

# Building Your Own Theology

## Tuesdays, 9:30am – 11:00am

1. *“Liberal Turn in Theology”*

2. *“Autobiography as Theology”*

3. September 27

**“Varieties of Religious Experience”**

**“Human Nature”**

4. October 4

**“God/gods/Spirit of Life/Ultimate Reality/  
Sacred/Divine/reality”**

**“Ethics”**

5. October 11

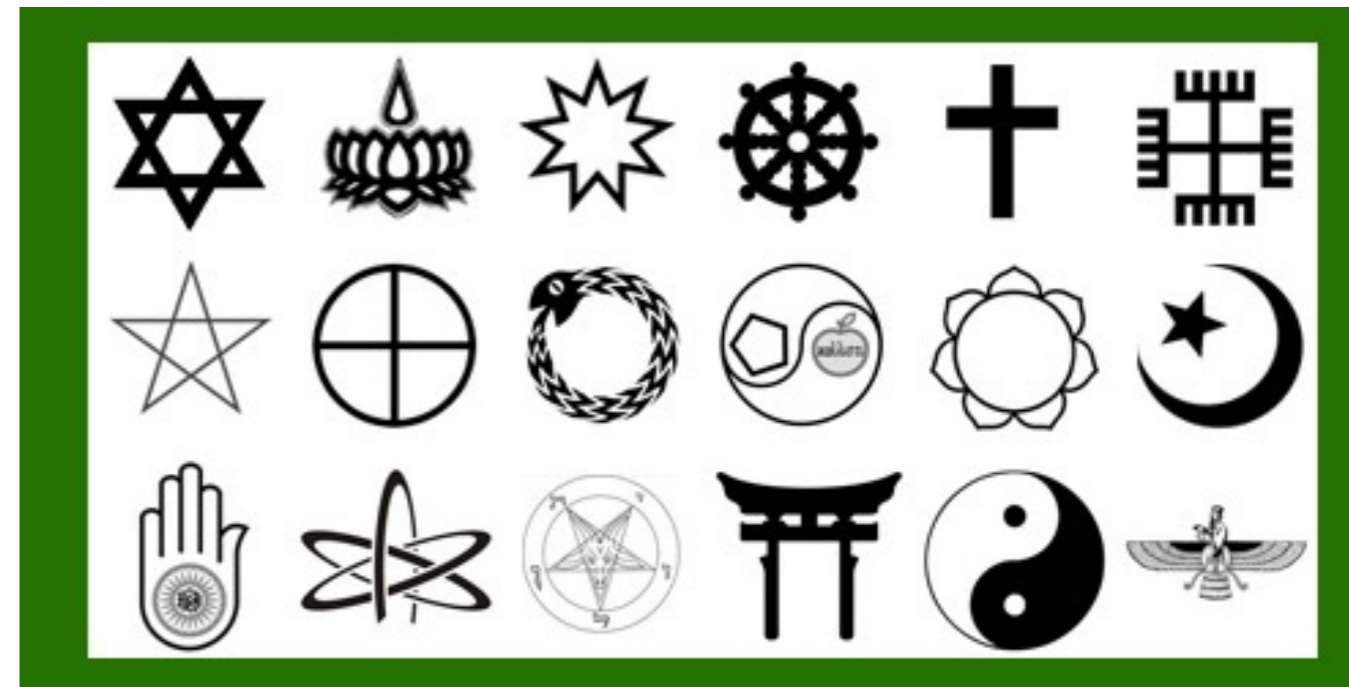
**“Future”**

**“So What?”**

6. October 18:

**“Credo: I Believe”** (500 words)

In(conclusion)



**[frederickuu.org/fcc](http://frederickuu.org/fcc)**

# Covenant

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- Use **“I” statements**: speak from your own experience.
- **Ask permission** before sharing other participants’ stories outside the group. *(And they have permission to say no without giving a reason.)*
- **“Lean in, Lean back”**: Be conscious of your level of participation. Allow everyone a chance to speak before you speak again.
- You always have **permission to “pass.”**



# Peter Mayer, “Holy Now”

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[youtube.com/watch?v=KiypaURysz4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=KiypaURysz4)

(Notice the ways this song is about  
Building Your Own Theology.)



# Diana Butler Bass

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- **1962:** only a couple of years after I was born, pollsters found that **2% of Americans claimed to have had a “mystical experience”** of God.
- **1976:** **31%** of the population
- **2009:** **48%** of Americans confessed that they had had a mystical encounter with the divine.

## CHRISTIANITY AFTER RELIGION

THE END OF CHURCH AND THE BIRTH  
OF A NEW SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

DIANA  
BUTLER  
BASS

# Diana Butler Bass

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..Not everyone who has experienced [the Sacred] afresh is an evangelical, fundamentalist, or Pentecostal. Indeed, they hail from many sorts of faiths....

