

Thursdays, 10:00 – 11:30 am,
Mar. 10 – Apr. 21 (skip 3/24)

\$46; 448 pages (2014)

(We'll cover all of "Parts 1 & 3" and as much as we can of Part 2)

Housekeeping

- Attendance
- Add to **email** list?
- **Other?**



Covenant

- Use **“I” statements**: *Speak from your own experience.*
- **Ask permission before sharing** other participants’ stories outside the group.
- **Step-up, step-back**: be conscious of the level of participation that you bring to the conversation. Allow everyone a chance to speak before you speak again.
- You always have **permission to “pass.”**



- Class 1: Part I: “Prehistory, Preparation, & Perspective” (ch. 1-2a)
- Class 2: Part I: “Prehistory, Preparation, & Perspective” (ch. 2b-3)
- Part II: “Comparative Acts”
 - Chapter 4: “Myth/Ritual”
 - Chapter 5: “Nature/Science”
 - **Chapter 6: “Sex and Bodies”**
 - Chapter 7: “Charisma and Power”
 - **Chapter 8: “Imagination and Paranormal”**
 - **Chapter 9: “Soul, Salvation, and the End”**
- Part III: Putting It All Together Again (chapters 10-12)

(For details, see “Chapter Outlines” under “Browse by Resources” at wiley.com/go/kripal)



Comicon 2014

Being an atheist is okay.

Shaming religions and intellectualising spirituality as false or stupid is not okay.

Being a Christian is okay.

Being homophobic, misogynistic, racist, or behaving in a hateful manner in the name of Christianity is not okay.

FB/Sue Fitzmaurice, Author

Being a reindeer is okay.

Bullying and excluding another reindeer because he has a shiny nose is not okay.

“What progressives don't get about traditional Christians”
(*implicitly makes Kripal's points*)

theweek.com/article/index/265094/what-progressives-fundamentally-dont-get-about-traditional-christians

- “*From* Christian colleges challenging the Affordable Care Act's contraception mandate *to* the Catholic bishops protesting same-sex marriage, orthodox Christians are among the most *unyielding* opponents of sexual liberation.
- Bound to their idea of human sexuality because it is inseparable from their understanding of God.
- *If* they're wrong about sex and gender, *then* they're wrong at a very basic level about God, the Bible, and their religious tradition.

“What progressives fundamentally don't get about traditional Christians” (Kripal would say, “Correct!”)

- “If Christians are no longer up in arms about trimming beards or eating ham, a common progressive line goes, why must they follow the bible's similarly backward thinking around homosexuality?”
- Orthodox Christian View: sexual difference is ordered towards procreation. “Tug on the strand of sexual difference, and you risk unraveling the whole” of Christianity.

“What progressives fundamentally don't get about traditional Christians” [Kripal would say #Freud!]

- Bible: Frequently calls God *Father*.
- Roman Catholics: “Father” indicates that “God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority,” attributes historically associated with the male of the species.
- Bible: Occasionally describes God in *feminine* language,
- Christ: called the church his bride because the church submissively receives God's revealed truth. “If it sounds sexual, that's because it is.”

“What progressives fundamentally don't get about traditional Christians”

- “Growing acceptance of homosexuality and self-defined gender identity challenges more than an old, persistent patriarchy.
- Threatens more than the Christian notion of sexual difference and complementarity.
- *If this traditional Christian understanding of human sexuality is wrong, then the biblical authors were misguided in building their conceptions of God and the church on the foundations of sexual difference.”*
- (theweek.com/article/index/265094/what-progressives-fundamentally-dont-get-about-traditional-christians)

Highlights from Session #1

“Religious Mystic & Rational Humanist: The Mystical Humanism of Jeffrey Kripal”:

patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2014/03/religious-mystic-rational-humanist-the-mystical-humanism-of-jeffrey-kripal

- [In 1989]: For days, I had been participating in the annual Bengali celebration of the goddess Kali in the streets and temples of Calcutta (now Kolkata).













Highlights from Session #1

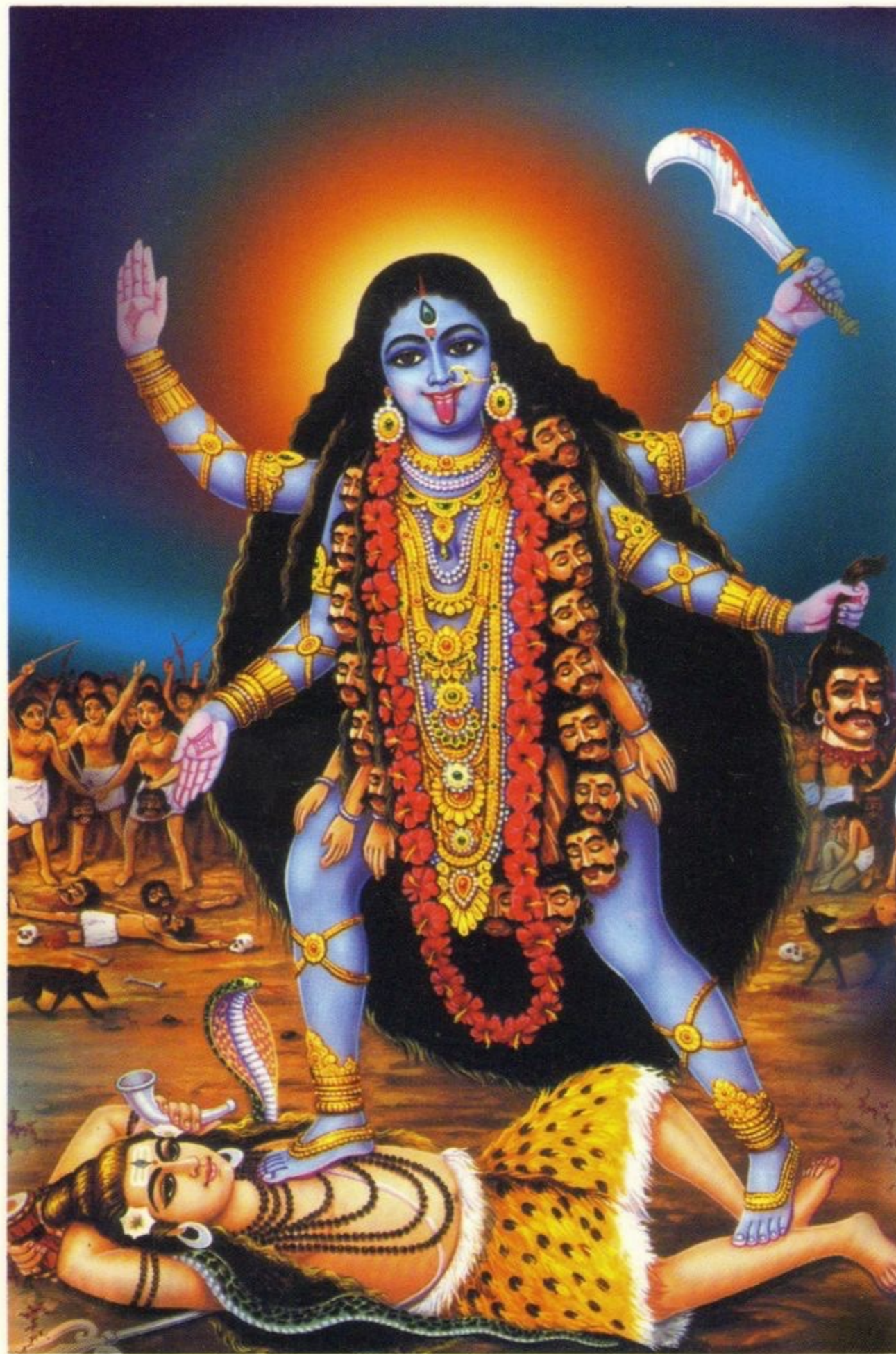
“Religious Mystic & Rational Humanist: The Mystical Humanism of Jeffrey Kripal”:

patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2014/03/religious-mystic-rational-humanist-the-mystical-humanism-of-jeffrey-kripal

- One morning I woke up asleep, that is, I woke up, but my body did not. I couldn't move. I was paralyzed, like a corpse, more or less exactly like the Hindu god Shiva as he is traditionally portrayed in Tantric art, lying prostrate beneath Kali's feet.







Highlights from Session #1

“Religious Mystic & Rational Humanist: The Mystical Humanism of Jeffrey Kripal”:

patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2014/03/religious-mystic-rational-humanist-the-mystical-humanism-of-jeffrey-kripal

- Then those “feet” touched me. An incredibly subtle, immensely pleasurable, and terrifyingly powerful energy entered me, possessed me, completely overwhelmed me. My vibrating body felt as if I had stuck a fork in a wall socket....

Highlights from Session #1

“Religious Mystic & Rational Humanist: The Mystical Humanism of Jeffrey Kripal”:

patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2014/03/religious-mystic-rational-humanist-the-mystical-humanism-of-jeffrey-kripal

- Perhaps more significantly, my brain felt as if it had suddenly hooked up to some sort of occult Internet and that billions of bits of information were being downloaded into its neural net.
- Or better, it felt as if my entire being was being reprogrammed or rewired.... It is almost as if some kind of direct, right-brained, mind-to-mind transmission took place, as if those residual plasmic energies were encoded with ideas or structures that could not be “languaged”
- but could be stored and later intuited and consciously shaped in the mirror of other resonant or echoing authors until they could appear, now through the prism of the left-brain’s words, as my books.”

(Jeffrey Kripal, *Mutants & Mystics*, 6-8)

Highlights from Session #1

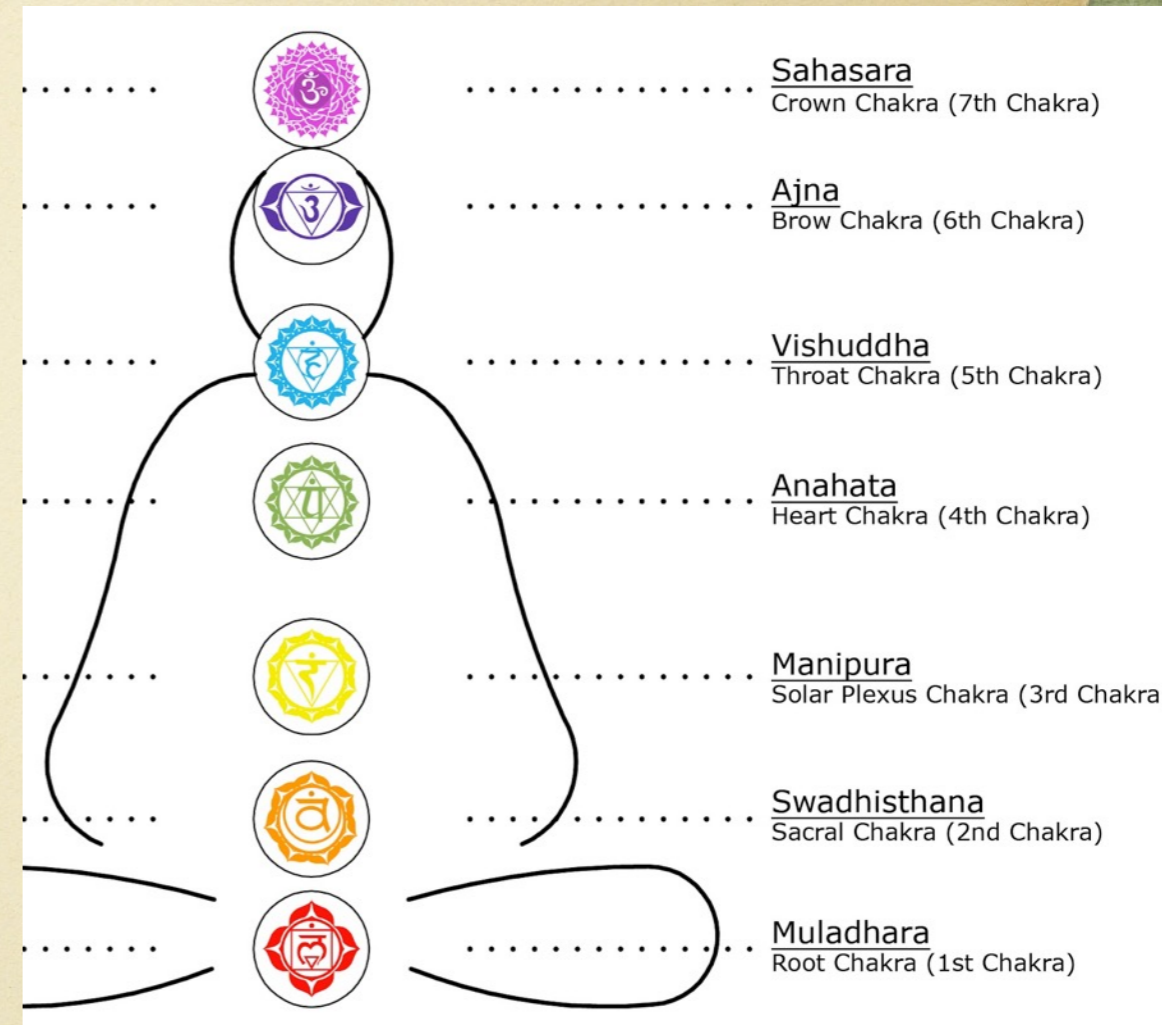
- Resist getting lost in the details (*names/dates: Wycliffe, Tyndale, Kant, Strauss, etc.*)
- Much more important than “content” is *themes, patterns, ways of relating* — what *emerges* from the comparative process

