjects were aware of wanting to move their fingers. 'M' measurements had to do with subjects noting the position of the dot on the clock when they became aware of moving a finger.

'S' measurements concerned the report of subjects with respect to the location of the dot on the clock face when the backs of their hands were stimulated. This was used as a way of measuring the amount of time it took for subjects to become aware that the back of their hands were being stimulated, and, subsequently, the time it took for that awareness to take place was subtracted from both the 'W' and 'M' measurements in order to acquire a more accurate time line for when different events took place within an individual during the experiment.

Libet and his colleagues discovered that the temporal point when subjects consciously wanted to move their fingers (the act of consciously wanting to do something) took place after the onset of the readiness potential but prior to reporting the movement of their fingers. In other words, something was bringing about a readiness potential in the subjects that was prior to the time when those subjects became consciously aware of wanting to move their fingers.

This raised a very important question. If the readiness potential was showing up on the EEGs of the subjects prior to those individuals being consciously aware of wanting to move their fingers, then, what was causing the readiness potential to occur?

Seemingly, something was preparing the subject to perform an action. Yet, this process of preparation was occurring prior to the time when a subject was even consciously aware of wanting to take such an action.

What was going on? The fact is, no one knows.

Many people have interpreted the Libet experiments as demonstrating that human beings are not the conscious authors of their actions. According to those individuals, the Libet experiments prove that unconscious activity in the brain is responsible for bringing about what is, subsequently, experienced as consciously wanting to, for instance, move one's finger, and, as a result, those individuals conclude that the idea of consciously willing actions is an illusion.

There are elements in the foregoing perspective that are both correct and misleading. While it might be true that the locus of manifestation that is associated with the idea of free will is usually normal, waking consciousness, the Libet experiments actually only demonstrate that the manner in which people have traditionally understood the exercise of choice might not be correct.

Something within the experimental subjects – not necessarily brain activity – is aware, in an intelligent fashion, of the experimental situation. That 'something' within any given subject is aware that the subject is engaged in an experiment and that the subject is being requested to perform certain tasks.

At some point, that 'something' decides to set in motion a cascade of activity that will result in the movement of a finger. This cascade of activity involves the generation of: A readiness potential; a conscious awareness of a decision to want to move the finger; a movement potential, and the movement of the finger.

Was the 'something' that set things in motion aware that it was doing so? We don't know, and, in fact, all that one knows on the basis of the Libet experiments is that normal, waking consciousness was not responsible for the cascade of events that took place, but, instead, was, itself part of that series of occurrences that had been set in motion by that unknown 'something' within us.

Previously in this book -- namely, Chapter 13: The Conscious Unconscious – I explored the idea that the so-called unconscious is actually conscious in an intelligent, reasoned, logical fashion (although the nature of that intelligence, reasoning, and logic might, or might not, be alien to what transpires in normal, waking consciousness). However, normal, waking consciousness is not aware of that activity except in an indirect manner by means of the ideas, thoughts, memories, feelings, and so on that bubble to the surface of normal, waking consciousness and

which the latter locus of consciousness knows (if it reflects on the matter) that it did not generate those contents, but, rather, those contents were generated by something else and, only subsequently appeared in normal, waking consciousness.

The conscious unconscious – i.e., the so-called adaptive unconscious – gives expression to a locus of intelligent awareness that exists apart from normal, waking consciousness. The conscious unconscious and normal, waking consciousness share a semi-permeable boundary that, under different circumstances, permits information to flow in both directions.

However, contrary to traditionally held beliefs, the locus of manifestation for conscious, decision-making takes place in the conscious unconscious and not within normal, waking consciousness. Libet's experiments are consistent with, as well as lend empirical support to, the foregoing contention.

Libet's experiments reflect a perspective that mystics from a variety of mystical traditions have been advocating for thousands of years. According to those mystics, normal waking consciousness is not who we are, and the fact that something else within our being seems to be the author of decisions concerning behavior is part of the evidence indicating that one needs to probe beneath the surface of normal, waking consciousness if one wishes to discover the real nature of the 'self'.

Normal, waking consciousness is the locus of manifestation within which a false sense of self resides and through which that false sense of self is given expression. This problematic sense of self is the locus of manifestation for a variety of processes involving confabulation that invent or construct a false narrative concerning the nature and identity of who, in essence, a human being is.

The Libet experiment demonstrates how the idea that normal, waking consciousness is responsible for exercises of free will is an illusion. The idea that there is something else within us that is responsible – in a conscious fashion -- for those decisions is backed up by facts, and the task before any human being is to discover what the nature of that 'something within' is and what the nature of its relationship with Being/Reality might be.

One should note that in relation to the Libet experiments, as well as in relation to the Kornhuber and Deecke experiments, the phenomenon of the readiness potential does not occur in conjunction with involuntary activities or random, neuronal firing. The electrical potential to which the readiness potential gives expression is associated with voluntary acts, and, therefore, with, presumably, the exercise of free will.

Whether, or not, the 'something' within us that is given expression through the activities of the conscious unconscious is free to do what it does or whether those activities might be determined by some other set of phenomena is unknown. Did the brain cause the cascade of events that began with the readiness potential and continued on through a series of events – including the conscious awareness that one wanted to move one's finger – that culminated with a finger being moved? If the brain did cause such a cascade of activity, no one currently knows how the brain initiated that intention.

Was 'something' that is not a function of brain activity responsible for the foregoing cascade of activity? We don't know, and neuropsychology tends to shy away from considering those possibilities because that discipline tends to resist reflecting on the potential significance of the fact that – despite a hundred years of rigorous, scientific scrutiny -- no one has, yet, come up with a viable evidence-based account for how the brain accomplishes such a feat.

The fact that becoming consciously aware of wanting to move one's finger should take place after the readiness potential arises and, thereby, indicates that the appearance of a movement potential is imminent is not necessarily as surprising as it might first appear to be. Just as 'something' set the readiness potential in motion, so too that same 'something' is likely to have brought about the emergence of a conscious awareness concerning the idea (or mental content) of wanting to move one's finger.

Normal waking consciousness incorrectly takes credit for the exercise of choice. In reality, normal, waking consciousness is merely the locus of manifestation through which the underlying exercise of choosing makes the presence of that underlying process known.

Libet's experiments demonstrate that for thousands of years, human beings have had a distorted sense of what is transpiring within them. For thousands of years, mystics (from an array of different spiritual traditions) have been trying to draw the attention of human beings to this very fact –

namely, we are not who we tend to think we are and that there are potentials for intelligent consciousness within us that extend beyond the realms of normal, waking consciousness.

The truth concerning the nature of our relationship with Being/Reality appears to be other than many of us have supposed it to be. These problematic conceptions concerning the possible nature of the self give expression to philosophical, theological, psychological, and scientific ways of trying to frame -- in an unviable manner -- our understanding of ourselves.

According to Daniel M. Wegner in his book: *The Illusion of Conscious Will*, "If [psychologists] had access to all of the information they could ever want, the assumption of psychology is that they could uncover the mechanism that gave rise to all your behavior and so could explain why you picked up this book at this moment." (Page 3) Let's reflect on the foregoing assumption.

I am a writer. Prior to engaging in a piece of writing I undertake a certain amount of research.

Consequently, I visit a real world or virtual book store and begin to look at the titles of books that might be of value in my research for a project that I have in mind. Since I don't necessarily know exactly -- but only in a very general sense -- what I would like to write about, I'm not quite sure what I'm looking for in the books that I am considering for purchase.

I read the descriptions that appear on the back covers of the books. In addition, I look at the table of contents for those books and, perhaps, page through the books and read a few sentences, paragraphs, or pages.

Usually, but not always, I am unfamiliar with the authors of the books that I am sampling. As a result, I might quickly take a look at the information about the author that is on the dust jacket to the book or associated with a virtual listing for that book

Sometimes I read reviews concerning the books I am investigating. For the most part, however, I don't consult book reviews because I often have found that what other people think about a given work doesn't correspond with my own feelings about that book after I have read it, and, consequently, I don't find reviews all that helpful.

Reviews – whether positive or negative -- are often written from the perspective of a set of biases. I would rather that my decision concerning the purchase of any given book was not influenced – positively or negatively – by the opinions of other individuals.

Although I try to get a sense of the potential value of a book before I purchase it, I really have no idea before the fact of whether any given book that I read is going to be all that helpful with respect to my intended writing project. Much of the time, my decision to purchase a number of books comes down to a feeling I have about whether those books might prove to be interesting, well done, and heuristically valuable (that is, capable of stimulating me to explore myself and my relation with the nature of Being/Reality in productive ways).

Whether, or not, the books I purchase turn out actually to be interesting, well-done, and heuristically valuable can't be determined until after I have read those books. Moreover, the criteria that are considered in order to try to determine – both before and after the fact of reading such material -- what makes something interesting, well done, or heuristically valuable are not always straightforward.

For instance, background information on an author might be accurate or it might be hyped. Consequently, whether, or not, I consider the information about the author to be interesting, depends – in part -- on whether, or not, I believe that information to be true.

Does the information describing the author cause me to decide that the author might be interesting? Does my own attempt to assess the truth inherent in that description determine whether, or not, I find the author to be interesting?

Or, possibly, do I decide that something is interesting, not because I am forced to do so by some set of factors, but because I choose to find certain information interesting or intriguing. Do I believe the information concerning the author might be true because that information somehow forces me to accept that material as being true or do I choose to consider that information as being true for no other reason than that I choose to do so ... because I choose to give such information the benefit of the doubt?

What if I am undecided about whether the author description is accurate or hyped? Should I give the author a chance or not?

Based on my perusal of things that are written on the back cover of the book -- which outlines information about the author together with the subject matter of that book -- as well as on the basis of having quickly read through the table of contents for the book, along with sampling a page here and there in the book, I still might be uncertain about whether, or not, to purchase the book. Once again, I am confronted with the problem of whether, or not, I should give this author a chance and take a more extended look at what she or he has to say by buying and reading the book.

I don't want to waste money and time on a book that turns out to be uninteresting, poorly done, and not very heuristically valuable for my intended writing project. At the same time, prior to purchasing and reading a book, I won't know if my money and time will, or will not, have been well spent or wasted.

Sometimes my feelings concerning the potential value of a given book turns out to be felicitous. Sometimes I end up disappointed.

In the face of uncertainty, if I choose to flip a coin to decide whether, or not, to purchase a given book, then, it is the coin flip that determines whether, or not, I will buy the book, but from where did the idea of flipping a coin come from and, more importantly, what, if anything, determines whether, or not, I will pursue that option.

Let's assume that my decision about whether, or not, to purchase a given book comes down to a decision involving two possibilities: (1) Flipping a coin, or (2) going with a vague, uncertain feeling that I have about the possible, potential worth of that book. Is the foregoing choice determined, and, if so, by what?

According to Daniel Wegner, psychologists operate on the assumption -- or believe -- that the decision to go with either one of the two foregoing choices must be determined in some way. In other words, they can't conceive of how something -- a choice -- could be uncaused, but why should one let those unproven beliefs frame the way in which one thinks about those issues?

What if there were a capacity within human beings that could choose what to accept and what to reject for no reason other than it could do so? What if the beliefs one considered to accept and the beliefs one decided to reject, or the information one chose to accept and the information one

chose to reject, or the data that one chose to accept as factual or as constituting evidence, or the grounds for an argument that one considered to be rational or irrational, and so on, were the result of the free exercise of choice ... not because the beliefs, information, data, and grounds were compelling in and of themselves but because one chose to consider them to be compelling?

When atoms within a radioactive substance appear to spontaneously decay, that process of decay is said to be random in nature. However, the idea of randomness is really code for the fact that we have no idea why, at any given time, certain atoms in that radioactive substance decay while others do not, or why it is that at some later time, atoms that didn't previously decay will, nonetheless, give expression to the decay phenomenon.

No one knows why different radioactive substances exhibit different half-lives or what permits those substances to behave in such a determinate, predictable manner if the underlying process is truly random in character. Radioactive substances are giving expression to their inner nature, but we are not quite sure what that nature is and, therefore, we refer to that phenomenon as being random in nature.

Just as atoms within radioactive substances manifest unpredictable behavior according to principles that are not, yet, understood, so too, human beings seem to be capable of giving rise to choices that have dimensions that seem to be spontaneous expressions of something within an individual that is characterized by both predictable and unpredictable features. Just as atoms in a radioactive substance spontaneously decay as a function of their inner nature, so too, human beings spontaneously make choices that give expression to the inner nature of that which is issuing such a choice.

Professor Wegner indicates that if psychologists were able to assemble all the information they could ever want with respect to the making of the foregoing sorts of choices, then, that information would demonstrate how something, or other, caused a certain choice to be made. However, since psychologists do not have such a body of information, then, at the present time, all one can say is that psychologists who think in the foregoing manner might just be choosing to assume their conclusions ... not because those conclusions are

necessarily correct but because they choose to consider their assumptions to be correct.

Consequently -- and, perhaps, somewhat ironically -- one is faced with a choice of whether, or not, to accept the operating assumption governing how psychologists engage many issues -- namely, whether, or not, choices are determined or whether they might be expressions of a capacity to choose in a spontaneous manner that is caused only by the nature of that which is doing the choosing. While there might be many considerations that impinge on the making of such a choice, nonetheless, if, after all is said and done, one is uncertain about whether, or not, psychologists are correct in their underlying, operating, mechanistic assumption concerning the nature of choice decision-making, how does one identify what, if anything, tips the balance and moves choice in one direction rather than another?

Let's return to the Libet experiments discussed previously. More specifically, 90 milliseconds prior to the movement of a finger and prior to any conscious awareness of wanting to move a finger, Libet demonstrated that a readiness potential -- which is associated with voluntary and not involuntary behavior -- occurs. At the present time, neither Libet, nor any other psychologist or neurophysiologist, knows what causes the readiness potential to occur.

Many psychologists, neurobiologists, and evolutionary theorists assume that some sort of activity in the brain caused the readiness potential to be activated. For example, perhaps, some neuron, or set of neurons, fired and set the readiness potential in motion.

However, as indicated earlier, the readiness potential occurs in conjunction with voluntary rather than involuntary behavior. Consequently, the idea that a random, involuntary firing of a neuron, or set of neurons, caused the readiness potential to occur seems to be somewhat contradictory in nature ... although one still might have to acknowledge the possibility that this is how things work.

Usually speaking, there are threshold values that govern whether, or not, neuronal activity has the requisite value to initiate or induce a certain kind of behavior. Leaving aside the issue of how those threshold values are set or come into existence, if the supposedly random firing of neurons is responsible for the occurrence of a readiness potential, one should be able to provide an account of what enables those firings to become

sufficiently strong and/or organized to bring about the occurrence of a readiness potential and, therefore, differentiate those firings from ones that might be purely random or, for whatever reason, might not have reached the necessary threshold level to initiate a readiness potential.

To date, no one has been able to provide the foregoing sort of causal account. The absence of such a demonstration does not necessarily mean that – therefore -- freewill, of some sort, exists. Nonetheless, the absence of such an account does leave open the possibility that there is something – maybe, of a non-biological nature -- within human beings that is capable of spontaneously and freely making a choice that is not caused by anything other than that something acting in accordance with its mode of being.

However, even if it were the case that activity in the brain is what induces a readiness potential to occur, the fact of the matter is that scientists do not currently know how the brain does what they claim it does. Currently, scientists do not know what happens prior to the 90-millisecond mark in the Libet experiments, nor, at the present time, do scientists know how the conscious awareness of wanting to move a finger comes about after the readiness potential occurs.

The whole business of translating neuronal activity into some sort of phenomenal display of awareness is, currently, a black box. We know that consciousness occurs and we know that the activity of the brain is correlated with phenomenal experiences, but we don't know how brain activity generates – if it does -- phenomenal contents, and we don't know how brain activity generates – if it does – a readiness potential.

When we have options about how to proceed in a decision-making process but are uncertain about which option to select, is the choice that is made an expression of deterministic and mechanistic processes or could that sort of a choice be made freely, with no antecedent causes generating that choice other than the spontaneous emergence of an arbitrary desire to move in one direction rather than another? Let's consider some possibilities.

Suppose I have a decision to make about some contingency in life. Should I do something or should I refrain from doing that something?

In reflecting on the matter, I note that there are some competing interests operating within me. Let's assume that these interests give

expression to, for example, a variety of motivational dynamics such as: A desire for fame, a desire for power, a desire for wealth, a desire for accomplishment, a desire for sexual satisfaction, a desire to be liked and loved by others, a desire for heavenly rewards, a desire for career advancement, a desire to be humane, a desire to be physically safe, a desire to delve into the unknown, a desire to take risks, and a desire for the truth.

On the one hand, I could make a decision that combined a number of the foregoing dynamic forces. If so, my decision would be impacted by a variety of interests and dynamics and would not be a function of any one consideration and, as a result, might involve some complicated dynamics

On the other hand, I might decide that just one of the foregoing motivational dynamics gave expression to what was the 'best' or 'right' or 'just' or 'necessary' thing to do. If so, then just one dimension of my being might be the reason why I decided the issue before me in a given manner rather than in some other way, and, as a result, the underlying dynamic is likely to be fairly simple and straightforward

In either of the foregoing instances, what is causing my behavior? Is it one, or more, of the aforementioned motivational forces or dynamics that is determining my behavior, or is my behavior caused by my decision to choose one of the foregoing motivational dynamics as an organizing principle to govern my behavior?

If the former of the two possibilities noted above is the case – that is, if my behavior is a function of one, or more, of the cited motivational forces or dynamics – then, how does that one dynamic, or set of such forces, come to determine my behavior? Why does my behavior move in one direction rather than another?

Perhaps, I have established a hierarchy of motivations. As a result, I apply my motivational hierarchy to the issue at hand and respond according to the preferences that are given expression through my ordered, hierarchical sequence of interests, desires, and motivational forces in conjunction with what is currently taking place in my life, together with my interpretation of those events.

If the foregoing scenario reflects the manner in which I go about doing things, how did I come to establish the hierarchy of preferences that I did? Did that hierarchy just form randomly (that is, we don't know

how the hierarchy was formed), or did I play some role in its formation and structure? Did that hierarchy arise because I derive more pleasure or satisfaction through some of those preferences than I derive from other motivational dynamics, or did such a hierarchy arise because I chose to like or enjoy some dynamics more than other possibilities?

Does a set of motivational forces determine what goes on within me? Or, do I choose how to engage those motivational forces?

Of course, even in the latter instance, once choices are made with respect to which hierarchical motivational dynamics are the ones to which I have become preferentially inclined, then, oftentimes, the only dimension of choice that remains is whether, or not, to continue on with such a hierarchy of preferences concerning various motivational dynamics. Habit often trumps the desire to change, and if this is the case, then choice disappears in the mists of the inertial properties of the preference hierarchy that has developed over a period of time, and under such circumstances, my behavior becomes determined by the motivational dynamics in that hierarchy.

However, even when I am in the thrall of a hierarchy of motivational dynamics, a question might arise at any time as to whether, or not, I should continue on in the way that, heretofore, has been the case. Such a question does not seem to come from the preference hierarchy – which has become largely fixed in character and, presumably, has been able to generate some degree of satisfaction, happiness, and pleasure in conjunction with current mode of operational dynamics. Rather, that question seems to come from somewhere else within me.

Am I happy with the way things are? Am I satisfied with the nature of the life that is being shaped by such a hierarchy of preferences? Does my current manner of going about things serve my best interests? Does my hierarchy of motivational dynamics serve justice, morality, truth, others, and/or life in general?

Seemingly, the same dimension of me that chose to construct one kind of preference hierarchy rather than some other hierarchy modality earlier in life might also be raising the question of whether that hierarchy should continue on as is, or should it be tinkered with in some fashion, or should it be overhauled entirely. Furthermore, if change is to occur, what criteria should be selected for consideration and how should one evaluate

those criteria, and how does one go about choosing to move in a different direction?

I grew up in a set of circumstances that did not involve any strong elements of indoctrination when it came to issues of religion. Yes, my mother brought me to church with her (although my father and older brother did not – except, perhaps, once or twice a year – attend church) but that was about it, and, consequently, I can't remember being subjected to forces of undue influence – from my parents, or the people at the church, or the people in my neighborhood, or the school I went to, or the kids with whom I played -- when it came to what I should, and shouldn't, believe in conjunction with religious issues.

For the most part, no one told me what to believe. Nonetheless, my choices were limited – by and large -- to what my immediate environment had to offer together with whatever my thoughts and feelings might have been with respect to whether I liked, or disliked, what was being offered through my life circumstances.

Certainly, the social, religious and educational circumstances that prevailed during my developmental years helped frame my understanding of many issues. However, at the same time, I chose the dimensions of those circumstances that appealed to me, as well as chose the dimensions of those circumstances that I was inclined to assign a lower level of preference.

I entered university with the intention of becoming a minister. However, that intention had more to do with what went on within me when I was away from home in Brooklyn, New York for six weeks while engaged in studying the theory of semiconductors between my junior and senior years in high school than such an intention had to do with having gone to church or Sunday school.

During my trip to New York, I began to feel – and it was more a feeling than anything else – a strange presence in my life that seemed to have something to do with God. As a result, I chose to become inclined toward that presence ... not because of a desire for heaven, or a fear of hell, or because it might lead to a career of some kind, or because it was in line with whatever I had learned through church – which was not much (and I blame myself for this state of affairs and not the church) -- but because, to me, what was taking place within me appeared to have a quality of truth about it, and, I decided I wanted to explore the extent to

which – if at all – those possibilities might give expression to truth, and, at some point, I chose to become influenced by, or I aligned myself with, that inclination.

As I indicated in the Foreword to this volume of the *Final Jeopardy* series of books, during my first year of university, I became dissatisfied with myself – not with religion per se – and, as a result, I began distancing myself from religious issues, and, instead became immersed in matters of philosophy, psychology, and science. Yet, in a way, my underlying intention hadn't really changed.

I still was looking for the truth, and my academic choices during that period of time attempted to advance and develop that interest through means that most people would not consider religious in nature. Yet, if my present feelings about religion are correct – i.e., that it constitutes a search for the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality – then, I was continuing on with my previous religious quest but the focus of that quest was, now, being filtered through philosophical, psychological, and scientific lenses rather than spiritual ones.

Following completion of university, I chose to go to Canada to resist the war effort in Vietnam. I had other options (for example, my boss at a cafeteria located in the Student Union building at MIT offered to get me into the National Guard, and, in addition, until I refused to sign a loyalty oath, I had a draft-deferrable job at a youth detention center just outside Boston). However, I opted for Canada, and with, maybe, a hundred dollars in my pocket (which I borrowed from a friend), no job, and no place to live, I ventured into the unknown.

My existential circumstances offered certain possibilities. I chose from amongst those possibilities

My primary concerns were not about the possibility of dying in Vietnam if I were to be called up. I just didn't want to have to kill anyone in order to serve the dubious purposes that constituted the Vietnam War.

Furthermore, I had some degree of exposure to a military-like atmosphere when I spent a term, or so, in R.O.T.C. during my first year of university. There was not a single thing that I liked about that experience, and, consequently, I simply wasn't interested in placing my life in the hands of the sort of mental and emotional orientation that seemed to be present in the military.

Within a fairly short period of time after arriving in Canada, I began to become interested – theoretically as well as practically – in exploring mysticism. Among other things, based on readings that I had done, I joined a Gurdjieff group in Toronto, but within a year after joining the Gurdjieff group, I stepped onto the Sufi path, and, in the process became a Muslim.