Highlights from Session #1

- When it comes to the history of testimonies about personal religious experience, there are a lot **charlatans, huckers, con artists, fakes, frauds, and imposters.**
- **UU**: balance **First Source of “direct experience”** with **Fifth Source of “reason and the results of science** that warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.”
- **Modernity**: seeming triumph of secularization, industrialization, progress, and rationality — understanding the world as a *machine*: the dream that **if we could just figure out how all the component parts work, then we’ll understand the whole.**
- **Postmodernity** science, rationality, and materialism alone — as powerful as that worldview is and continues to be — is *insufficient*. The **universe is messier, more complex, more holistic and interconnected** than modernity allowed. The postmodern world in which we find ourselves is skeptical of universal answers and open to **multiple ways of obtaining knowledge** [*the both/and of science and spirituality*)]

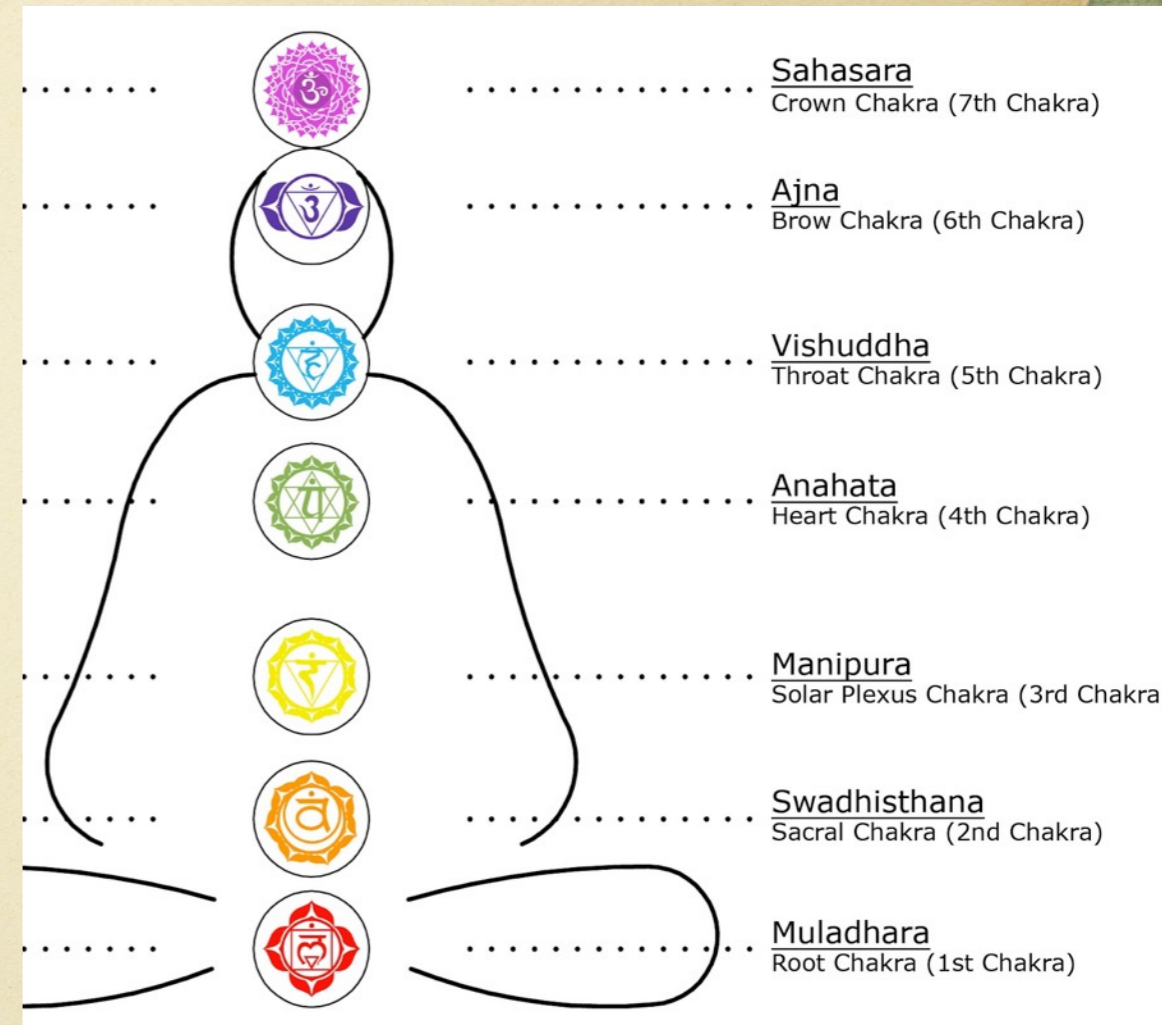
Highlights from Session #1

- Dissertation Defense: Kripal asked was about his *preferred methodological tool*.
- **“Very big Freudian screwdriver”**
- Indian mystic Bhagwan Rajneesh (1931–1990): **“Freud only got to the third chakra.”**
- Freud (and science): right, *but doesn't go far enough*.
- Limit intrinsic to the scientific method, which requires the object of study to be *repeatable* and verifiable in *laboratory* conditions.



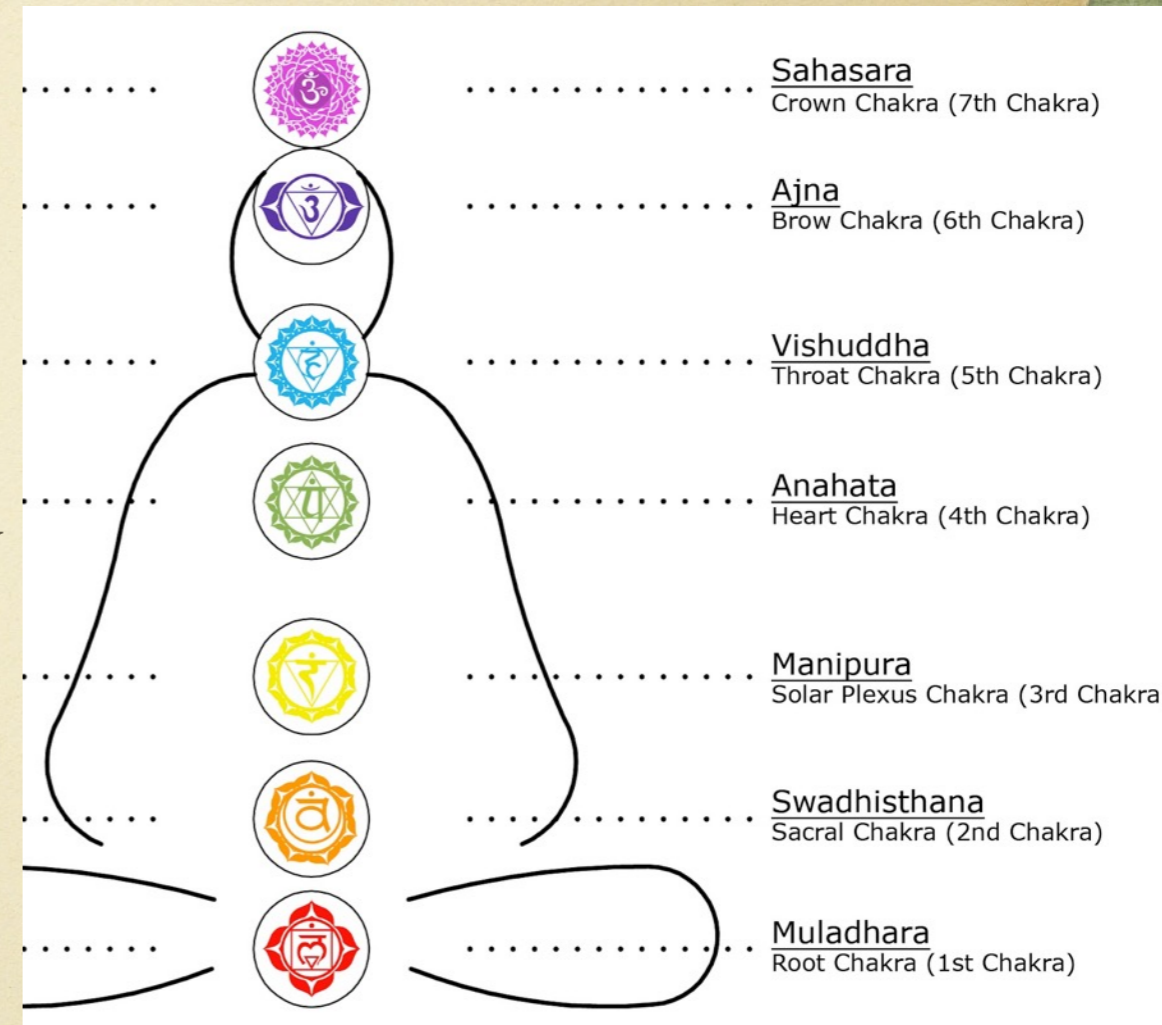
Highlights from Session #1

- First three chakras in more familiar scientific terms: “**the anal, genital, and digestive.**”
- Freudian terms: “anal-retentive and Oedipal Complex” (*unconscious motives* related to “sexual desire, greed” as well as “shame, disgust, and fear”).
- Rational science: better at addressing these “lower/material” aspects of the human condition



Highlights from Session #1

- Science is less skilled at addressing the *subjective, poetic, interspirituality* of the
- Heart Chakra: mystical love
- Throat Chakra: still-speaking ecstasy
- “Third Eye” Opening: near-absorptive state
- Seventh Chakra: Unitive state, “complete absorption,”



Highlights from Session #1

- Just as spiritual teachers have criticized scientists for only getting to the “third chakra,” **many orthodox religions are rightly criticized for stopping “just above the waist”**
- Many traditional religions *do well* with the mystical love for the divine, but their approaches to the anal, genital, and digestive parts of the human condition (“below the waist”) are often **nonsensical, inhumane, and unrealistic** to say the least.
- Example: why there is so much excitement about any mention of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.
- I do not think that the historical Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene.
- I do think that *archetypally* the mentioning of Mary Magdalene and Jesus exposes that **the orthodox tradition about Jesus, for the most part, stops “just above the waist.”**

Highlights from Session #1

- If your primary image of the sacred is a celibate male individual, there is an unconscious knowledge that there are **huge aspects of the human condition that image of the divine neglects** (like with a monotheistic God as “Father”-alone),
- Especially if you are *female* or *non-celibate male*.
- Invoking the name of Mary Magdalene fascinates many people for precisely that reason: she reminds us of a huge gap in orthodox Christianity.
- [*“Sex and the Single Savior.”*]

Highlights from Session #1

- Continue to be skeptical of strands of spirituality that are “superficial, flaky, anti-intellectual, and socially disengaged.”
- “Mystical Humanism”: intersection of science & spirituality.
- Limits of scientific materialism: A man is searching for his car keys. Another man comes up and asks where he thinks he lost them. “In the basement,” he answers. “So why are you looking out here in the driveway?” he asks in confusion. “Oh, because the light is much better here.”
- (*“There might really be something worth looking for in the dark.”*)
- J. B. S. Haldane: “My own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but **queerer than we can suppose.**”

Comparing Religions has costs & promises

- Like playing with fire.
- Like the “Red Pill” from *The Matrix*: “This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill — the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill —you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes.”
- Cost: professional study of religion is incompatible with particular types of religiosity (*fundamentalism*).
- Promise:
 - “free/responsible search for truth/meaning”
 - “one who knows one knows none”

Highlights from Session #1

- Anthropomorphism and Projection Theory: It is no coincidence that, “the Ethiopians worship black gods and the Thracians worship gods with blue eyes and red hair....”
- Two major influences: Enlightenment Rationalism & the Romantic Reversal.

Romantic Reversal

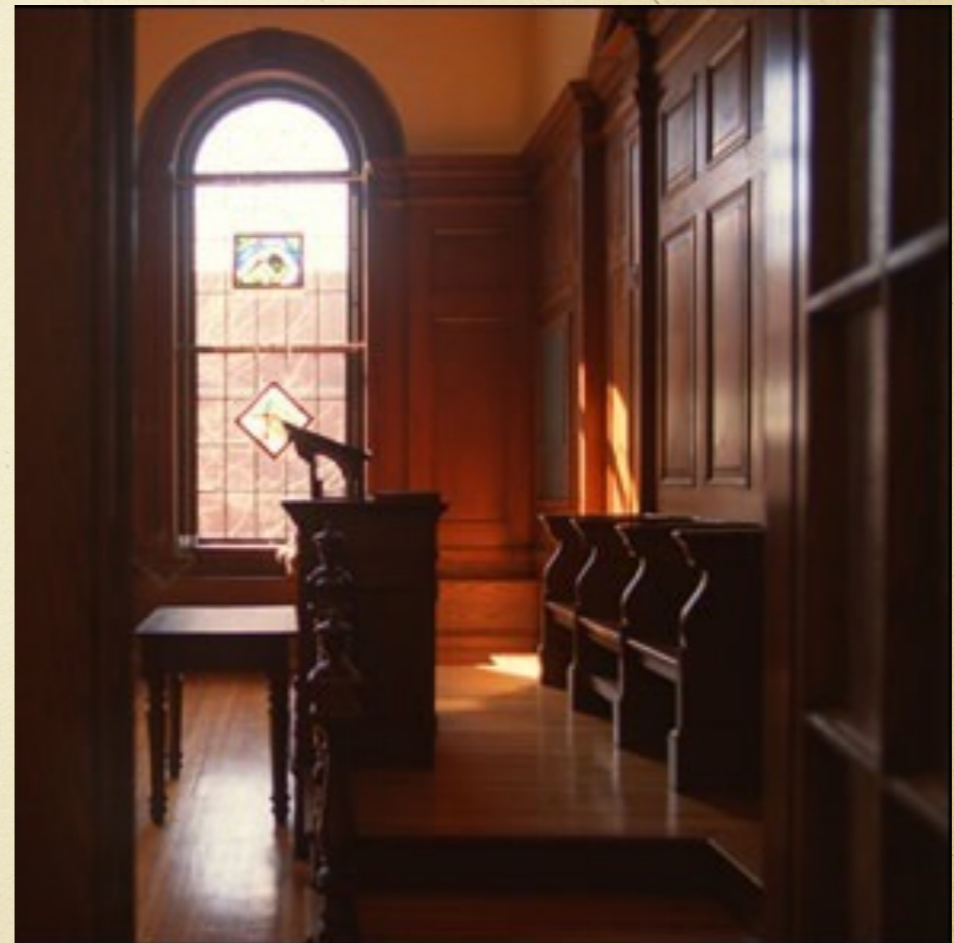
- *All Religions are One* (1788) — human nature lies behind it all.
- *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793): “Men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast”
- *[Projection Theory: the divine may be a projection of the human, but the human is also really and truly divine.]*
- Blake: Is Jesus divine?
Friend: “He is the only God. And so am I. And so are you.”



William Blake (1757-1827)

Romantic Reversal ("Reflexivity")

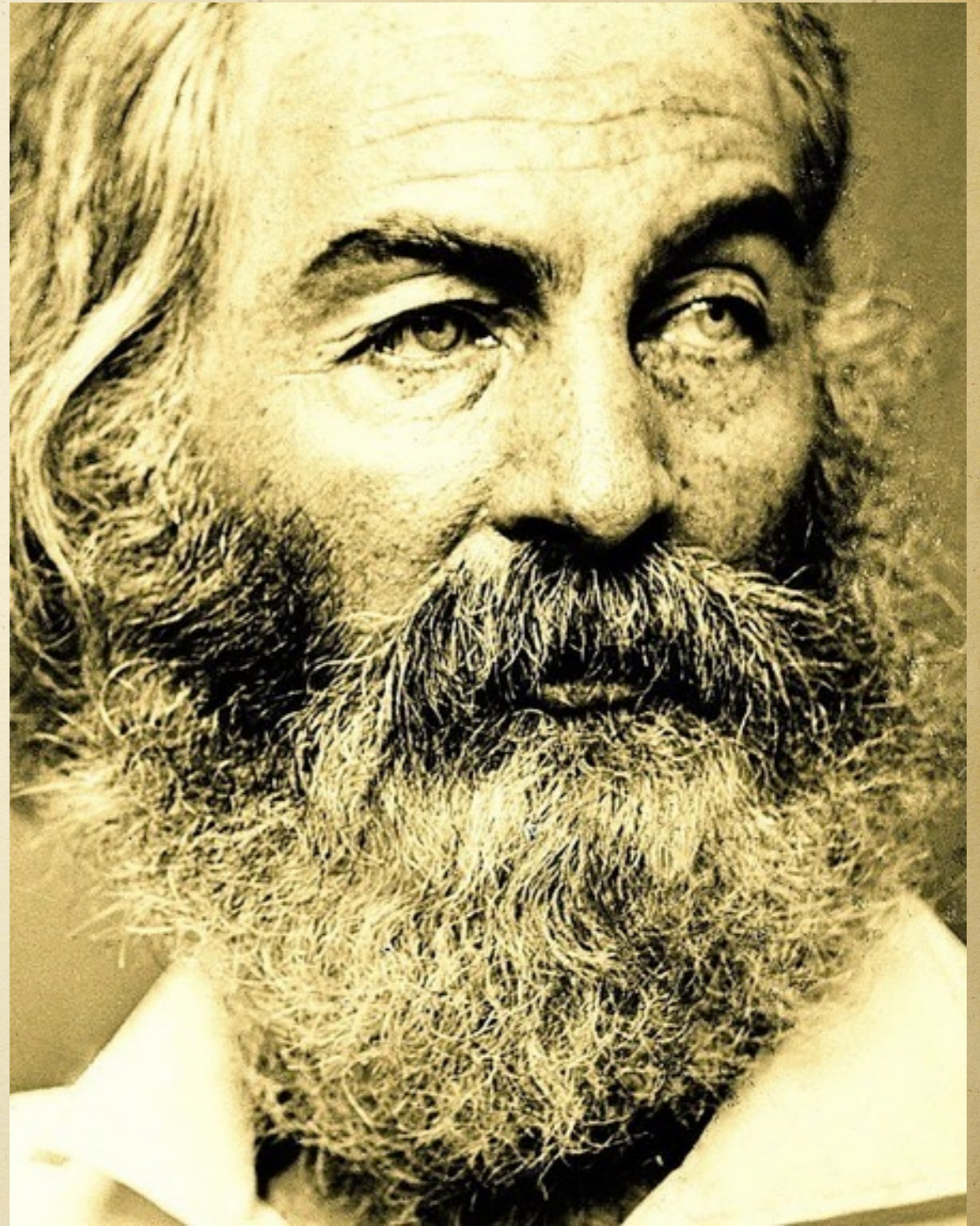
- 1838, "Divinity School Address" to six graduating students, their families, and the faculty.
- Denied unique divinity of Christ and affirmed the divinity of the "infinite soul"
- "They call it Christianity, but I call it consciousness."
- Banned from Harvard for 25 years.



Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882)

Romantic Reversal

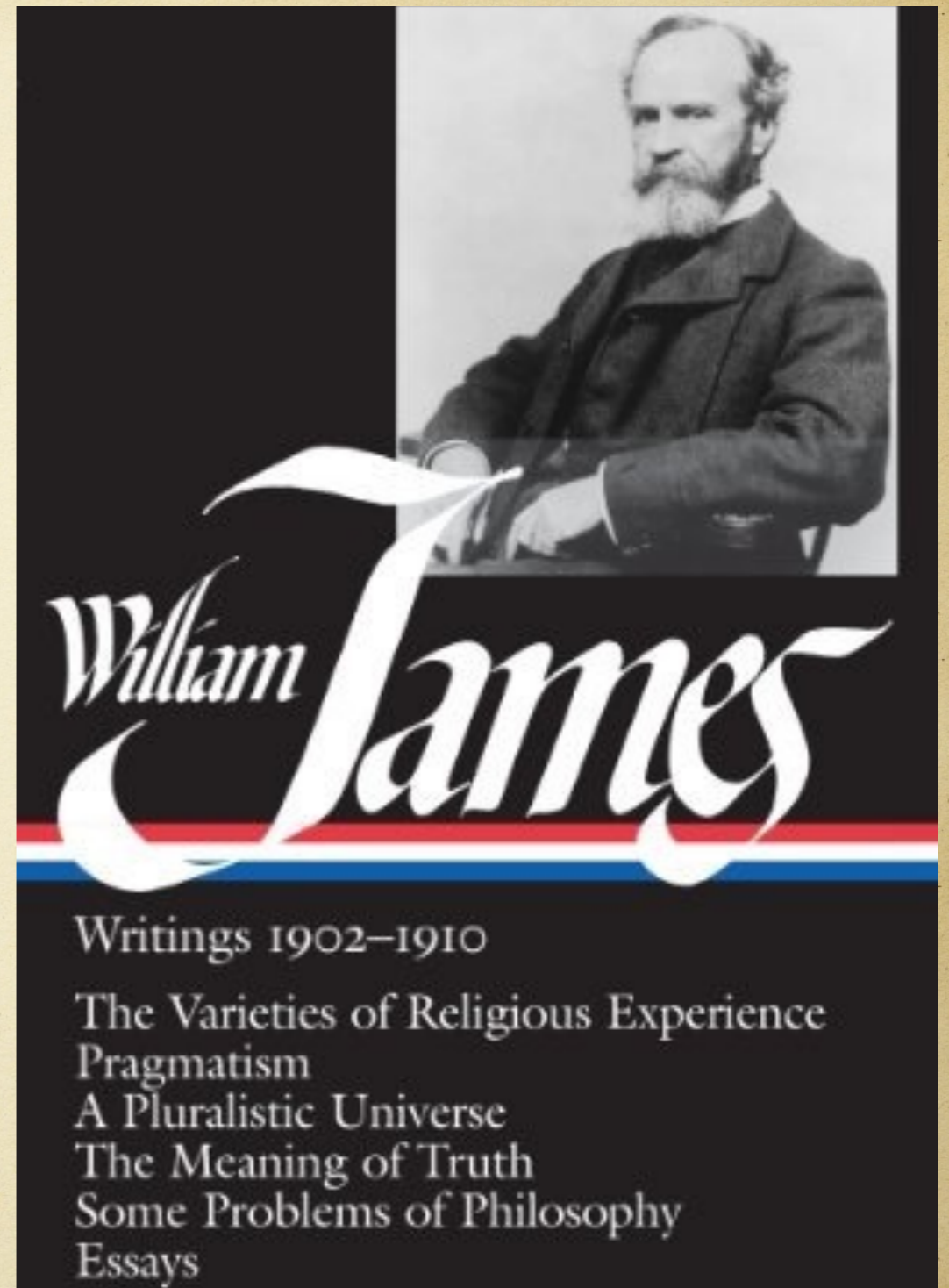
- *Leaves of Grass*: “We consider the bibles and religions divine.... I do not say that are not divine, I say they have all grown out of you and may grow out of you still, It is not they who give the life.... it is you who give the life.”
- At Whitman’s funeral, passages from Jesus, the Buddha, and Confucius were all read.
- Theme: Mystics are often the most radical comparative thinkers
(*firsthand vs. secondhand*)



Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

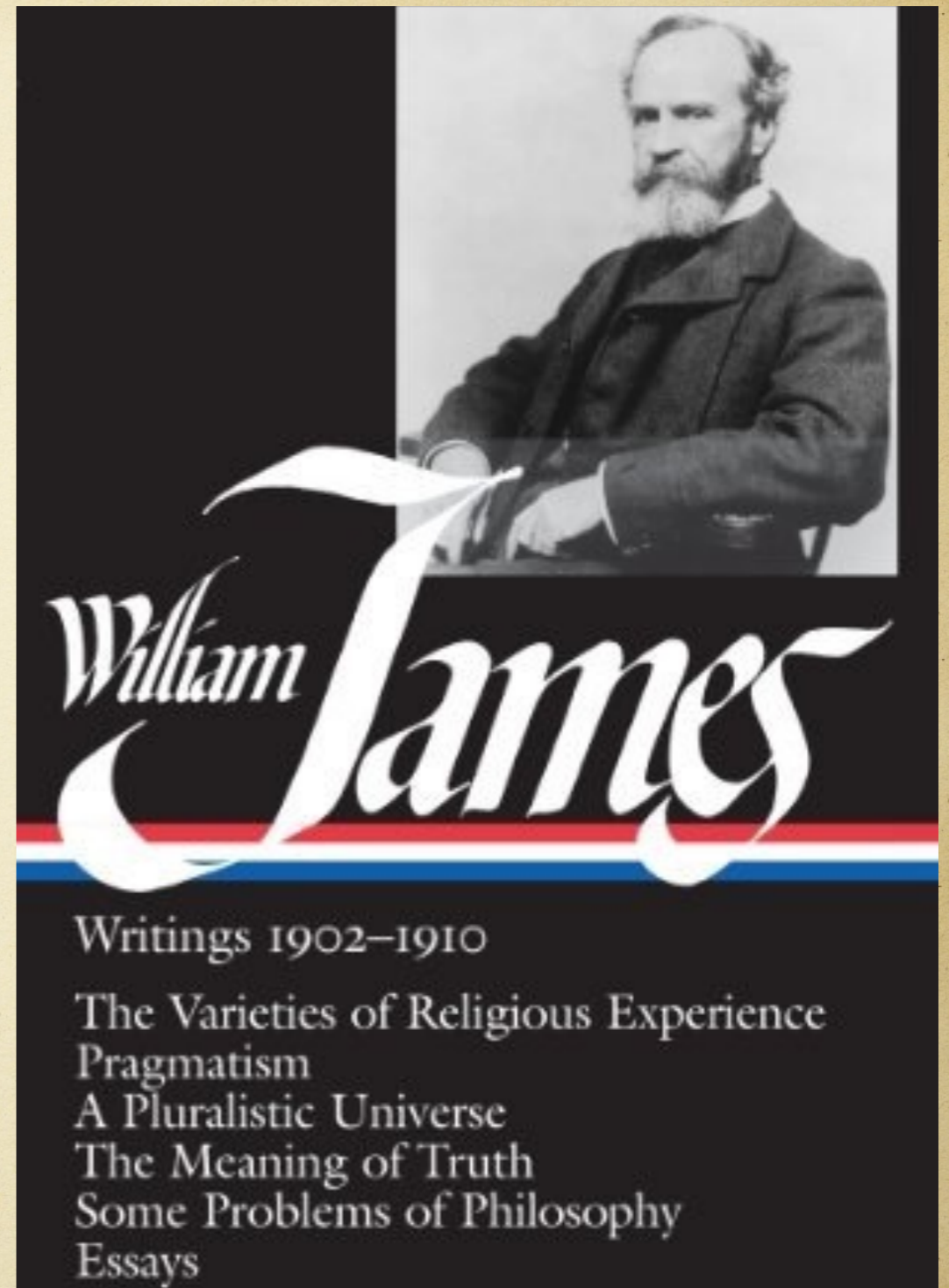
Early Psychology of Religion

- “Firsthand religion”
- established religious communities are based, for the most part, on secondhand tradition,
- “but the founders of [religious traditions] owed their power originally to the fact of their direct personal communion with the divine.”



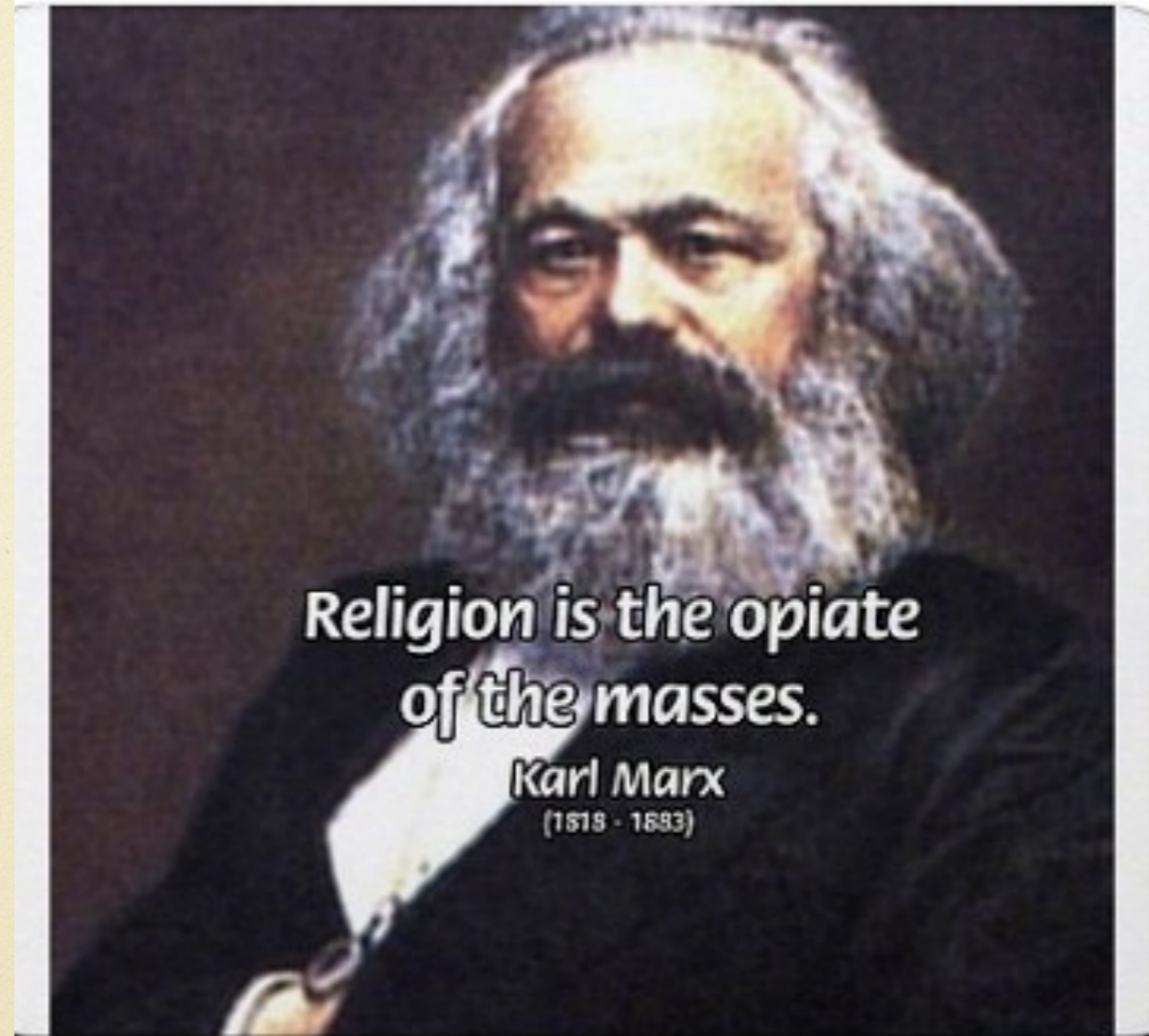
Early Psychology of Religion

- Possibility of becoming “conscious that this higher part [of one's self] is coterminous and continuous with a **MORE** of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of [one's self], and which [one] can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save [one's self] when all [one's] lower being has gone to pieces”



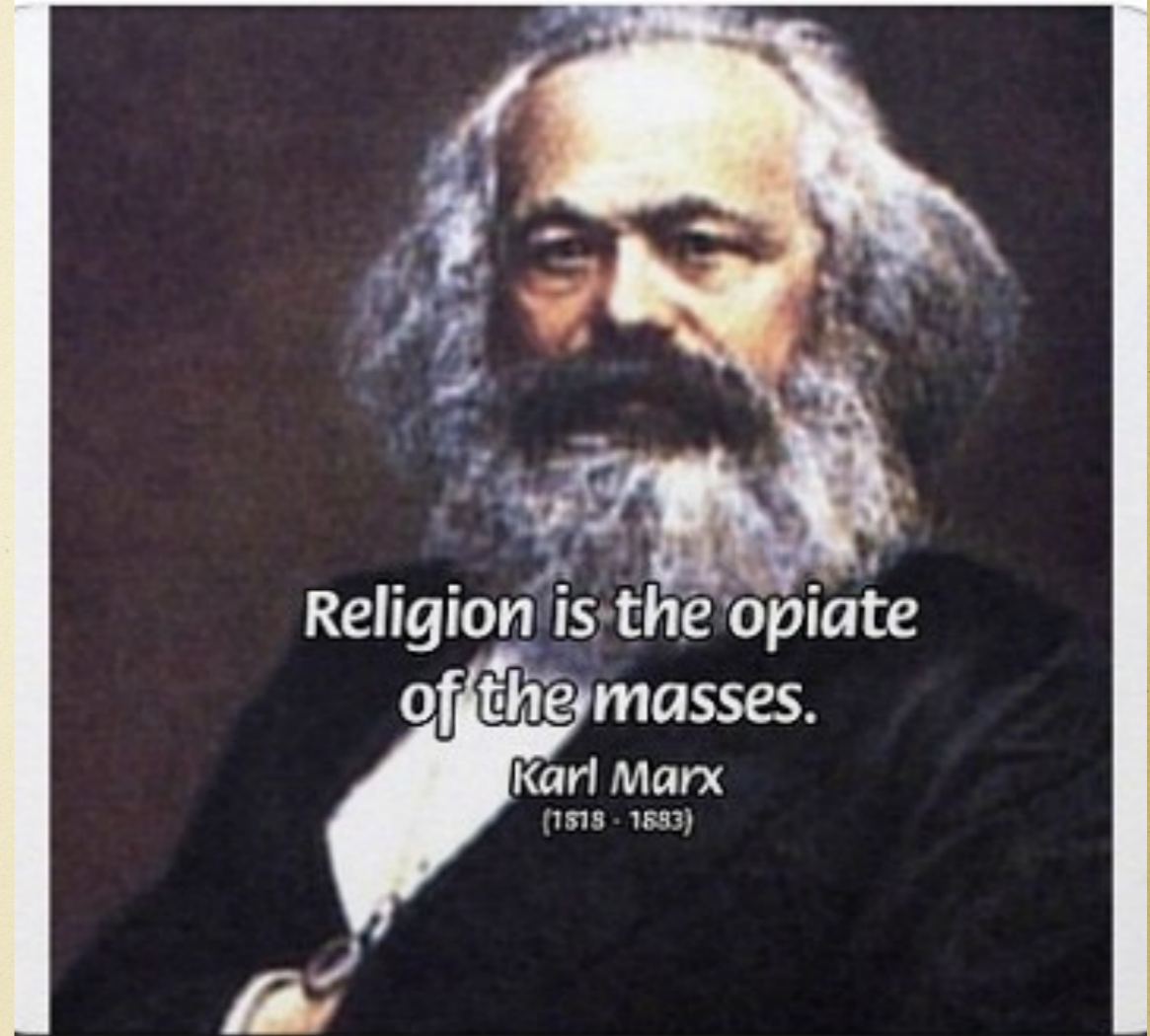
Masters of Suspicion

- Religion encourages people to focus on *non-existent fantasies*
- (like “heaven” or “salvation”),
- preventing them from confronting the *real* material and economic structures
- that keep them oppressed and poor.