As best as I can recall, there were no motivational dynamics operating within me that were forcing me to join the Gurdjieff group, and, as well, there were no motivational dynamics taking place within me that caused me to become a Muslim. Opportunities came along in my life, and I chose to give those opportunities a chance to play out and see where they might lead ... and, quite frankly, at the time the foregoing decisions were made, I had no idea what – be it good or bad -- might happen.

No one made me any promises. Possibilities were presented, and it was up to me to decide which of those possibilities should be pursued and in what manner.

I knew little, or nothing, about Islam. I think the first time I came in semi-contact with a Muslim was when I was an orderly at a private psychiatric facility in Boston, and learned that one of its clients was a Muslim ... whatever that was.

Prior to stepping onto the Sufi path, I had read a few books that provided – what I later came to understand were -- an incorrect and distorted view of the Sufi path. Prior to becoming a Sufi, those distorted views might have influenced my choice to pursue that spiritual path, but I was the one who was choosing to be influenced in this manner, and, more importantly, once I, subsequently, had been disabused of that understanding, it was also something within me that chose to accept the new understanding rather than retain the old one.

Throughout the foregoing sequence of events – from: Entering university with a pre-theology major, to: Distancing myself from spirituality, going to Canada, re-igniting my interest in spirituality, and, at a certain point, joining a Gurdjieff group, followed by stepping on to the Sufi path and becoming a Muslim – there was no particular motivational dynamic (or set of such dynamics) that was shaping my behavior other than a series of decisions – choices -- that inclined me toward investigating various opportunities concerning the possible nature of truth.

Seeking the truth was just one of many possible options that might be pursued by me at that time. Due to past experiences during different facets of my social, educational, religious, and developmental history, a desire for truth might have arrived at my door and sought entrance into my life, but I had to open the door whose bell was being rung and choose to be receptive to what was being offered by whatever was on the other side of the aforementioned door, and this had to be done in a context in which there were other possibilities that also were vying for my attention and commitment.

My inclination to pursue the issue of truth was not a function of a desire for: Wealth, fame, friendship, community, power, physical safety, heaven, risk-taking, a career, sex, and so on. Instead, my choices in the foregoing sequence of life events were a matter of trying to find the truth ... whatever it might be.

Something within me was choosing to attempt to become aligned with the truth. Something within me was willing to give priority to a search for the truth over other possibilities that were present in my life.

Even if my choices had been a function of one, or more, of the foregoing desires (i.e., wealth, fame, power, and so on), this would be because I had chosen to cede my agency to those forces. It is not the presence of desire, *per se*, with respect to wealth, fame, and the like that determines behavior, but, rather, it is the decision -- or choice -- to permit a given desire, or set of them, to shape one's life (i.e., to whatever extent and in whatever way) that is the determining factor in such matters.

Nothing in Libet's aforementioned experiments concerning the fact that the readiness potential occurs prior to a person's awareness of wanting to move a finger undermines what has been said in the last ten pages or so. Even if waking consciousness only becomes aware of wanting to do something after the readiness potential has emerged, nonetheless, prior to the emergence of the readiness potential, something within the individual has been conscious of what is transpiring in a given set of circumstances and has engaged in an intelligent process of analyzing and evaluating those circumstances in order to arrive at making a decision – or choice – concerning how to proceed with respect to which motivational dynamic one will become inclined toward ... that is, to which motivational dynamic one is inclined to cede one's agency.

Human beings do not necessarily have free will because there are many occasions in which we make choices but those choices do not necessarily get translated into action. If we had unimpeded free will, then, every choice would become actionable, but, usually, choices must become aligned with centers of motivational energy in order for those choices to become realized in the form of some behavior or other, and, this is why choice tends to involve a process of selecting a certain source of motivational energy to which to cede one's agency – that is, the self – through which choice is to be given active expression in behavior.

The foregoing process of aligning choice with some form of activation energy can be done through both internal and external processes. For instance, within us are drives (which is just another way of talking about motivational impetus or energy centers for translating choices into behaviors) concerning: Ambition, greed, sex, physical safety, competence, love, curiosity, power, truth, fear, well being, and so on. In order for any given choice to be translated into action, one must align that choice with a motivational center or source of energy that is capable of actualizing the choice, and, this process of alignment is done by ceding one's agency – sense of self – to those centers and letting the latter do their thing.

On the other hand, I might align that choice with some external source of energy and power – such as: Political, religious, social, economic, financial, and/or educational institutions, – in order to realize the object of my choice. When individuals do not feel able on their own to bring their choices to realization, they often become associated with external sources of power that the person feels might be able to bring those choices to fruition.

Internal conflict occurs when different loci of consciousness within an individual generate an array of choices that clash with one another. Or, more specifically, internal conflicts arise when different dimensions of a human being (for example, normal, waking consciousness and the conscious unconscious – that is, the so-called adaptive unconscious) seek to cede agency to different centers of motivational impetus and, as a result, behavior gets caught up in the struggle for dominance between competing senses of agency (e.g., the false self and the essential self)

When a person prays for Divine assistance, the intent of such a prayer is often to seek to align one's agency (the essential self) with -- or cede one's agency to -- a presumed Divine Presence. This process of attempted

alignment is the means, God willing, through which an individual is enabled to act in accordance with choices that are made concerning life.

On the one hand, from the perspective of those who believe in God, there is only one's subjective sense of whether, or not, one feels one's choices have been able to successfully cope with the situation for which one has been asking for assistance, and, as a result, one attributes (correctly or incorrectly) whatever degree of success is deemed to be present to Divine assistance. On the other hand, from the perspective of those who do not believe in God, prayers are considered to be ineffective because non-believers have concluded that God does not exist and, as a result, they believe that no One hears such a prayer of supplication and, therefore, there can be no source of power with which one can align one's choice to act, say, in a spiritual manner rather than in a non-spiritual manner.

Of course, individuals who do not believe in God are not in any better position to arrive at veridical conclusions concerning those matters than are most individuals who do believe in God. As was noted in the previous paragraph, just as people who believe in God have little to go on except their own subjective evaluation of their circumstances – an evaluation that might or might not be correct – so too, people who do not believe in God have little to go on except their own subjective sense of things – a sense that might, or might not, be correct.

One chooses to believe in a certain way or one chooses not to believe in a certain way. However one chooses, those choices give expression to the manner in which an individual cedes his, or her, agency (i.e., sense of self) to different dimensions (both internal and external) of one's life.

One might like different kinds of experiences, or one might consider different themes to be of interest, or one might derive pleasure, enjoyment, or satisfaction from a variety of possibilities. However, at any given time, one chooses to which of those likes, pleasures and interests one will cede one's agency or sense of self.

Similarly, there might be many different kinds of experiences that one does not like, or in which one is not interested, or from which one does not derive pleasure. However, in each case, one chooses what one dislikes, considers uninteresting, or finds unpleasant/painful, and, as a result, one tries to refrain from ceding one's agency (i.e., sense of self) to those dimensions of life.

There are still other possibilities that are simultaneously appealing and problematic (perhaps even difficult and painful). Some people like engaging challenges or taking risks and are willing to endure difficulties and pain in the pursuit of those challenges and risks, while other people shy away from those challenges and risks, but in each case, choices are made to cede one's agency to undertake challenges and pursue risky activities or, on the other hand, choices are made to avoid those challenges and risks.

Choices give expression to one's sense of self, and choices give expression to one's sense of the nature of Being/Reality, and choices give expression to one's sense of the relationship between one's sense of self and one's sense of the nature of Being/Reality. A person cedes the agency of her or his being (i.e., one's commitments) based on his or her forgoing sense of what the truth is with respect to the nature of one's relationship with Reality/Being.

I remember my spiritual guide once saying (and he didn't expound on what he said): "People have free will but not as much as they might suppose." I've often thought about those words.

There are a lot of things in life over which we have no control. We have no control over who our parents are or what our genetic endowment will be. We have no control over when or where we will be born or into what circumstances we will be born. We have no control over what opportunities will come our way. We might not even have any control over what we like, or in what we are interested, or what we find pleasurable, enjoyable, and satisfying.

However, despite all of the things over which we have no control, there are, nonetheless, choices to be made concerning how we will engage that over which we have no control, as well as the manner in which we are prepared to permit those existential contingencies to shape our decision concerning how, or if, we will attempt to seek the truth concerning the nature of our relationship – both collectively and individually -- with Being/Reality.

Perhaps one of the areas of life over which we might have some degree of control is the identity of the sorts of character traits through which we will engage all of the many things over which we have no control. More specifically, on the one hand, there is a potential in most, although not all, human beings, that have to do with qualities such as:

Honesty, sincerity, courage, humility, nobility, selflessness, generosity, love, compassion, forgiveness, kindness, gratitude, perseverance, patience, equitability, equanimity, and so on through which an individual might engage that over which one has no control, and, on the other hand, there is a potential within most, if not all human beings, to express qualities such as: Greed, anger, selfishness, jealousy, pettiness, dishonesty, hatred, cowardice, impatience, insincerity, arrogance, lust, unfairness, vengefulness, and being intemperate through which one might engage that over which has no control.

Mystics of all authentic spiritual traditions have taught that the best way to engage the central question of life – namely, what is the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality? – is by choosing to become inclined toward, and committed to, the aforementioned positive, constructive character traits, while actively resisting and distancing oneself from the aforementioned negative, and destructive character traits. Mystics have argued that the positive, constructive character traits will assist one’s quest to seek the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality, while the negative, destructive character traits will interfere with, distort, corrupt, and undermine such a quest.

A person might have little, or no, control over whether, or not, one will be successful – partially or wholly – with respect to realizing the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality. However, the issue of choice might play a very big role in shaping how one engages that quest (i.e., through which set of character traits), and if so, then, perhaps, how one engages the challenge of life becomes an extremely important issue precisely because one appears to have so little control over the nature of that challenge and whether, or not, one will ever acquire insight into one, or another, level of the potential inherent in the challenges to which life gives expression. Perhaps, the idea that what matters concerns how one plays the game, so to speak, and not a matter of whether one’s choices lead to success or to difficulties.

In a book mentioned previously in this chapter, namely: *The Illusion of Conscious Will*, by Daniel Wegner, the author states: “... actions feel willed or not, and this feeling of voluntariness or doing a thing “on purpose” is an indication of conscious will. It is also common, however, to speak of conscious will as a force of mind, a name for the causal link

between our minds and our actions. One might assume that the experience of consciously willing an action and the causation of the action by the person's conscious mind are the same thing. As it turns out, however, they are entirely distinct, and the tendency to confuse them is the source of the illusion of conscious will ..." (Page 3)

Libet's experiment involving the manner in which the readiness potential occurred prior to the time when subjects became aware of wanting to move their finger is a perfect illustration of what Professor Wegner is attempting to point out to his readers in the foregoing quote. The subjects in the Libet experiment become aware of wanting to move their finger only after something in the adaptive unconscious – the conscious unconscious – had set a readiness potential in motion indicating that a voluntary action – in this case, a finger movement – was forthcoming, and, therefore, the sense of conscious willing that occurred in the subjects with respect to finger movement was illusory because that sense of conscious desire was not what caused the finger to move ... something else brought about the finger movement.

I both agree and disagree with the perspective being put forth by Professor Wegner in the previous quotation. I am quite willing to acknowledge that what takes place in waking consciousness is, in many respects, often – but not necessarily always -- of an illusory nature.

After all, waking consciousness has a tendency to attribute a variety of properties, qualities, and capabilities to itself in a manner that is not necessarily warranted. For instance, when normal waking consciousness considers itself to be the source of a desire to move a finger, this is but one example of a process of false attribution that is taking place in conjunction with normal, waking consciousness, and, consequently, such an attribution is illusory in nature.