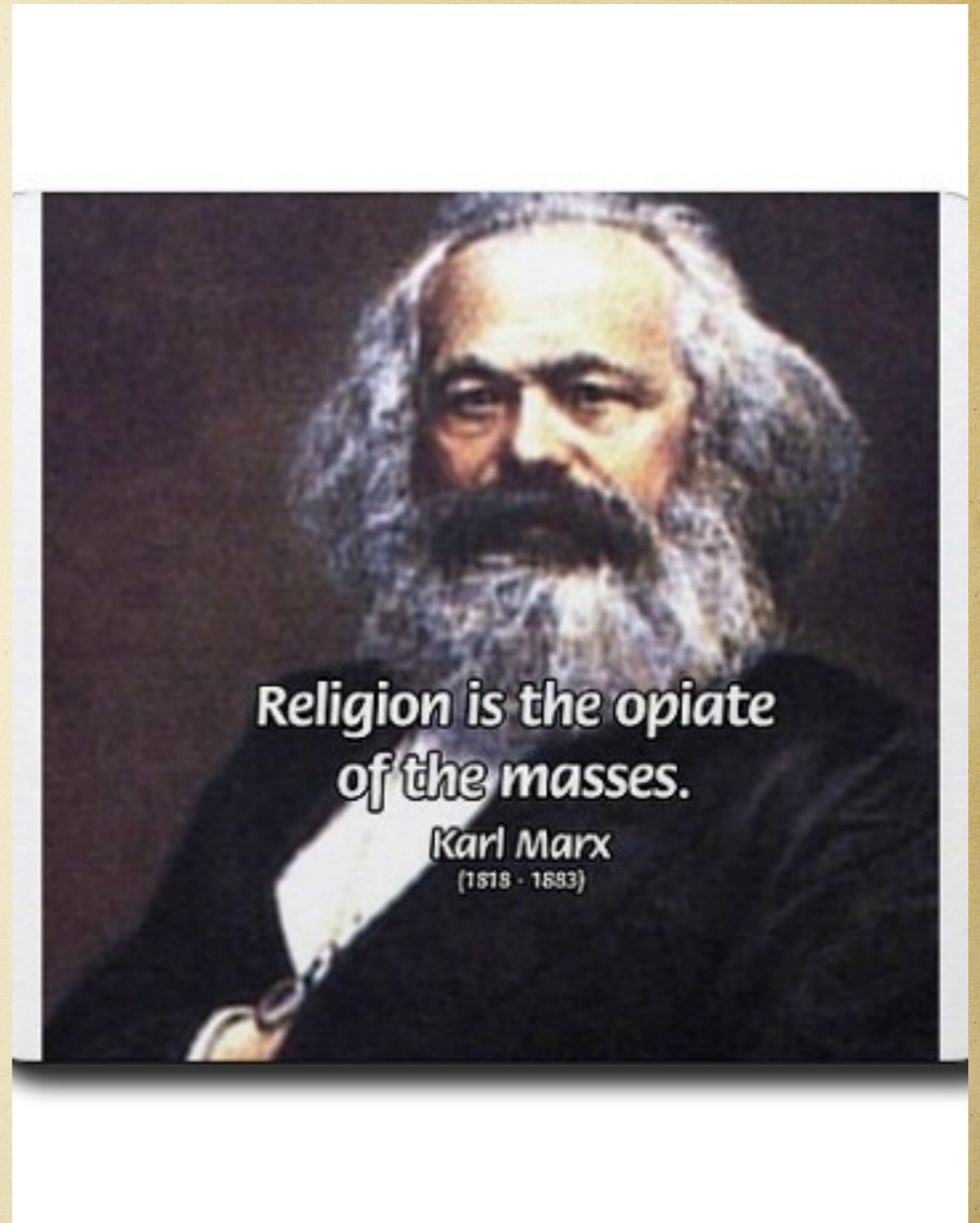
Masters of Suspicion

- “Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering.
- Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the **opium of the people**.
- The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the *demand for their real happiness*.
- To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to *give up a condition that requires illusions*.
- The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.”



Masters of Suspicion

- (“Atheism for Lent”: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2014/02/atheism-for-lent-the-spiritual-practice-of-doubt/>)
- **Marx** sees religion as “the sigh of the economically distressed” that primarily serves to “legitimize” the current unequal distribution of “socio-economic power.” So, for Marx, we need to unmask that “underneath” the religious impulse is really about our dissatisfaction with the unfair economic playing field. (Since we don’t see any way to change that inequality, we placate ourselves with religion.) His contention is that by exposing the ways that religion is merely an “opiate of the masses,” we can free ourselves to focus on creating a fair economic system for all. In his famous words, “Workers of the world, unite!” *#OccupyWallStreet*.



Masters of Suspicion

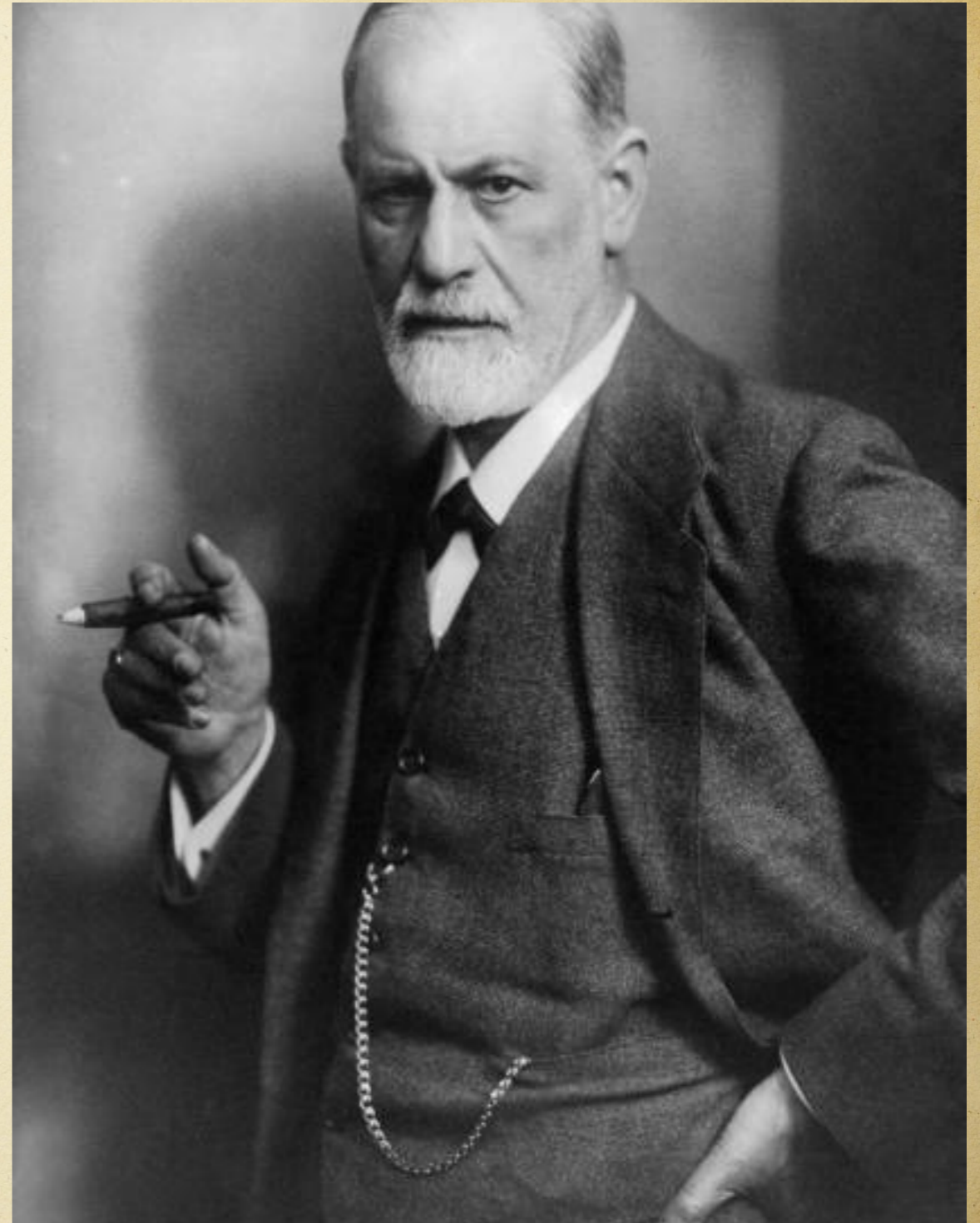
- Religion as the “*resentment* of the weak against the strong.”
- Weak trying to control those who are strong.
- *Unmask* the ways the religion is holding back the greatest among us from achieving their fullest potential in overcoming the limitations of traditional morality
- and becoming what he called the *Übermensch* (“Beyond Human”).



Friedrich Nietzsche
(1844-1900)

Masters of Suspicion

- Religion as existential “*weakness seeking consolation.*”
- Root of religion as “a desire for one’s mommy”:
- the felt longing for the Presence of God is *really* about the unconscious desire to return to the “Oceanic Feeling” of the womb.



Sigmund Freud
(1856-1939)

Masters of Suspicion

- “The true sense of **theology is Anthropology**”
- All claims made about “God” are in actual fact reflections or projections of “[Humanity].”



Ludwig Feuerbach
(1804-1872)

Masters of Suspicion

- Reverse the subject & predicate of traditional religious claims
- Reclaim (*Romantic reflexive reversal*) the unconscious truths we projected on the divine.
- “If [Jewish scripture] states that ‘God made [humans] in [God’s] own image,’ what this really means is ‘[Humans] made God in [humanity’s] own image,’
- or if Christianity states that ‘God is love,’ what this in essence means is ‘Love is God.’”



Ludwig Feuerbach
(1804-1872)

Masters of Suspicion

- We humans *unconsciously* sensed the truth of love's central importance to the human condition, and projected that truth onto "God" ("God is love").
- The invitation — once we become aware of that dynamic of psychological projection — is to let go to the "crutch" of needing to see "God is Love" and claim that truth for ourselves: **"Love should be an Ultimate Concern for humans."**



Ludwig Feuerbach
(1804-1872)

Process-Relational Theo-poetics

- To what theism are you adding the prefix “a-” ?
- “You get the atheism you deserve, depending on the theism you are serving up.”
- #Projection/Projectile
- “I am trying to open thinking and practice to the *event* that is playing itself out under the name of God.”