The experience of consciously wanting to move a finger was not due to a choice that was made by normal, waking consciousness. The decision to choose to move a finger was made somewhere else in the subject and that 'something else' helped bring about a readiness potential indicating that a voluntary action was about to take place, and normal, waking consciousness only received the memo concerning the movement of a finger after the decision had been made.

Nonetheless, despite my willingness to acknowledge the truth in certain aspects of the perspective being advanced by Professor Wegner

concerning the illusion of conscious will, I also have my reservations about his view, and this reservation is rooted in something that has been noted previously in this chapter but which I feel is sufficiently important to be emphasized once again. More specifically, despite the fact that normal, waking consciousness is subject to illusions about itself as being the source of any number of capabilities, qualities, and properties, nevertheless, there is at least one other center of awareness in human beings that actually is the source from which a choice – for example, when to move a finger – is made in a conscious manner and that is not done in the same illusory manner as occurs within normal, waking consciousness.

‘Something’ within a human being -- other than normal, waking consciousness -- is making a choice. That choice is made with an awareness of existential circumstances, interests, needs, and possibilities, as well as is made by engaging in a conscious, evaluative process that is as deliberative, reasoned, and analytical as an individual considers to be necessary with respect to that choice.

Although normal, waking consciousness is not the source of choice, nevertheless, whatever the source of choice turns out to be, it freely wills those choices. In other words, those choices are not the result of some underlying dynamic that sends a memo to the adaptive unconscious (i.e., the conscious unconscious) -- as was done in the case of normal, waking consciousness -- and, thereby, informs the adaptive unconscious or conscious unconscious of a choice that already has been made elsewhere. Instead, the dynamic of choice takes place entirely within a dimension of the essential self, and that dimension is responsible for the decision that has been made ... a decision that, subsequently, is forwarded to normal, waking consciousness only after a readiness potential has been generated.

The willing of choice is not an illusion. An illusion arises when normal, waking consciousness attributes those choices to itself.

The locus of manifestation through which choice arises is the dimension of self that works in conjunction with the adaptive unconscious (i.e., the conscious unconscious). That locus of manifestation is fully aware of the process of making a choice, but normal, waking consciousness is unaware of that choice-making process and only becomes aware of that choice (i.e., informed) after the fact.

Reasons for making a given decision or choice might occur in normal, waking consciousness. However those reasons are treated by normal, waking consciousness as being relevant only because the dimension of the self that operates in association with the adaptive unconscious has chosen to consider those reasons as having relevance to the making of a given choice.

Freely willing a choice is not the same thing as bringing about the behavior that realizes such a choice. Human beings have the capacity to freely will whatever choices they like, but translating those choices in to active, behavioral realization is another matter, and, therefore, human beings are not always capable of willing into behavior the choices that are made.

Human beings have the capacity to freely choose, or become inclined toward, almost any kind of behavior. However, human beings are not necessarily able to exercise free will with respect to the activation of any given choice since there might be many competing forces – both within, and external to, an individual -- that are capable of undermining, disrupting, modulating, or constraining the exercise of such an expression of free will.

Intention gives expression to a desire to realize a given choice. Whether, or not, those intentions ever get realized depends on a complicated dynamic involving (according to spiritual guides of the Sufi path): The essential self; the constructed self (ego); the nafs (which consists, among other things, of a variety of qualities and forces operating within an individual that, depending on circumstances, can either help or hinder a person's quest to seek the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality), and the nature of the dynamic between an individual and the presence of God.



Chapter 20: Epistemological Reflections

Where do ideas come from? The question can be stated in a very simple manner, but the answer to the foregoing question entails a great many complexities.

Some ideas arise in conjunction with sensory data. For instance, by means of specialized, biological cells involved in the process of vision, we are able to detect: Edges, contours, surfaces, movements, patterns, contrasts in light, and so on in relation to the environment around us, and that data is put together (through a process that we don't understand) in a manner that reflects -- to varying degrees of accuracy -- properties that seem to have something to do with what is taking place in the world.

The relationship between sensory data and perception often requires interpretation because what we see is not necessarily what is out there in the world. For example, we see colors, but those colors do not exist externally, but, rather, different wavelengths of electromagnetic energy impinge on us, and that energy is translated by cells in our eyes as having certain values that are phenomenally experienced or interpreted as being some kind of color.

The world is filtered through the capacities -- both in terms of abilities and limitations -- of our sensory apparatus. We perceive the world according to the manner in which our senses frame experience.

Nonetheless, the process of perception is not entirely a matter of inventing the world. In other words, despite whatever peculiarities our senses introduce into the manner in which we experience the world, our senses are tied into the world in a manner that constrains what takes place, and, consequently, if the world did not impinge on our senses in the way it does, our senses would not respond in the way they do.

The sensory capacities of human beings and the physical properties of the world engage one another and generate a dance of intimate interactions. We experience that dance in phenomenal terms.

As the dance takes place, ideational possibilities arise -- we do not know how -- that might have something to do with the potential meaning, significance, or value of those experiences. For instance, some sensory experiences are enjoyable and others are not, and, as a result, we (through, for example, processes involving classical and/or operational

conditioning) come to associate certain phenomenal values with different kinds of sensory experiences.

The foregoing sorts of associations are stored in memory. Just how the foregoing processes of learning and memory storage take place is unknown.

Memories can (by means of largely unknown processes) either be recalled, or, sometimes, those memories bubble to the surface on their own -- perhaps due to some sort of resonance with what is taking place. In either case, the memories are phenomenally experienced (how this takes place is unknown) as ideas (comprised of sensory, interpretive, conceptual, and evaluative components) that are related, in some manner, with what transpired in the past and/or with what is currently taking place.

What is being experienced sensorially is also being filtered through emotional processes taking place within us. Emotions process the foregoing experiences (precisely how that processing takes place is unknown) by gauging the significance, meaning, and/or value of those sensory experiences from a variety of emotional perspectives.

Strands of pleasure, pain, associations, sensory information, and emotional processing become woven together (what makes that weaving process possible or how it works is not known) in the form of memories that are subject to critical reflection. During critical reflection (which is made possible by an array of processes that are not entirely understood) questions, of one kind or another, arise in conjunction with the foregoing kinds of memories.

Normal, waking consciousness is not the source of: Sensations, phenomenal experience, questions, critical reflection, associations, memories, or emotional evaluations. Nonetheless, various kinds of packaged results concerning the foregoing activities are phenomenally experienced in normal, waking consciousness as ideational themes (and, at the present time, how all of this is accomplished is understood only poorly, if at all).

We can choose to focus on one, or another, facet of phenomenal experience. However, as the Libet experiments that were discussed in the previous chapter demonstrated, those choices are made beyond the boundaries of normal waking consciousness even as the nature of those

choices are experienced by normal, waking consciousness as if it (i.e., normal, waking consciousness) were the locus through which those choices were being made.

As choices are made concerning what aspect of phenomenal experience should be focally engaged, ideas arise in conjunction with those choices that have varying degrees -- and kinds -- of relevance in relation to those choices. We don't actually know a great deal about how any of this takes place other than to know that it does occur.

Some ideas are imported from the world around us. Parents, siblings, husbands, wives, friends, neighbors, teachers, classmates, acquaintances, artists, magazines, television/radio programs, entertainers, books, politicians, theologians, bosses, and fellow employees, all give expression to a variety of ideas.

Due to processes that we do not entirely understand, some of those ideas are incorporated while other ideas are kept out in the cold. The ideas that are internalized often are altered by means of an array of sensory, emotional, intellectual, and motivational factors engage those ideas in ways that are not always understood.

We accept and reject ideas for many different reasons (both good and bad). However, ultimately, whatever those reasons might be, we do so because we choose to endorse some reasons while passing over other possibilities.

We choose what we consider to be: Reasonable or unreasonable, rational or irrational, factual or fictional, desirable or undesirable, real or unreal, interesting or uninteresting, important or unimportant. Our understanding of the world and ourselves is constructed through the choices that we make about what is occurring within, and around, us.

We develop beliefs (hermeneutical commitments with varying degrees of strength) concerning this or that aspect of experience. We develop beliefs about what the truth is concerning the nature of the relationship between oneself and Being/Reality, and these beliefs give expression to our ideas about, and understanding of, the world.

Through insight, we grasp certain dimensions of the nature of Being/Reality. What makes insight possible or how it takes place is unknown, but ideas arise in conjunction with, as well as through, those insights.

We also are connected to experience through fantasies and dreams. We don't know what makes fantasies and dreams possible, but ideas rooted in fantasies and dreams do occur on a fairly regular basis and do so as a result of many factors ... some that are known and some that are unknown.

Sometimes, fantasies and dreams appear to be tied to real world events in complicated ways. The extent to which those fantasies and dreams might reveal important truths (or even unimportant truths) concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality is often difficult to determine.

Working out whether, or not, any of our sensations, perceptions, interpretations, memories, beliefs, ideas, and understandings concerning the nature of our relationship with Being/Reality are accurate is a complicated and contentious process. Science, philosophy, and religion all have ideas to offer concerning how one might go about trying to make those sorts of determinations.

We are faced with the task of trying to navigate our way through an array of ideas that arise from a variety of sources. How does one go about determining what can, and cannot, be known concerning the truth about the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality?

Could any of the ideas, understandings, insights, intuitions, or sense of things that arise within us be a function of forces and sources that are other than biological, physical, or material in nature? There is so much that we don't know about what takes place within us, one cannot necessarily rule out such a possibility.

However, due to processes of a priori reasoning involving nothing more than deductions based on various biases, assumptions, and theories, some people like to argue that all ideas are necessarily a function of the activities of the brain. Those individuals might be right but, to date, they have been unable to prove the truth of what they are proposing.

Many of us like to believe that we know and understand more than we do. Sometimes a small degree of discretion is the better part of valor.

For example, consider the following excerpt from my own life. Prior to taking a trip to India a little over twenty-five years ago, I had been told by someone – someone who was not my shaykh (who had passed away a

few years earlier) -- that there was a certain mosque in Delhi that, if possible, I should visit. It was known as the 'Mosque of the Jinn'.

Although many people in the West are familiar with the idea of Jinn due to the story of Aladdin and his lamp ("Jinn" becomes "genie"), not all of those people – in fact, perhaps, most of them – are not likely to believe that Jinn could be other than fictional beings. However, I have seen things as well as listened to the accounts of individuals whom I consider to be credible that might indicate otherwise.

In any event, I added the aforementioned individual's suggestion to my 'to-do' list. The Mosque of the Jinn was one of many places that I hoped to be able to see during my journey.

When I finally arrived in Delhi, I went to a number shrines associated with individuals who have importance within the Chishti silsila (or spiritual lineage) with which I am affiliated. I was under the impression that the 'Mosque of the Jinn' was near one of the shrines I was visiting, but I wasn't sure, exactly, where that mosque was located.

After offering prayers at one of the Sufi shrines, I approached a custodian. The custodian was someone who spent much of the day at the shrine engaged in prayers as well as engaged in various forms of remembrance and service.

When the gentleman had finished his prayers, I asked him if he could tell me where I might find the Mosque of the Jinn ... a building that I believed was located somewhere in the area. Instead of providing directions, he asked me what I knew.

I understood his question to be alluding to spiritual knowledge. I replied: "Not much."

He said words to the effect of: "Well, in that case, perhaps, you shouldn't go there at this time because the sun is about to set, and, there might be some risk in being there under those conditions." I accepted his words, and, as a result, I didn't proceed to the Mosque of the Jinn.

At the time that I confessed to the custodian that I didn't know much, I recently had earned my doctorate. Consequently, from a certain perspective I knew a great deal.

I knew a lot about education, philosophy, science, history, as well as technology. In fact, I had proven to the satisfaction of a group of people – the members of my doctoral, oral examination committee – that I seemed

to know much more than what I had indicated to be the case during my interaction with the custodian at the shrine.