2013

Process-Relational Theo-poetics

- “The several religions differ from one another in ways that are broadly similar to the ways that *languages* differ from one another.”
- “No more sense to ask what is the true religion than what is the true language...*different vocabularies doing different things.*”



Counterculture

- **Race** (*Civil Rights Movement*)
- **Class** (*counterculture*)
- **Gender** (*Women's movement, sexual revolution, LGBTAQ rights movement*)
- [*Slate: should you call cops?!*]



Counterculture

- Asian Religions
- Yoga
- Altered States of Consciousness
- Drug experimentation



THE RELIGIONS OF MAN

A clear and objective description of the great religions and their appeal to the spiritual aspirations of the different peoples of the world

BY HUSTON SMITH



HARPER  COLOPHON BOOKS / CN 43 / \$3.50

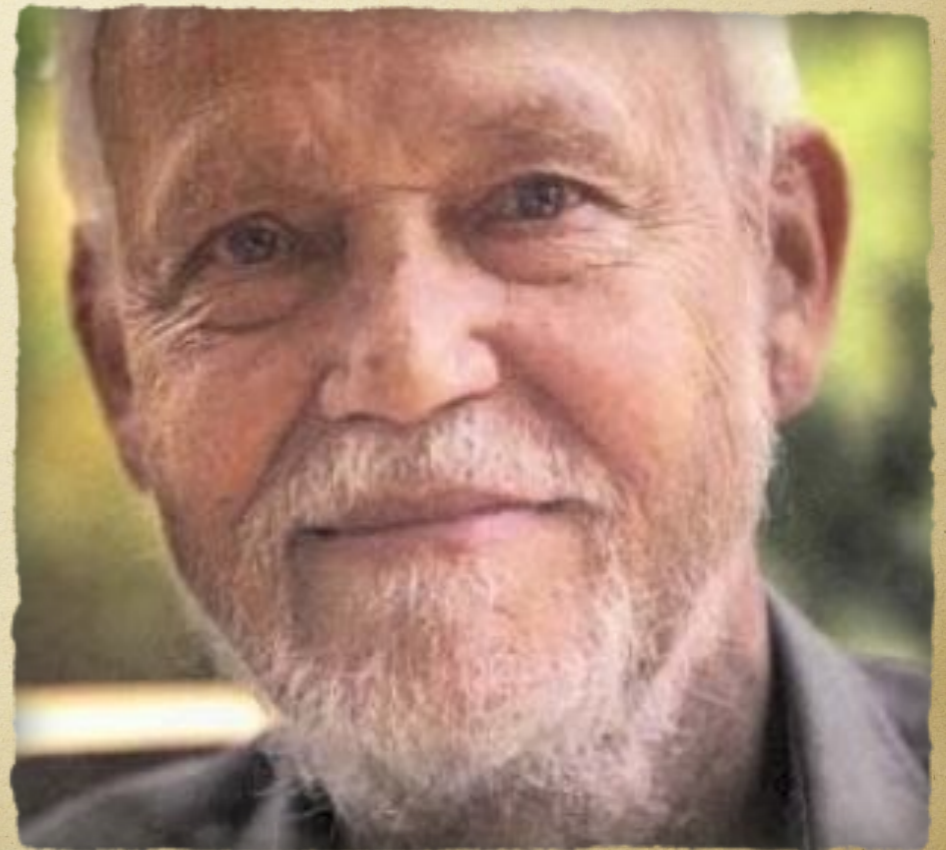
Radical in 1958



50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

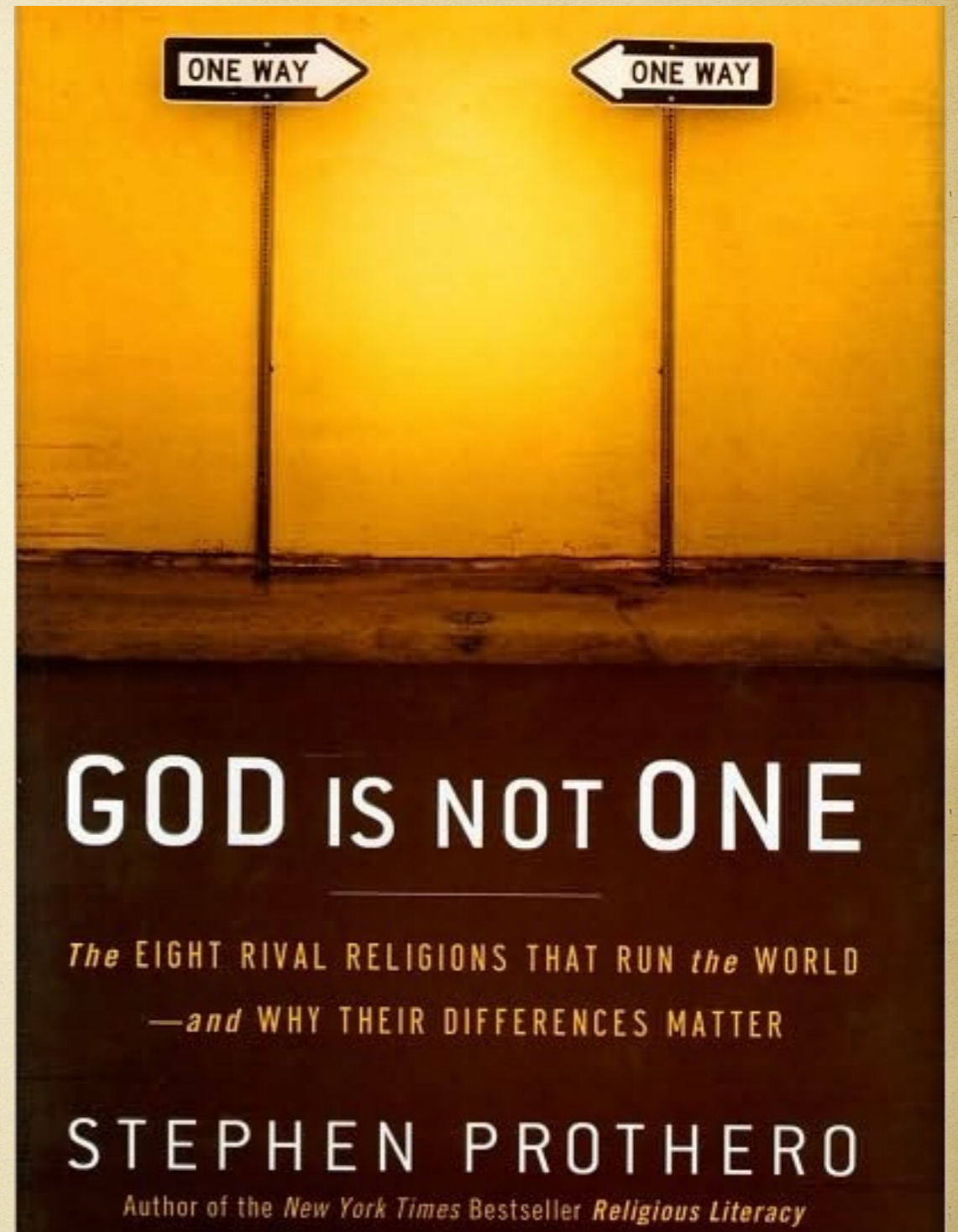
The World's Religions

MORE THAN TWO MILLION COPIES SOLD

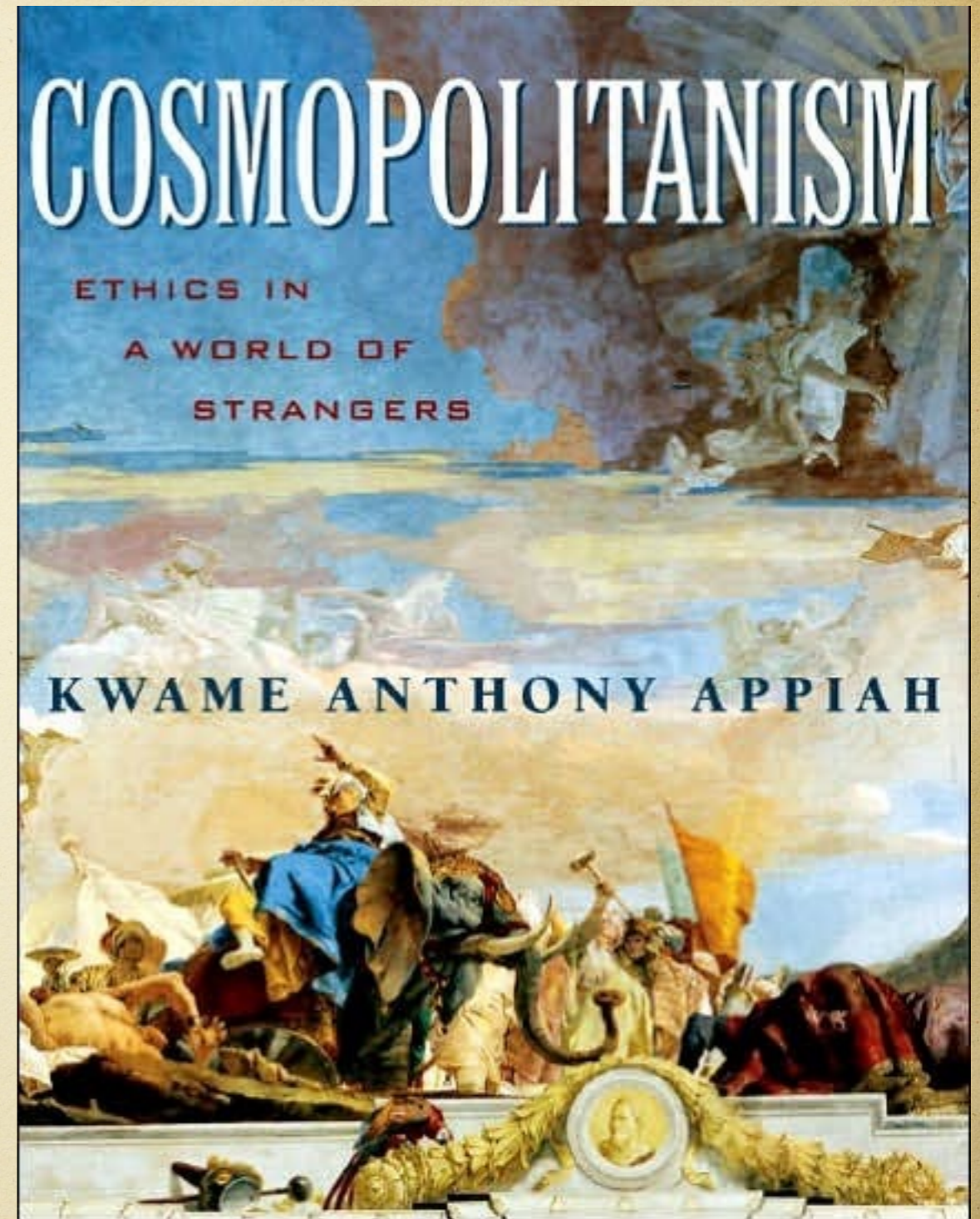


(Over-)correction

- Scholars began acting against obvious excesses of naïve (*and often colonialist*) claims of Perennial Philosophy, which overemphasized *sameness*.
- Began to stress *differences*: local languages, contexts, nuances:
love,
ἀγάπη,
Karuṇā/കരുണ]