Yet, none of the foregoing academic understanding necessarily consisted of knowledge in any essential, spiritual sense. The former kind of knowledge – the information associated with a Ph.D. -- might help me navigate my way through much of the modern world and might serve to qualify me as being a suitable candidate for any number of jobs and career paths, but, that knowledge tended to be useless when it came to gaining insight into the real issues of life.

Having a doctorate might enable a person to generate informed opinions, or develop testable hypotheses, or create interesting theories, or make educated guesses about any number of issues. But, the learning associated with a doctorate didn't necessarily provide me with any reliable or veridical insight into the nature of my relationship with existence or the actual nature of Being.

In fact, in many ways, a doctorate doesn't necessarily have much to offer when it comes to providing a useful means of engaging life with respect to answering a variety of questions such as: Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? What is my essential potential? What criteria should I use to evaluate those matters? Or, what is the best way of engaging those issues? Academia might be able to propose any number of possibilities concerning the foregoing questions, but there is little, or no, guarantee that any of the proffered possibilities from academia provide veridical accounts concerning the truth about the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

Upon hearing the foregoing story, someone might ask: "Why assume that the custodian at the shrine knew what he was talking about? Why accept what he had to say?"

One of the things that -- to a considerable degree -- I do know is what I don't know. Based on an extensive understanding of my condition of ignorance, I was being truthful when I indicated to the custodian at the shrine that as far as real, substantive, detailed knowledge is concerned -- knowledge concerning the real nature of certain facets of spirituality -- I didn't know much even though at the time I might have had a great deal of theoretical and book-based knowledge concerning that matters.

There is a tremendous difference between the theory of mysticism and the reality of mysticism. This is so even when, for the most part, that theory is given expression in an accurate manner.

By way of analogy, one can read all manner of books on, and listen to all kinds of conversations concerning, the idea of sex. However, actual sexual experience gives expression to a dimension of reality that, in many respects, lies beyond what can be conveyed through books and conversations.

In any event, even though I didn't have much knowledge about the person with whom I was talking at the shrine, I immediately chose to trust what he had to say. Among other things, he had taken sufficient interest in my situation to be concerned about certain possibilities and, therefore, conveyed to me information alluding to some of the risks that were associated with those possibilities.

He wasn't trying to say that he was a man of knowledge and that I wasn't. He wasn't trying to get money from me or curry favor with me for some ulterior purpose.

He was just trying to be helpful to a stranger. He was trying to offer assistance to someone whose name he didn't know and someone who he didn't even know whether, or not, was a Muslim or a Sufi.

He was just trying to be a friend to someone whom he very likely would never see again. I saw no reason for not trusting what he had to say.

Furthermore, sometimes the heart knows when it is being truthfully told something of importance. Unfortunately, this is not always so.

At any given time, our consciousness or phenomenological space is being pushed and pulled in many different directions. Among those pushes and pulls are our: Opinions, ideas, beliefs, values, speculations, biases, interpretations, concerns, anxieties, doubts, likes, desires, fears, hopes, jealousies, and dislikes.

Although many of us have considerable knowledge when it comes to: Performing our jobs or understanding how society operates or being able to skillfully pursue any number of hobbies or personal interests, when it comes to the essential questions of life we – if we are honest with ourselves – tend to be quite ignorant.

We tend to guess, speculate, theorize, and/or opine our way through the essential questions of life. We hope we are right, but in our heart of hearts we often are aware that we are, in a sense, whistling past the cemetery.

We often are in the unenviable position of not knowing whether, or not, we should trust ourselves when we hear ourselves making pronouncements about the nature of existence. We might have good reason for not trusting what someone else says, but, we also have good reason for not trusting what we, ourselves, think or believe or feel ... indeed, we have a lifetime of intimate experience with an existential process – i.e., our conscious lives – that has given expression to both error and success, but we often tend to remember the successes and forget the mistakes ... and the latter are usually far more numerous than the former.

If someone else were to give us as much bad advice as we often tend to give ourselves (the sort of advice that has led to as many problematic circumstances as we often create for ourselves), we would tend to treat the ideas of the former individual with considerable circumspection and mistrust. Yet, we tend to be all too quick to jump to the defense of our own speculations, opinions, biases, and beliefs concerning the nature of existence because one feels very vulnerable, fragile, and threatened when one honestly acknowledges the very real and determinate limitations that are entailed by our lack of knowledge and understanding concerning the essential issues of life.

We don't want anyone else to take advantage of our ignorance ... that is, to manipulate us or to control or exploit us due to what we don't know about a given situation. Yet, by default, we often permit certain dimensions of ourselves to take advantage of that ignorance and, as a result, manipulate, control, and exploit our hearts and souls because of what we don't know about many situations of existential consequence.

We build coping strategies – of better or lesser construction – to see us through difficult circumstances. We construct the conceptual and emotional equivalent of the Maginot Line that was constructed by the French prior to the Second World War ... a line that was supposed to serve as a stalwart defense but was, eventually, outflanked by the Germans.

Similarly, we assemble our defenses according to what we believe is sound thinking, only to have them outflanked by forces operating within and without. We feel we are doing what is best, but our vision of what is

best is often clouded by what we don't know about the actual nature of what is best.

We run with our theories, speculations, likes, dislikes, opinions, and biases. Frequently, however, we often fail to see how those processes tend to distort our understanding concerning the issues of life.

We live in an age of mistrust. For very good reasons, we often can't trust others, and, as well, for very good reasons, we often can't trust ourselves. As a result, we become stuck, unable to make spiritual progress.

When I told the aforementioned shrine custodian that I didn't know much when he asked me what I knew, a very important epistemological template was generated. Knowledge of one's own ignorance is a very useful thing to have.

Descartes said: cogito, ergo sum – I think, therefore, I am. From a Sufi perspective, he should have said: "Something thinks, therefore something is."

However, due to his inability to see past his own ignorance concerning the matter, he made some problematic assumptions about where thoughts come from or what makes them possible. Consequently, what he believed to be the foundation of certain knowledge was neither certain nor error-free knowledge.

Something is happening within consciousness. One (and this refers to me as well) should not let one's ignorance induce one to claim that one knows what it is that is happening within consciousness before one actually acquires real knowledge about the matter rather than just having opinions, speculations, theories, and defenses concerning those phenomena.

Much of the time, many of us are filled with passionate conviction concerning the degree of truth we claim is contained in our beliefs and understandings concerning this or that topic – especially in conjunction with the most basic questions concerning the nature and purpose of existence. Yet, rarely, if ever, do we subject our own ideas, beliefs, values, and understandings to the same degree of rigorous, critical examination that we direct toward the ideas, beliefs, values, and understandings of other individuals.

Proving something to be true is a very nuanced, complicated, and involved process. And, to some extent, the first four volumes of *Final Jeopardy* serve as a way of bearing witness to those difficulties.

Accepting something as being true is not even remotely the same process as being able to demonstrate the truth of that same something. Yet, many of us go through life accepting as true many of the things that we believe.

Few, if any, of the things we believe in life have been demonstrated, in some definitive manner, to actually be true. Nonetheless, as Leonard Cohen intimated in his song '*Everybody Knows*', we don't always know what we claim to know.

Furthermore, even when we do know something, we don't necessarily understand what we know. For example, one of the ways in which I learned the difference between knowing and understanding is through my realization that students in my psychology classes often could correctly answer many questions on a test but did not know how to apply that knowledge to a variety of problems and issues.

Various beliefs and understandings might be very serviceable components in the coping strategies that we devise for purposes of navigating our way through the waters of life. However, truth is the most important and indispensable component in any coping strategy ... without the truth, coping strategies will inevitably break down and lead us far away from what is necessary to cope with life effectively ... as life actually is and not as we believe or understand it to be.

When someone questions the truth of our unproven claims we tend to get upset. We are upset because we are brought into contact – directly or indirectly – with the realization that there is considerable ignorance surrounding and permeating our beliefs or understandings and, as a result, we often are pushed or sucked into an emotional and psychological condition of dissociation concerning the nature of our relationship with Being/Reality.

Under the foregoing circumstances, we often feel confronted by questions for which we have no reliable response that is capable of being shown to be true independent of our relatively empty claims. This can be a very troubling, threatening experience.

Acknowledging one's essential ignorance tends to be a very humbling experience. Nevertheless, embracing that ignorance can lead to the sort of humility that is a very valuable companion to have when journeying along life's path.

Historically, there have been a lot of terms that have populated discussions concerning the issue of knowledge. Some of these terms are: Definition, assumption, postulate, logic, syllogism analytical, synthetic, a priori, a posteriori, necessary, causation, deduction, reason, proof, induction, contingent, experience, self-evident, judgment, understanding, fact, abduction, inference, implication, intuition, insight, truth, and certainty.

I have explored the foregoing issues both formally – i.e., through academic courses – as well informally (i.e., outside of academia). Despite years of formal and informal study, I'm not sure that any of the aforementioned terms (together with the ideas that underlie that terminology) are very helpful when it comes to trying to determine the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

For instance, consider the notion of syllogistic reasoning. If one starts with the premise that: 'All men are mortal', and, then, proceeds to identify Socrates as a man, then, one, seemingly, is entitled to conclude that: 'Socrates is mortal.'

However, let's take a look at the opening premise – namely, 'All men are mortal.' How are the concepts "men" and "mortal" being defined?

Should men be considered as beings that are equipped with souls capable of surviving physical death? If one defines the idea of "men" in a manner that includes the property of having a soul, then, while it might be true that the physical bodies of men die, nonetheless, there is a dimension of their beings that might not be mortal.

Or, what if Socrates is transgender in nature? How does one determine whether, or not, Socrates is a man or a woman?

What are the criteria for determining what constitutes being a man? Is it a matter of gender, or is something else meant by that term?

Moreover, after becoming clear about what various terms mean, those ideas might have little to do with being able to assist us to discern truths concerning the nature of Being/Reality. However interesting it might be that some syllogisms are able to illustrate the manner in which

logic and reasoning operate, the scope of those arguments tend to be very narrow and, as a result, have very limited applicability.

Nonetheless, definitions and assumptions often tend to frame our understanding of what it means to reason in a logical fashion. Questioning the reliability of those definitions and assumptions can take one down the proverbial rabbit hole.

However, like Alice, once one tumbles down the rabbit hole, one is often at a loss with respect to how to grasp or evaluate what is taking place. The old ways of thinking and understanding might no longer be applicable to what is transpiring in one's life.

Science provides one way of engaging, testing, and thinking about a variety of issues that can lead – but not always – to reliable results. However, why should one be deferential toward science in conjunction with a great many issues (e.g., the origins of: Life, consciousness, intelligence, memory, language, creativity, morality, and identity) for which, at best, science only has been able to provide very speculative, problematic, and unreliable accounts?

Furthermore, asking the question: What is the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality often leads to an array of different issues prior to tumbling down the rabbit hole and after experiencing such a tumble. Different experiences often lead to different understandings and methodological systems for engaging the issue of trying to determine the truth about one's nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality, and, consequently, one can't necessarily take a given set of definitions and assumptions and suppose that one size fits all.

What is considered to be rational is often a reflection of the logic that already is present in the definitions and assumptions through which one filters experience. If one changes the nature of those definitions and assumptions, then, one often changes one's conception of what is considered to be rational or true or real.

For instance, prior to the times when János Bolyai, Nikolai Lobachevsky, and Bernhard Riemann began to critically reflect on the fifth postulate of Euclid's geometry, mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers had operated on the basis that the Euclidian postulate concerning parallel lines was correct. Yet, for more than 2000 years, no

one had ever been able to prove that Euclid's fifth postulate was actually true.

After János Bolyai, Nikolai Lobachevsky, and Bernhard Riemann were done with the fifth postulate, a whole realm of new possibilities began to surface. Those possibilities had applicability to the real world and laid a foundation for such things as general relativity ... Einstein's update of Newton's theory of gravity.