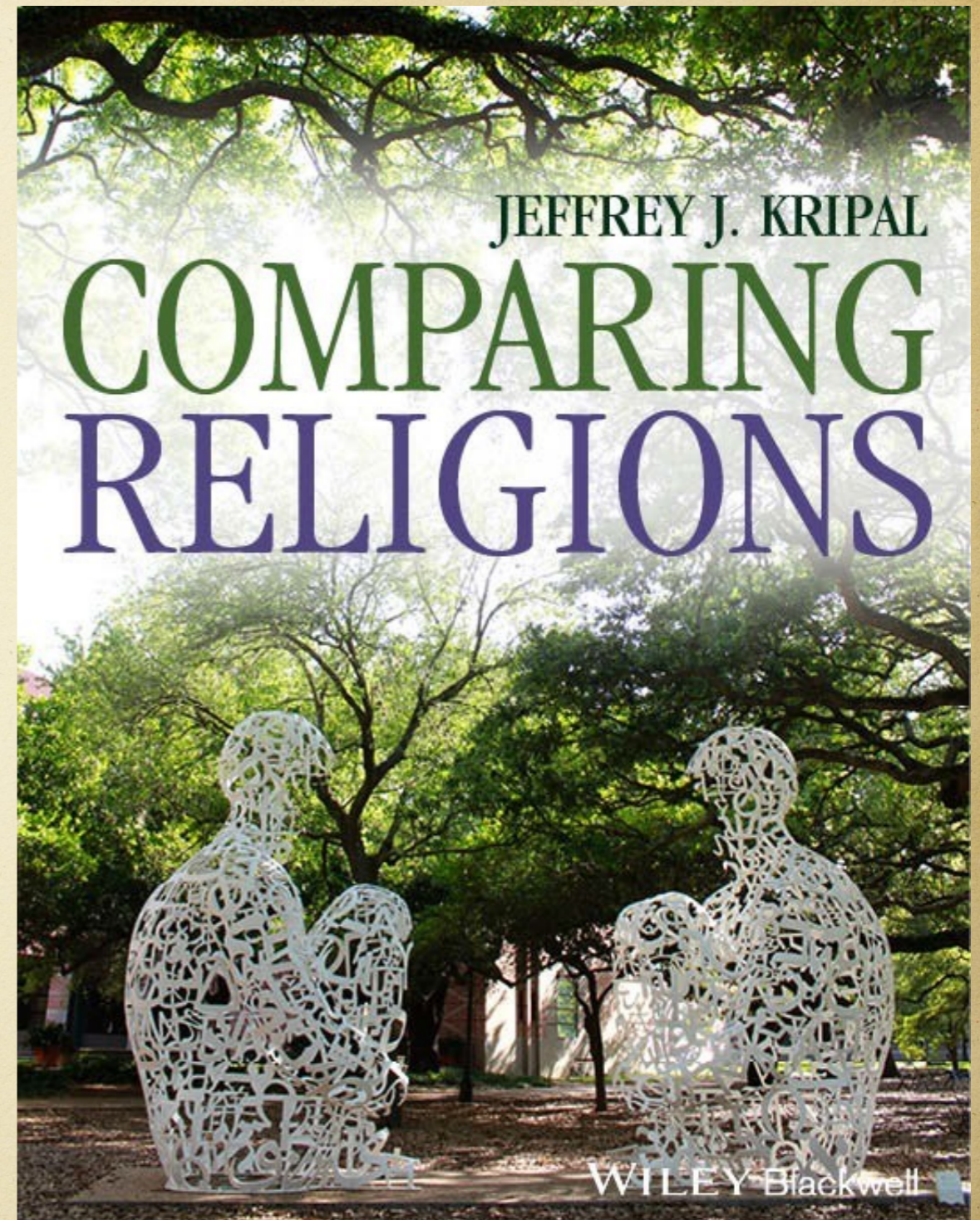


- Ghana-born, British trained.
- “positive cosmopolitanism” to replace “clash of civilizations”
- All humans share desire for equality, justice, flourishing, and human rights.

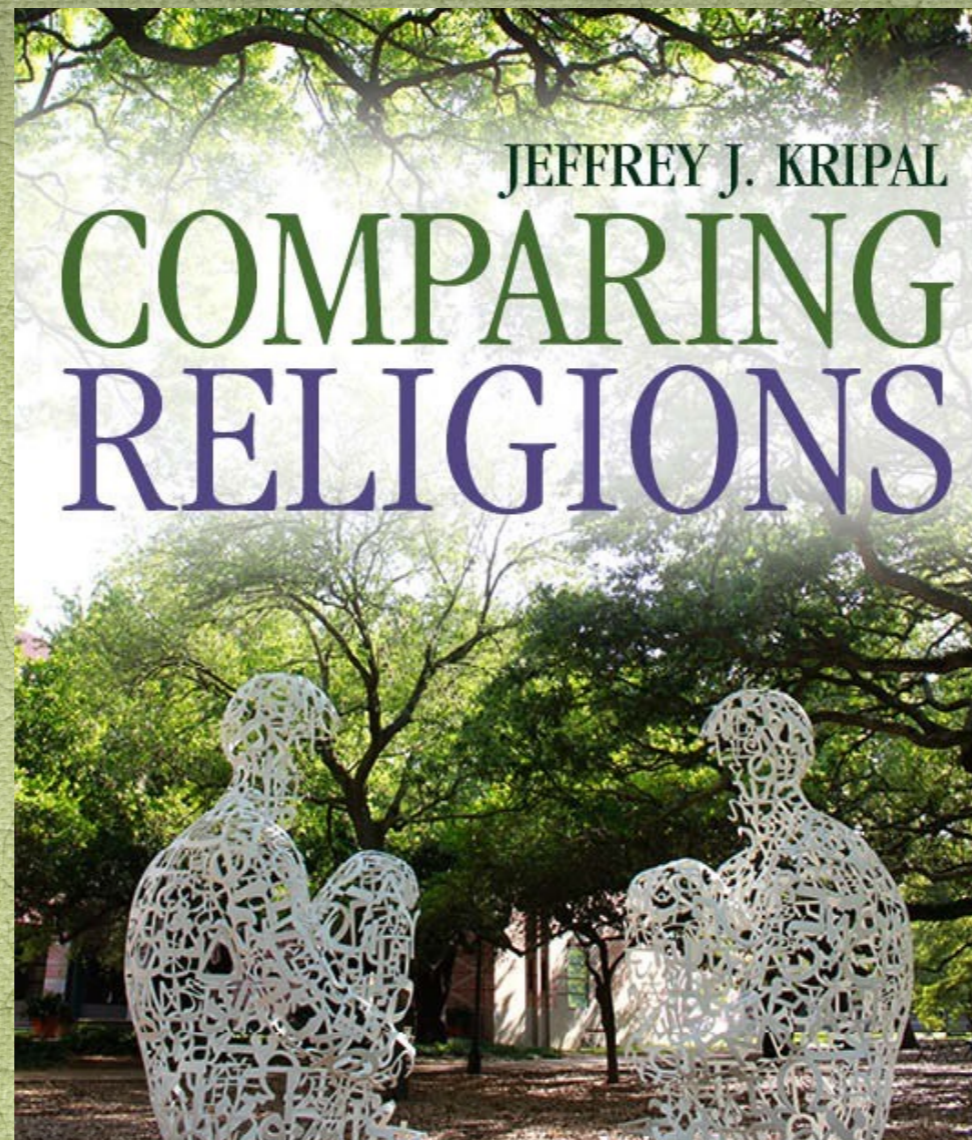


2007

- At the intersection of mystical, Renaissance humanist, romantic, and countercultural streams.
- Both/And
- Consciousness *and* culture
- Sameness *and* difference



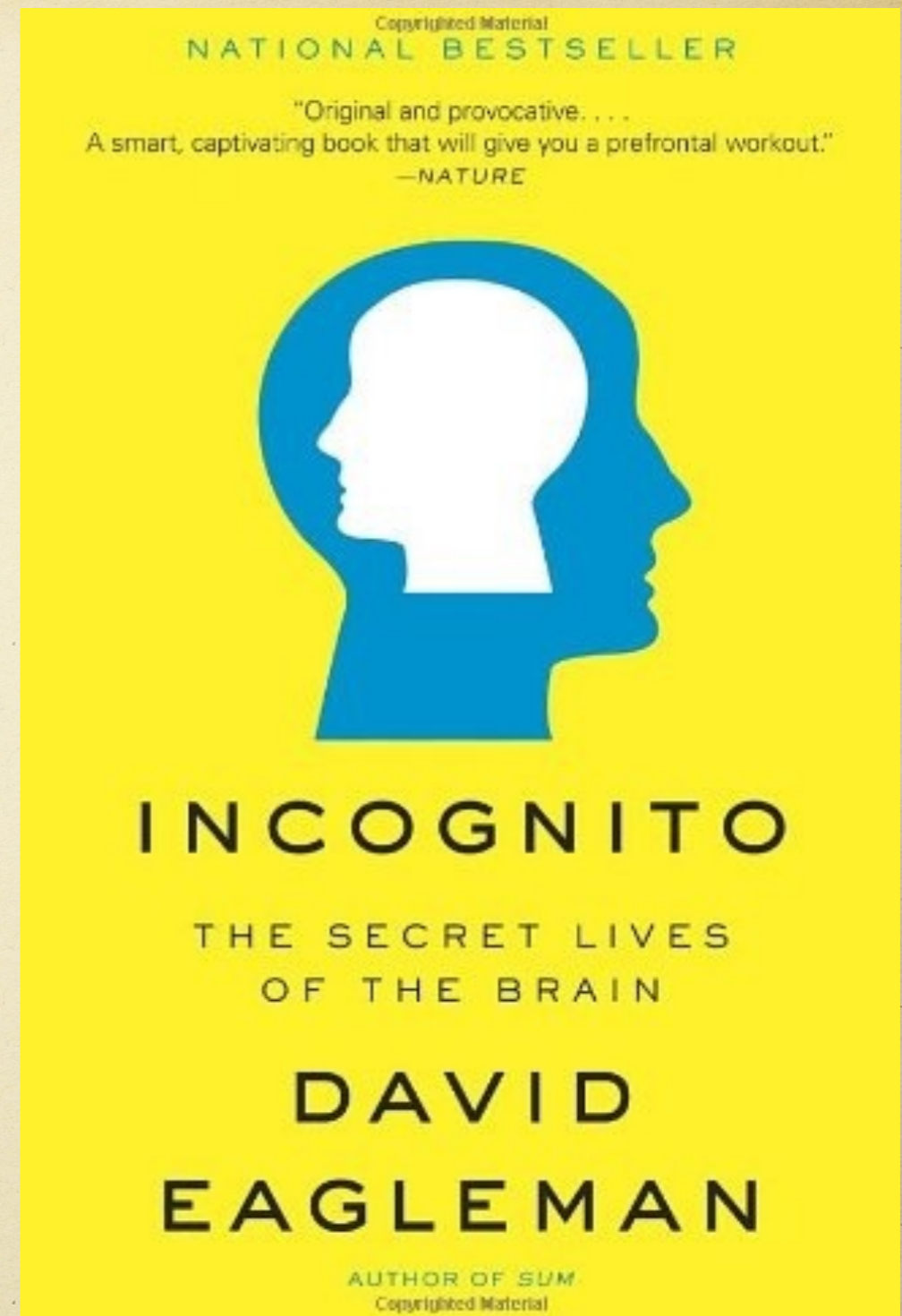
2007



Chapter 3:
The Skills of Reflexivity & Some Key Categories

“The Terms of Our Time Travel”

- “Ours is an incredible story. As far as anyone can tell, we’re the only system on the planet so complex that we’ve thrown ourselves headlong into the game of deciphering our own programming language.
- Imagine that your desktop computer began to control its own peripheral devices, removed its own cover, and pointed its webcam at its own circuitry. That’s us.”



2012

ORIGINAL PHOTO OF THE "MIRACLE OF THE SUN" IN FATIMA

13 OCT 1917 - PUBLISHED BY L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO, 1951



Comparison Can Shift the Meaning of a Religious Event

- Religious events, experiences, institutions, or practices can “mean” one thing in their local historical terms and something quite different when placed on the table of comparison.
- Example: “Miraculous cures” part of broader class of “miracles.”
- Traditional View: irruptions into ordinary reality that function as “signs” of the holiness of a saint, the power of a local deity or pilgrimage site, etc. (*increase/undergird faith.*)
- Comparativist’s Table: (collects, classifies, recontextualizes): same pattern/claims with Hindu or Christian saints, Sufi shrines or Amazonian shamans, Chinese or Mexican pilgrimage places work as well as French or English ones.

Comparison Can Shift the Meaning of a Religious Event

- Moreover: reports of UFO encounters in North America triggering spontaneous cures.
- Bizarre twist: one famous European apparition of the Virgin Mary that triggered cures looks very much like a UFO encounter: the famous “miracle of the sun” on October 14, 1917 in Fatima, Portugal.
- Sun turned into a spinning “silver disc,” shooting “fireworks” and “zig zagging” as it appeared to threaten to fall to earth — which resembles the “spinning discs” and “falling leaf” pattern of the numerous UFO sightings that would come later in the same century.
 - Witnessed by tens of thousands of people.
 - Predicted with precision by three child visionaries months before it happened.

ORIGINAL PHOTO OF THE "MIRACLE OF THE SUN" IN FATIMA

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Comparison Can Shift the Meaning of a Religious Event

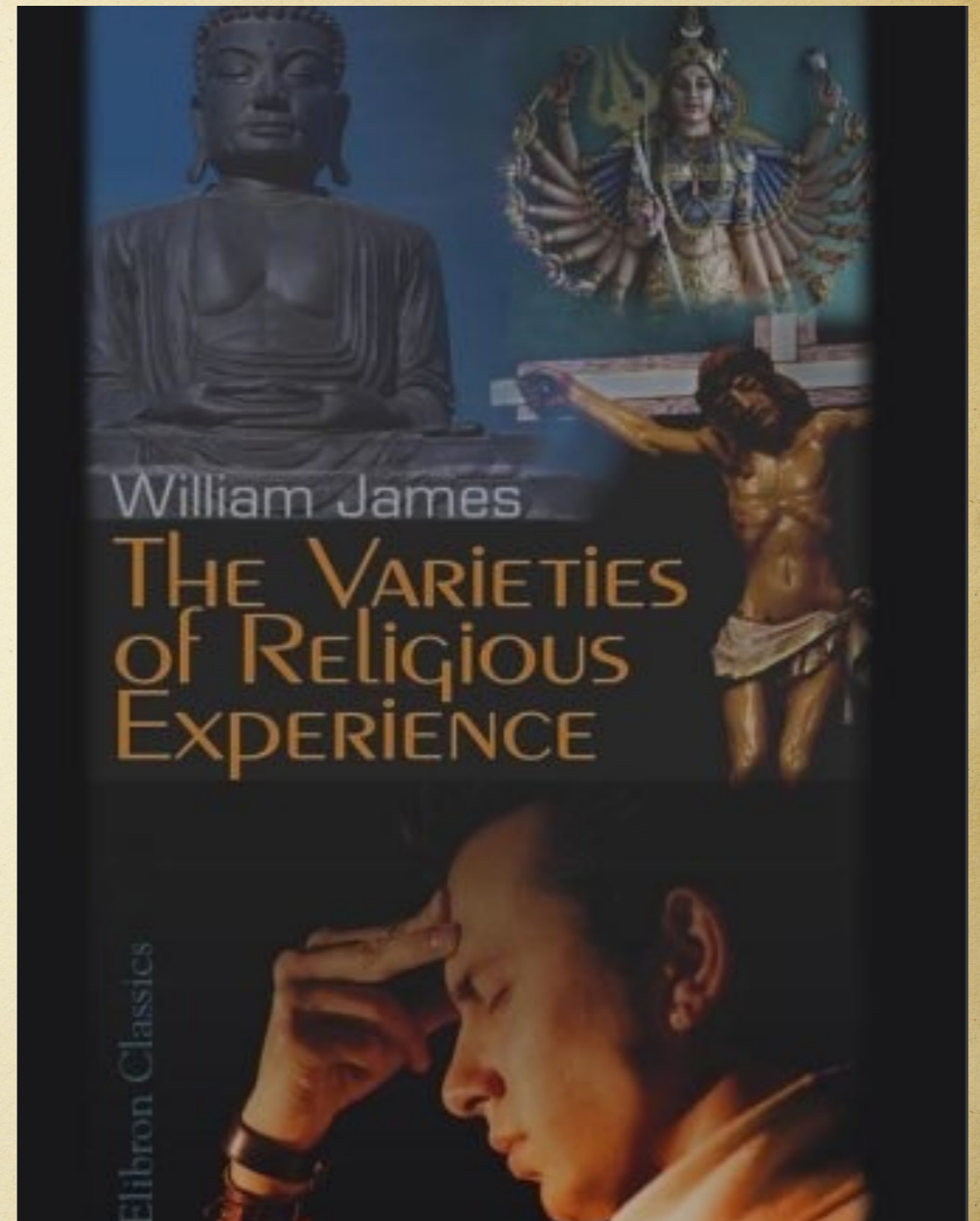
- Sometimes comparison just gets you into trouble!
- Hermeneutical Circle: “new whole” of the comparativist perspective allows us to speculate how these events “really work” (as opposed to how individuals believe they work from a singular perspective). [*“to know one is to know none”*]
- If Catholic saints, Amazonian shamans, Sufi saints, and UFO encounters all catalyze spontaneous cures, how can one possibly say that the healing miracles of one’s own tradition “prove” the exclusive truth of one’s very particular faith? **Must we not search for a deeper, more global explanation?** (*social, psychological, psychosomatic, spiritual — or all four — at work in all of these local cases.*)

Comparison Can Shift the Meaning of a Religious Event

- Comparison: often directly against local exclusive truth claims. But pattern bolsters plausibility as common human experience.
- Paradoxical: believing nothing & everything. Better: not believing in beliefs, but believing in belief. [*both/and*]

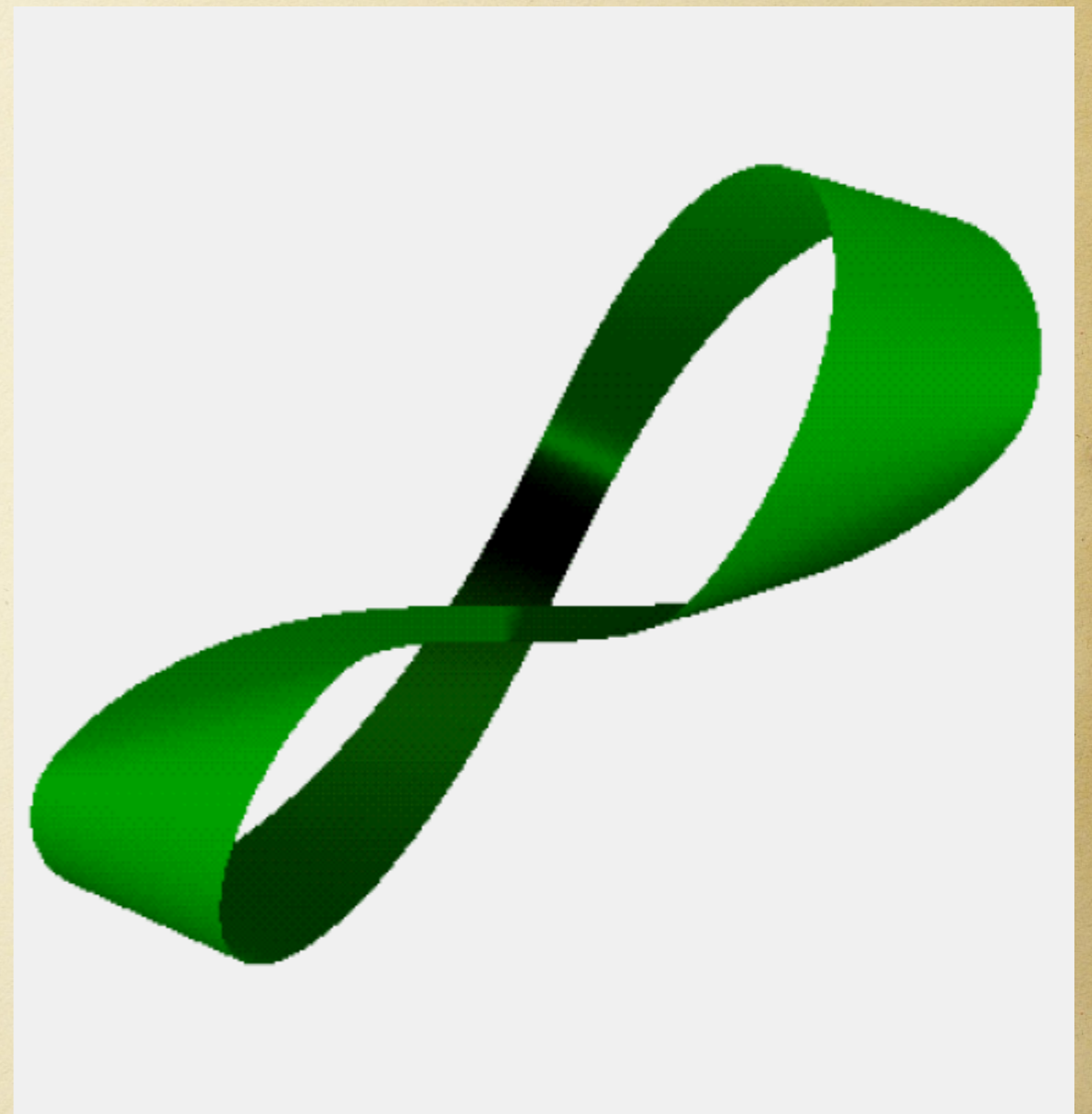
Principle of Extremity

- “In order to disprove the assertion that all crows are black, **one white crow is sufficient.**” -William James
- Best understand the deepest dynamics of a religious experience by focusing on the most **extreme** and **extraordinary** instances.
- Aldous Huxley: To the commonsense perspective of people all over the world, the claim that liquid water is really two gases glued together by completely invisible forces is completely unbelievable, but nonetheless true. Only by “traumatizing” the water does it split into hydrogen and oxygen.



Reflexivity

- Step outside of oneself and one's society and reflect critically on how one is thinking — or how one is *not thinking* but *being thought* by the “script” of one's context (culture, religion, place, and time)
- Metacognition
- **“It's difficult to get a [someone] to understand something when [their] job depends on not understanding it.”** -Upton Sinclair
[even more difficult if think eternal soul depends on it!]



Möbius strip
*(oscillate between
insider-outsider perspectives)*

Kripal's "Tough Questions"

- What do you make of the fact that the critical study of religion began "in the towers and dungeons"? Or that, to this day, scholars of various disciplines are harassed and threatened in various ways all around the world, often by religious authorities and communities. (scholarsatrisk.nyu.edu)
- What do you think about the many individuals and nation-states who assume they can learn, practice, and purchase western science and technology without absorbing any of the core cultural values that produced and support that science and technology — that is, without becoming "Western/Modern."
- What would change about how we think of ourselves and organize our societies if, following Emerson, we gradually abandoned the labels of religion and moved to the language of "mind" or "consciousness"?

Jeffrey Kripal's "Tough Questions"

- Have you or someone you have known had a similar firsthand experience of the strange, the uncanny, the unrepeatably, the unasked for, but the nonetheless existentially real?



"Paranormal Reader" by Rob Beschizza

Jeffrey Kripal's "Tough Questions"

- If you are religious and believe in some sort of deity, does the god you worship look like you? Do you tend to think of god in human terms? [*God/Goddess, Lord/Lady*]
- Are ancient notions of religious orthodoxy and modern notions of human rights compatible?
- The way we talk matters a great deal. How would our societies differ if we abandoned the language of "religions" and adopted the language of "paths" or "ways"?



"Paranormal Reader" by Rob Beschizza

- Class 1, July 22: Part I: “Prehistory, Preparation, & Perspective” (chapters 1-2)
- Class 2, July 29: Part I: “Prehistory, Preparation, & Perspective” (chapters 2-3)
- Class 3, August 5: Part II: “Comparative Acts”
 - Chapter 4: “Myth/Ritual”
 - Chapter 5: “Nature/Science”
 - **Chapter 6: “Sex and Bodies”**
 - Chapter 7: “Charisma and Power”
 - **Chapter 8: “Imagination and Paranormal”**
 - **Chapter 9: “Soul, Salvation, and the End”**
- Part III: Putting It All Together Again (chapters 10-12)

(For details, see “Chapter Outlines” under “Browse by Resources” at wiley.com/go/kripal)