Definitions and assumptions tend to be arbitrary – that is, nothing necessarily demonstrates that those definitions and assumptions are correct. Sometimes (and Euclid comes readily to mind) use of definitions and assumptions leads to heuristically valuable results capable of disclosing possibilities that might not have been discovered. If someone had not begun with those definitions or assumptions and, then, proceeded to work out the logic that followed from those definitions and assumptions in order to see where it led.

However, definitions and assumptions also have their limits ... as certain, later proponents of Euclid's mode of thinking discovered somewhat reluctantly. Those limits can frame the way in which one perceives and understands the world and do so in a distortive and/or problematic manner.

For instance, consider the idea of describing something as being 'a priori'. Normally speaking, when someone refers to an understanding as being a priori in nature, this is intended to indicate that such an understanding gives expression to a process of deduction that is independent of experience and observation and, as such, is to be distinguished from possibilities that are a posteriori in nature and, as a result, require factual evidence and not just logical analysis to justify the deductions that emerge in the context of a posteriori reasoning.

Yet, focusing on a given idea within consciousness involves both experience and observation. Ideas arise in conjunction with experience as well as observation, and the process of focusing on, or reflecting on, those ideas involves instances of both observation and experience.

Is one required to suppose that only those engagements that concern the external world involve instances of observation and experience? Or, is it possible that one's inner phenomenology could contain ideas that might arise from realms of being independent of the external, material, physical

world, and, if so, wouldn't the notions of observation and experience apply to those ideas?

Suppose someone has a vision. Can one claim that any deductions or reflections concerning that vision are purely a priori in nature – that is, independent of experience and observation – and, therefore, of limited value?

Irrespective of whether, or not, a vision is true, observing or witnessing the presence of that vision is experiential in nature. Consequently, can one say, with any degree of accuracy, that there are ideas within us that are truly a priori in nature?

Isn't everything that goes on within us tied, in one way or another, to experience and observation (internally, externally or both)? Whether, or not, those experiences and observations give expression to some facet of truth is, of course, another matter, but if, for example, a vision, insight, revelation, intuition, or mystical experience takes place, one cannot necessarily justifiably dismiss those experiences as being a priori in nature, and, as a result, conclude that they have nothing of potential value to say concerning the nature of Being/Reality.

Defining the a priori as being independent of experience and observation frames how one engages what takes place within us. Ibn al 'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) claimed to have undergone a number of mystical openings that took place while he was in Mecca, and he needed 10,000-plus pages to describe some of what he experienced, and, furthermore, he noted that what he wrote constituted only a small subset of what he actually experienced.

The Buddha (may God be pleased with him) claimed that he experienced enlightenment beneath a tree in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India ... a tree that has since been referred to as the Bodhi Tree. The Qur'an gives expression to a series of spiritual events that took place in the being of Muhammad (peace be upon him) over a period of twenty-three years.

Don't the foregoing incidents – quite apart from the issue of whether, or not, they are true – raise the possibility that what, previously, have been described as being a priori in nature (internal ideas), might actually constitute forms of observation and experience that occur quite independently of instances of observation and experience involving the external, material, physical world, and, yet, might be no less important –

and, perhaps, even more important -- than so-called empirical observations and experiences connected to what takes place in the external world of physical events?

Traditionally, a priori ideas have often been described as being necessarily true because one's logical analysis of those ideas supposedly is capable of demonstrating that deductions involving them are a function of the logic inherent in those ideas. However, since individuals can experience hallucinations that are not real in any sense except a phenomenological one, we can't refer to a priori ideas concerning spirituality as being necessarily true, but, instead, like experiences and observations concerning the physical, material world, one must engage those internal ideas, observations, experiences, and understandings through a process of rigorous critical reflection and, in the process of doing so, ask a great many questions.

Interestingly, while both ibn al-'Arabi and the Buddha (may God be pleased with them) seemed to treat their experiences as being self-evidently true in nature, Muhammad (peace be upon him), on the other hand, feared that his initial encounter with what, subsequently, were considered to be experiences of revelation might be a sign of madness or possession. Sometimes what takes place within us seems to be self-evident but -- after some amount of examination -- our understanding concerning the nature of those experiences might not turn out to be as self-evident as we first thought, while on other occasions what takes place within us might seem to be worthy of doubt and caution but on further consideration and reflection might have a value that, initially, we were not prepared to acknowledge.

Sometimes processes of deduction (attempting to make a transition from the general to the particular), induction (attempting to make a transition from the particular to the general), and abduction (in which one generates a theory to account for a given observation or set of observations) lead to felicitous results, and sometimes those modes of reasoning obscure issues and lead one away from a variety of other considerations. To date, no one has been able to establish a set of general rules involving deduction, induction, and abduction that necessarily permits one to discern the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

I am quite willing to acknowledge that one can identify an array of circumstances capable of demonstrating that processes such as: Reason, experience, evidence, facts, insight, proof, and truth have substantive realities through which one can organize, analyze, and draw defensible conclusions concerning the nature of various phenomena. After all, among other things, bridges and buildings can be built that don't collapse, or diagnoses can be given and medical treatments offered that are capable of helping to return ill people back to health, or vehicles can be built that are capable of taking human beings from the Earth to the Moon and back again.

The fact illusions and hallucinations can be shown to occur indicates that under certain circumstances human beings can be mistaken about the nature of reality. On the other hand, the fact that human beings are capable of pointing out the existence of those illusions and hallucinations indicates that human beings also are capable of determining certain truths concerning the nature of reality.

I am also aware that ideas concerning the nature of reason, facts, proof, evidence, insight, inference, truth, and so on are quite variable and are often used by different individuals in different ways to mean different things. Human beings are quite adept at framing arguments in terms that are self-serving and, therefore, in the process of analyzing experience, we often employ 'reason', 'evidence', 'facts', 'inference', and 'proof' in ways that permit us to come to the conclusions that are desired.

Furthermore, there is considerable historical evidence to indicate that since human beings first appeared on Earth – however this might have occurred – many errors in reasoning, analysis, critical reflection, judgment, understanding, and the like have taken place. I have seen myself commit those sorts of errors, and I have witnessed others do so as well.

Having academic degrees does not make one impervious to error-ridden possibilities. Lacking those sorts of degrees does not necessarily make one less vulnerable to those same problems.

Those who possess power – or who are considered authorities -- don't necessarily have any better insight into the nature of things than anyone else does. Of course, those who have power don't have to know the truth of things in order to be able to bring about whatever their power permits them to realize, but by being able to do whatever they like,

human beings who possess power – or authority -- often tend to inadvertently disclose the extent of the epistemological, moral, and spiritual corruption that is present in the exercise of that power.

When reflecting on what I consider to be the most important question of life – namely, what is the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality -- I have come to increasingly appreciate the importance of being willing to undertake a rigorous process of due diligence with respect to the manner in which I engage the foregoing issue. In fact, the 34, or so, books that I have written to date – including the present one – all have given expression to the process of attempting to exercise due diligence with respect to the issue of trying to determine the truth – to whatever extent this might be possible -- concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality.

Moreover, at the heart of the process of due diligence is a complex dynamic that involves making judgments about what and who to trust. Sometimes my judgments about who and what to trust have been quite constructive and productive, and sometimes those judgments have given rise to a great many difficulties.

As a result, I don't necessarily always trust my own judgments. Yet, I don't necessarily trust the judgments of other individuals either.

The responsibility for identifying what and who to trust with respect to engaging the challenge of determining the truth about the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality rests with the individual and no one else. One chooses, and one must accept responsibility for whatever ensues from the exercise of that choice.

There are ideas within me that come from a great many sources that are both internal and external in character. Which of those ideas should I choose to trust and pursue and which of those ideas should be cast aside?

One of the working principles that the Sufi tradition has helped me to come to appreciate – and I believe that any authentic spiritual/mystical/religious framework endorses the same principle – is that one must clean and calibrate one's instruments (e.g., reasoning, analysis, critical reflection, judgment, insight, and so on) in order to have the best opportunity for being able to gauge the degree to which truth is present with respect to any of the phenomena that are taking place within me. The cleansing and calibration process begins with becoming

increasingly inclined toward, as well as giving expression to, positive character traits (such as: Humility, honesty, patience, courage, charitableness, forgiveness, perseverance, nobility, selflessness, sincerity, love, tolerance, equitability, equanimity, gratitude, and service to others), while becoming increasingly disinclined toward giving expression to negative character traits such as: Dishonesty, arrogance, hypocrisy, insincerity, anger, selfishness, cowardice, pettiness, ingratitude, injustice, jealousy, impatience, greed, intolerance, and enmity.

If an idea emerges within me or comes to me from an external source, then an internal process of critically reflecting on that idea takes place that analytically engages such an idea and attempts to determine the nature of the character dynamics that are operating within that idea. If the framework through which I undertake such a process of critical reflection is constructed with qualities of positive character traits, then I have found that I have a better chance of determining whatever degree of truth might be present in such an idea than if that idea were engaged through filters woven from negative character traits.

The series of books that I have written give expression to the results of a process of critical reflection in which I have sought to operate out of an orientation of positive rather than negative character traits in conjunction with my conceptual engagement of a variety of issues involving: Medicine, neurobiology, psychopharmacology, AIDS/HIV research, psychology, evolution, philosophy, physics, cosmology, mysticism, Islam, and religion. To what extent that attempt has been successful is not necessarily an easy issue to assess ... for me or for others.

In addition, the various books that I have written are an attempt to work my way toward providing a response to the *Final Jeopardy* challenge – namely, what is the nature of Being/Reality? Given that I am 74-plus years old, I know that the time that remains available to me for putting forth the best answer I can by means of the resources that I have available to me is fast running out.

What conclusions have I come to with respect to the *Final Jeopardy* challenge and what are the reasoned and evidential bases for reaching those conclusions? One answer that might be offered with respect to that question is given expression through the series of books I have written, and I am unable to put that response in a more compact form ... that is, I

have no *Classics Illustrated* or CliffsNotes version to offer concerning my perspective on things.

Another possible answer might also be offered with respect to the foregoing question concerning the nature of my *Final Jeopardy* response to the question: What is the nature of reality? This answer is more elusive than the foregoing one.

The second answer might be referred to as the 'Interstitial Response'. More specifically, between all of the sentences of the books that I have written are interstitial spaces that shape, and are shaped by, the contents of those books, and those spaces are filled with possibilities and degrees of freedom that extend beyond whatever – if anything -- has been established through the written contents of those books.

For me, my beliefs and ideas concerning the nature of reality are contained in everything that I have written. However, my beliefs and ideas also are contained in everything that I have not written but which, nonetheless, permeates what has been written.

As indicated previously, Ibn al-'Arabi (may God be pleased with him) indicated that his *Meccan Revelations* (which consisted of more than 10,000 pages) constituted only a small portion of what he could have said about the openings or unveilings that he claimed took place in Mecca and that what he could have said about those experiences constituted only a very small portion of what is. Similarly – but in a much lower, less rich, and more constrained sense -- what I have written in the *Final Jeopardy* volumes to date is but a small subset of that which has occurred in my life, and my life constitutes but a very, very limited set of manifestations that have been made possible by the greatness and magnificence of What is.

There are many realities encompassed by the unwritten portions of my life. Moreover, many of those realities exist in the interstitial, phenomenal spaces within me around which the contents of the *Final Jeopardy* volumes are woven and through which the words in those volumes have become manifest.

Both what I have written, together with the concomitant interstitial phenomenal spaces associated with those words, is a function of an understanding that has been constructed across the years of my life concerning what I consider to be the truth about the nature of my

relationship with Being/Reality. That understanding might be correct in certain respects and incorrect in other respects, but whatever the case might with respect to its degree of correctness and incorrectness, that understanding represents the choices I have made in relation to formulating my response to the *Final Jeopardy* challenge.

I do not consider the foregoing understanding to be definitive, absolute, or certain. Instead, for the last 74 years I have been engaged in a continuous process of trying to update, refine, and improve that understanding in any way that appears to be: Reasonable (on both a regular, everyday level, as well as in conjunction with that which seems to transcend the world of everyday sorts of happenings); evidenced-based (from both internal and external sources); character-driven (in the positive and not negative sense), and open to (rather than closed off to) the possibilities that might be inherent in the data that Being/Reality is sending my way.

Chapter 21: Spiritual Abuse

Throughout most of this book I have defined religion as the process of seeking the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. There are many individuals and forces that are interested in undermining, corrupting, and derailing the foregoing sort of search, and those activities give expression to spiritual abuse.

Spiritual abuse is not a theoretical concept for me. I interacted with a perpetrator of spiritual abuse for 11 years.

While many of us are aware of the existence of sexual, financial and terrorist-oriented forms of exploitation that take place in a religious context, nonetheless, the presence of spiritual abuse is not necessarily easy to recognize. The ways of spiritual abuse can be quite subtle.

The aforementioned individual with whom I spent time – on and off – over a period of 11 years was a very funny, charismatic, knowledgeable, and intelligent individual. He was accessible, affable, and very down-to-earth.

With equal ease, he could skillfully engage those who were oriented in a fundamentalist manner concerning Islam as well as enticingly engage those who were neophytes. He could hold sway over groups of people for hours on end (sometimes up to nine or ten hours at a time), regaling them with a seemingly endless supply of: Stories, anecdotes, histories, explanations, and reflections concerning Islam, the Qur'an, Hadiths -- words attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) – Sufi saints, mystical teachings, poetry, world affairs, politics, and the events of the day.

He patiently answered all manner of questions. When he responded to those questions he continued on until the person who raised the question was satisfied with the answer that was being given.

If an individual wanted a personal, one-on-one meeting with him, he was very generous with his time. Despite the fact that he was busy with people from the time he got up until the time he went to bed, I never saw anyone who made a request for personal attention being refused ... although those individuals might have to wait an hour or two until time became available for them.

The tale of how I came to meet my second teacher is instructive on several levels. My first shaykh or spiritual guide had passed away several years previously.

I had spent 16-17 years with my first shaykh. I was introduced to Islam and the Sufi path through him.

Those 16-17 years were probably the most difficult and, yet, rewarding period of my life. I learned more about: Me, life, people, government, news media, education, spirituality, and the world, than during any other facet of my life. However, when my first shaykh passed away, I still felt the need for additional spiritual guidance and, consequently, I was trying to figure out what to do in that respect.

Several possibilities arose, but I decided to keep looking. While I was considering things, I was continuing to conduct a weekly, informal group at the university where I was doing graduate studies in education.

The meetings explored various aspects of the Sufi path and Islam. Usually, those gatherings involved between 5-10 people, some of who were regulars, while the identity of others shifted from week to week.

I was not a spiritual guide in any sense. Nonetheless, my own teacher had asked me to lead the discussion group.

I had been conducting those meetings for fifteen, or so, years prior to the time when my guide passed away. I continued leading those meetings for a time after my teacher passed away.

One night I received a call at home. The woman who contacted me wanted to know if I was the person who was leading a weekly discussion group concerning the Sufi path that was taking place at the university.

When, I indicated that I was such a person, she indicated she would be coming to the next meeting. She asked for the day, time, and location of the meeting, and once she received that information, she terminated the conversation.

At the next meeting of the Sufi discussion group, a new woman showed up. As indicated previously, the meetings usually only involved 5-10 people, and, consequently, identifying a newcomer was not all that difficult.

I asked her if she was the person who had called me earlier in the week. She answered in the affirmative.

For the next five or six months, she attended every meeting. She rarely spoke or asked questions, but, on several occasions, she made a few, fleeting references to her spiritual guide.

On one occasion, she indicated that she and her family were going to New Jersey to meet with her shaykh. There were a couple of other people at the meeting who expressed interest and inquired about whether, or not, they might be able to go down and meet with the shaykh as well.

Permission was sought by that woman on behalf of those individuals, and, as a result, one or two people who had been regular participants in the Wednesday night Sufi discussion group made arrangements to travel to New Jersey and spend a day, or two, with that teacher. When they returned to the discussion group meetings the next week, they seemed to be quite happy with what had transpired during their journey to meet with that shaykh, but not a great deal was said about what took place.

At a certain point – after a number of months had passed -- the aforementioned woman invited me to have dinner with her family. I accepted and was happy that I did because she was a great cook.

The foregoing scenario took place several additional times. During one of these occasions, the woman indicated that her spiritual guide had asked her to inquire about whether, or not, I might be willing to instruct the woman's young daughters concerning Islam and the Sufi path.

I wasn't excited about the idea, but I also didn't want to just say no. I expressed some reservations, but the woman and her husband indicated that they were quite open to the arrangement and would be happy with whatever I might be able to do in that respect.

Consequently, on Sunday afternoons, I began to go to the couple's house, and spend an hour, or so, interacting with their children while we explored various simple themes concerning Islam and the Sufi path. Each time I went, I was treated to a great meal with the family.

Eventually, the couple indicated that following my sessions with their children -- and prior to the meal that would be served later -- their spiritual teacher had indicated to them that he wanted me to offer Fatiha (a litany/prayer that involves: Recitation of various surahs, or chapters, from the Qur'an; giving thanks; spiritual remembrance). My Arabic pronunciation was not all that good, and, as a result, I was hesitant to

lead Fatiha, but the parents indicated they would be content with me doing the best that I could do.

The foregoing arrangement continued on for quite a few months. At some point during this period of time, the woman and her husband indicated that their teacher was going to be coming to Toronto in the near future, and they informed me that their teacher was looking forward to meeting with me.

The day of the meeting finally arrived. There were quite a few people in attendance (perhaps 30, or so, individuals ... although the precise number was hard to determine because as the evening progressed some people had to leave for various reasons while various newcomers replaced them.

I spent most of my time just listening. I was impressed with his understanding of a great many things.

Since I had spent 16-17 years listening to, interacting with, and asking questions of my first shaykh – someone who was both a university professor in Islamic studies, as well as a rigorous practitioner of Sufi discipline (including 18-19 instances of observing 40-day seclusions) – I had acquired a fair amount of familiarity with Islam, the Qur'an, Hadiths, and the Sufi mystical tradition. What the individual from Pakistan -- by way of New Jersey -- was saying during the meeting resonated strongly with what I knew about Islam and the Sufi path.

I attended two or three of those meetings. Each meeting lasted four, or more hours, but after 2-3 hours I usually had to leave in order to get ready to go to work the next day, but there were many others who participated in those meetings and who stayed on into the wee hours of the morning.

After the second or third meeting, I decided that I had met the individual with whom I wanted to continue to learn about Islam and the Sufi path. I asked the woman whose children I had been teaching if she would ask the gentleman if he would be willing to initiate me into his spiritual Order.

She did as I asked. Shortly thereafter, she came back with an affirmative response, and arrangements were made for me – and a number of other individuals – to take initiation at a subsequent gathering.

My relationship with my previous shaykh was quite close. I had become something like an assistant, of sorts, for my first shaykh. As a result, for nearly two decades, I engaged in all manner of activities (including writing a number of reports and numerous letters in conjunction with various campaigns that occurred during those years, as well as serving as chairman for the aforementioned Wednesday night Sufi discussion group) and, in addition, I had the great good fortune to accompany my shaykh on several extended journeys overseas.

I was not seeking, nor was I expecting to have, the same sort of relationship with my new shaykh that I had enjoyed with my previous shaykh. I was completely ready to start over again.

The past was the past. The present constituted a new day.

On the night when I became initiated by my new shaykh, something totally unexpected took place. After I was initiated, the shaykh indicated to the other members of the gathering that it had been the wish of his own shaykh that I be made a shaykh or spiritual guide in the silsilah or spiritual lineage of his Sufi Order, and that by initiating me and making me a shaykh, he was merely carrying out the instructions of his own spiritual guide.

After the process of my initiation had been completed -- along with the initiation of a number of other individuals -- there was a break in the proceedings. During that break, I talked with the woman whose children I had been instructing in some of the basics of Islam and the Sufi path.

She indicated she had known, for some time, about what was going to take place in conjunction with my initiation (i.e., being given the responsibilities of becoming a shaykh). However, she also informed me that her spiritual guide -- who was now my spiritual guide -- had told her that he would be very, very upset with her if she disclosed anything to me -- even by way of the slightest hint -- about what was to occur.

When I asked to be initiated, nothing had been promised to me. Not even in my wildest dreams would I have anticipated that what took place on that evening would actually take place.

I might have spent 16-17 years with my previous spiritual guide engaged in all manner of spiritual activities, but I never really thought of myself as having the qualities necessary to be a shaykh. By the Grace of God, the foregoing period of time helped me to become a much better

person than I might otherwise have been, but, nonetheless, I felt that a tremendous gap existed between, on the one hand, the manner in which my first shaykh went about things and, on the other hand, how I engaged life, and, therefore, it was difficult for me wrap my head and heart around the idea of being a shaykh.

However, I believed that whatever might be possible through me would be due to God's presence and not as a result of my capabilities (or lack thereof). Consequently, I was willing to proceed forward with the understanding that God could work through anyone ... even me.

The whole process leading to initiation took place over a period that lasted for almost two years. Although the woman who had called me up and asked about the Wednesday night meetings occasionally made references to her shaykh during those meetings, such references were brief and fairly rare.

When I began meeting with the family – first, just for meals, and subsequently for instructional sessions involving her children, and, then, for the observance of Fatiha -- there was very little conversation about her and her husband's shaykh. They never placed any pressure on me to go down to New Jersey and visit with their shaykh. They never so much as even hinted that I should consider becoming initiated into their Sufi group

When I finally met the shaykh – nearly two years later – he was friendly. However, he was friendly with everyone, and, consequently, I never felt as if he were paying any special attention to me.

The primary attraction during those meetings was that I liked what he had to say and the manner with which he conducted himself. His words and behavior reflected what I already believed to be true concerning Islam and its mystical dimension, however, what also seemed to be quite clear was that the depth of his understanding concerning the Sufi path appeared to be fairly substantial.

During the next 11 years I became occupied with trying to do whatever I could to fulfill the spiritual responsibilities that had been assigned to me. To make a long story very much shorter, and due to a variety of circumstances, I: Moved six or seven times involving several countries (Canada and America); became unemployed for nearly two years, and, then, worked for a little over a year before going through several more years of being -- with the exception of the doings some part-

time proof reading – unemployed; became married and divorced on several occasions, and, as well, I wrote several books (one was fictional in nature, while the other was non-fictional in scope and focused on introducing readers to the Sufi path.

My new shaykh, or spiritual guide, had told me on several occasions that I was very important to the silsilah, or spiritual lineage, to which we belonged. He kept emphasizing that because of my status within the silsilah, he was under an obligation to tell me everything that was taking place within our group.

It took me 11 years to discover that, among other things, he wasn't living up to the aforementioned obligation. One of the reasons that it took so long for me to figure out what was going on was because my life was often quite chaotic during that period of time due to: Relationship problems, financial difficulties, long periods of unemployment, having to move around a fair amount, and, as well, trying to fulfill my obligations as a shaykh within the silsilah.

Although there were periods of time during the foregoing general state of chaos when I was able to spend time with my new shaykh, a great deal of the 11 years that I knew him was spent apart from his physical presence. We kept in touch through snail mail, e-mail, and phone conversations, but there were a great many things taking place within the Sufi group about which I knew little or nothing.

If I communicated – usually through e-mail -- with someone else in the group and was informed by that individual about this or that oddity concerning what was taking place in different places with respect to various group members, I would contact my teacher – as I had been instructed to do by him – tell my spiritual guide what I had been told, and, then, he would provide me the back story and an account of what was supposedly taking place.

Later on – much later on – I came to know that he was spinning many stories for my consumption. In fact, if it had not been for someone – someone that I trusted -- who lived in my vicinity and came to have direct access to information that countered what the alleged shaykh had been telling me, I'm not sure that I ever would have learned the truth concerning a great many matters involving that individual.

My so-called spiritual guide had been lying to me for quite a few years about a number of things of considerable importance. In addition, concrete evidence surfaced – in the form of the aforementioned person who lived near me and who I trusted – that my spiritual guide was engaged in one, or more, illicit sexual liaisons with some of the women in the group who lived in different parts of North America.

After learning the things that I did concerning the man, I resigned my spiritual commission, so to speak. The resignation was a mere formality since, in point of fact, I never had been an authentic shaykh because the person who conducted the ceremony was a spiritual fraud.

Following the foregoing chain of events, I contacted people (some times in person and sometimes by phone) for whom I bore some responsibility – indirectly or directly – with respect to having introduced them to my former shaykh. I discussed with those individuals what I understood concerning the situation and tried to answer whatever questions they might have about things as best I could.

Some of those individuals took my concerns to heart and discontinued their relationship with their former shaykh. Others who listened to what I had to say chose not to believe the information being given to them and, as a result, continued to consider that man as an authentic spiritual guide.

As with all things, people make choices about what information to accept and what information to reject. As with all things, people make choices about what they believe the nature of truth to be in any given set of circumstances.

The individual that I once considered to be my spiritual guide has left a great many tattered souls in his wake. Either because of what I said or as a result of their experiences with that man, a number of individuals decided, subsequently, to distance themselves from religious or spiritual pursuits altogether.

Those individuals discontinued their search for the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality. As a result, the direction of their lives changed due to their experience of having been spiritually abused at the hands of their former spiritual guide.

However, the individuals that decided to remain affiliated with their so-called shaykh are continuing to undergo the process of spiritual abuse

because those people continue to believe that they are being rightly guided but, instead, through an intricately constructed web of lies and deceits, they are being led away from the truth concerning all manner of issues. They have developed a false sense of the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality because everything that they understand about Islam and the Sufi path is being filtered through the distorted and corrupt conceptual lenses of their teacher.

Recovering from spiritual abuse is a very difficult process. Among other things, one grieves over having been violated in such an intimate, essential manner.

One feels rudderless and without a compass. One is disinclined to trust others ... especially in matters involving the issue of religion.

Of considerable importance to the process of recovery from spiritual abuse is to have an opportunity to have access to what might be termed a "compassionate witness". A compassionate witness is someone who will permit one to be able to debrief about all aspects of the experience of having been spiritually abused without feeling like one is being judged and who will offer various kinds of emotional support to assist one through a dark period in one's life.

I had access to such a compassionate witness in the form of the aforementioned individual through whom I first came to learn about some of the hidden activities of the person I once considered to be my spiritual guide. I also served as a compassionate witness for that same individual who been exposed to spiritual abuse from the same so-called teacher.

Eventually, one has to accept responsibility for whatever role one might have played in opening oneself up to such a process of spiritual abuse. At the same time, one also has to struggle with trying to derive whatever constructive dimensions one can from those events.

If one does not grieve properly, if one does not have ready access to a compassionate witness, if one does not accept responsibility for whatever small part one might have played in helping to facilitate such a state of affairs, and if one does not do the work that is necessary to derive constructive benefits from a bad situation, then, one is likely to become stuck spiritually speaking. In other words, one loses interest in or loses

one's desire to continue to pursue – as best one can – seeking the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

I was very fortunate because for 17 years, or so, I had been provided with an opportunity to spend a lot of quality time with my first shaykh ... someone who I consider to be an authentic spiritual guide. If I had met my second teacher first, and my first teacher second, I'm not sure there would have been much of a relationship – if any – with the second teacher.

Of course, someone might wish to raise questions concerning my first shaykh. How do I know he was authentic?

True knowledge of anything is very difficult to acquire. Most of us engage life through a conglomerate of beliefs, opinions, speculations, understandings, theories, worldviews, and ideas that have not been, or cannot be, proven to be true.

All too frequently, we are willing to kill or harm one another on the basis of such unsubstantiated perspectives. Truly, oftentimes, we know not what we do, but, nevertheless, we choose to proceed as if we did know what, in fact, we do not know.

Could I be wrong about the spiritual authenticity of my first spiritual guide? Yes, I could be, but after considerable reflection on the matter and after having sifted through years of experience with him, I feel there is sufficient reliable evidence to strongly support the reality of his authenticity.

Do I know that my first spiritual guide was authentic? No, I don't because real knowledge has a high threshold to achieve before one can actually claim that one has that sort of knowledge. Nonetheless, I have fairly strong grounds for believing that he was an authentic source of mystical teachings concerning the truth about the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality.

Is it possible that I am wrong about the spiritual authenticity – or lack thereof -- of my second teacher? For example, is it possible that I should not have trusted the person who helped me to come to realize the nature of what was taking place within the Sufi silsilah of the second shaykh?

Possibly, yes! However, this is very unlikely to be the case because I have been able to assemble a fair amount of reliable evidence indicating that the alleged, second shaykh repeatedly lied about a variety of issues

as well as carried on in a manner that is completely inconsistent with the responsibilities and duties of an authentic spiritual guide.

Do I know that the second individual was a spiritual fraud? No, I don't – again, because the threshold for having real knowledge is quite high -- but, nonetheless, I have done due diligence and, as a result, I have taken the matter as far as I am capable of doing and, in the process, I have chosen to believe – on the basis of considerable evidence – that the second teacher was deeply involved in activities of spiritual abuse – that is, activities intended to undermine, corrupt, and derail individuals as they sought to discover the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality.

While the 11 years that I spent associating, in one way or another, with the person I now consider to be a fraudulent spiritual guide have been fraught with difficulty, I still learned a great deal about: Me, life, other people, and spirituality, but the nature of the lessons that were learned had a largely negative quality to them. In other words, during the course of those 11 years, I wasn't so much engaged in discovering the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality as much as I was learning about the nature of certain forces that are dedicated to disrupting the foregoing process of searching for the truth.

My first spiritual guide – the one who I consider to be an authentic teacher – never tried to interfere with, disrupt, undermine, corrupt or derail my search for the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality. He encouraged me to undertake a rigorous and disciplined study of myself as well as of the world around me.

He worked with me in order to help me acquire the sort of positive, constructive character traits that would assist me to engage the central question of life – the reality problem – objectively and with equitability. In addition, he worked with me in order to help me to try to rid myself of the negative, destructive character traits that tended to interfere with and disrupt the foregoing search.

Throughout the period of time that I spent with the individual whom I currently consider to be a spiritual fraud, I was engaged in a process of searching for the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality. However, instead of learning about that sort of truth, I was developing an understanding – unbeknown to me at the time -- about a variety of problems that often tend to surround any such search, but this

sort of understanding didn't come into clear resolution until after those 11 years had passed.

Sometimes, learning what is not true is almost as important as learning what is true. Such learning serves as a complement to whatever truths one is able to realize with respect to the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

During my 17 years, or so, of associating with my first spiritual guide – the individual I consider to be an authentic teacher -- the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality consisted in one set of experiences. During the 11 years, or so, that I associated with the second guide – the person who I consider to be a fraudulent teacher – the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality consisted of a different set of experiences.

Ultimately, both sets of experiences have contributed to helping me search for the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality. As a result, I now realize that such a search is a lot more complicated than I initially thought was the case. (For further information concerning the nature of spiritual abuse, please read my book: *The Sufi Lighthouse* or the three volume series: *Journal of a Sufi Odyssey: A True Novel* by Shaykh Tariq Knecht.)

Today, there are many individuals who are inclined toward one, or another, form of atheism. I am sure that they believe they have good reasons for believing in the way they do.

I am quite willing to leave it to Being/Reality to decide who is closer to the truth in any given matter and acknowledge that everyone – including myself -- must accept responsibility for the extent to which their perspectives reflect – or fail to -- the truth of things concerning the nature of Being/Reality. We all are engaged in the challenge of Final Jeopardy – that is, trying to come up with the best response we can with respect to the 'reality problem'.

However, some atheists are as deeply involved in a process of perpetuating spiritual abuse as are individuals like my second guide – the fraudulent one. More specifically, on the one hand, I am willing to recognize that there is potential value to be found in conjunction with criticisms of individuals who claim to be religiously inclined but who, simultaneously, engage in acts of: Hatred, dishonesty, cruelty, greed, arrogance, injustice, deceit, selfishness, murder, exploitation,

manipulation, and so on. However, on the other hand, what religious hypocrites do does not give expression to the essential nature of religion – which is to seek for the truth concerning the nature of the one’s relationship with Being/Reality.

Individuals such as: Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Daniel Dennett, as well as, among others, the relatively recently deceased Victor Stenger and Christopher Hitchens, often don’t seem to be content with merely pointing out the errors and mistakes of individuals who claim to be interested in religion but whose actions appear to indicate otherwise. Instead, the aforementioned individuals seem to want to attack religion per se, and part of the method they use to attempt to accomplish this involves their attempt to use the errors and mistakes of individuals as if the latter behavior constituted factual evidence that religion – no matter what its character might be -- is a fraudulent activity that has no redeeming value.

Religion – understood as the search for the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality – is the most important activity in which any human being can engage. When people such as Sam Harris and other like-minded individuals seek to undermine, derail, corrupt, or distort the pursuit of religion through their speculations, opinions, and unsubstantiated theories, as well as by treating their likes and dislikes as if those were necessary truths, and, thereby, discourage people from pursuing certain modalities of searches for the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality, then, to me, those activities seem to be every bit as spiritually abusive as are the acts of ministers, imams, rabbis, theologians, priests, and spiritual guides who discourage people from pursuing religion as a result of the reprehensible activities of the former alleged experts concerning religion.

To be sure, individuals like Sam Harris and his colleagues ought to be free to point out what religion should not be by exploring what they consider to be the mistakes that various people make in certain circumstances. However, one cannot validly take arguments concerning what religion should not be – that is, being spiritually abusive in a broad sense – and, then, try to claim that what religion should not be is the essence of religion.

I might agree with Harris, Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, Stenger, and others on all manner of things concerning the behavior of certain

individuals who claim to be religious but aren't. However, the actual nature of religion transcends the foregoing sorts of behaviors, and, consequently, if one seeks to argue that because those individuals engage in problematic behaviors, then this constitutes proof that religion, per se, is not worth pursuing, then this seems, to me, to give expression to a form of spiritual abuse that is directed toward discouraging and undermining anyone who might be interested in pursuing the essential nature of religion – as has been outlined in the previous 543 pages – but who does not wish to do so in a manner that is reminiscent of the kinds of behaviors that are being criticized – sometimes justifiably so -- by Dr. Harris and company.

Dr. Harris and other like-minded individuals should be encouraging the latter sort of individuals. Instead they appear to want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. (To further explore some of my critical reflections concerning the work of Dr. Sam Harris, please refer to my: *Epistle To A Sam Harris Nation: Debunking the Moral Landscape, Sam Harris and the Future of Ignorance*, as well as *Sam Harris and the End of Faith: A Muslim's Critical Response*).

Spiritual abuse often corrodes and destroys religious aspirations, inclinations, desires and motivation. As a result, those who are subjected to spiritual abuse are often left bereft of holy longing.

Holy longing is the desire to seek, discover, understand, and act in accordance with the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. That truth gives expression to that which human beings are inclined to cherish as sacred precisely because the truth concerning the nature of Being/Reality, together with how we fit into the scheme of things with respect to that Being/Reality, is deserving of our veneration and also is deserving of our commitment to its principles.

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