What if the 1970s were not simply an evangelical revival like those of old, but the first stirrings of a new spiritual awakening, a vast interreligious movement....

This transformation is what some hope will be a “Great Turning” toward a global community based on shared human connection, dedicated to the care of our planet, committed to justice and equality, that seeks to raise hundreds of millions from poverty, violence, and oppression.... In the last decades, this shift has accelerated exponentially, sweeping millions more into both discontent and the longing for change.

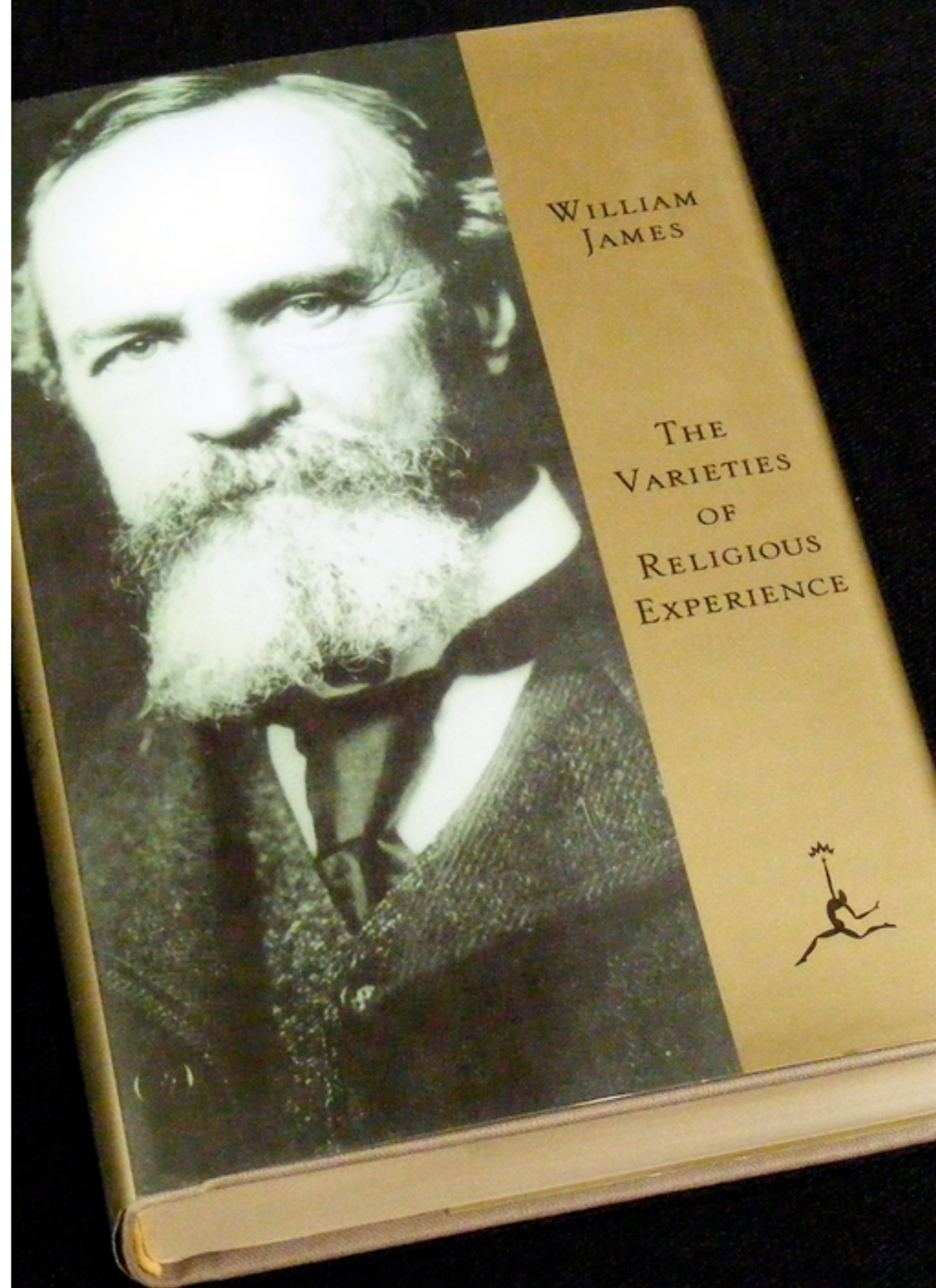


# William James

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**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.*”



Ralph Waldo  
Emerson

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“cast behind you all  
conformity, and  
acquaint men at **first  
hand** with deity.”

--Divinity School Address (1838)



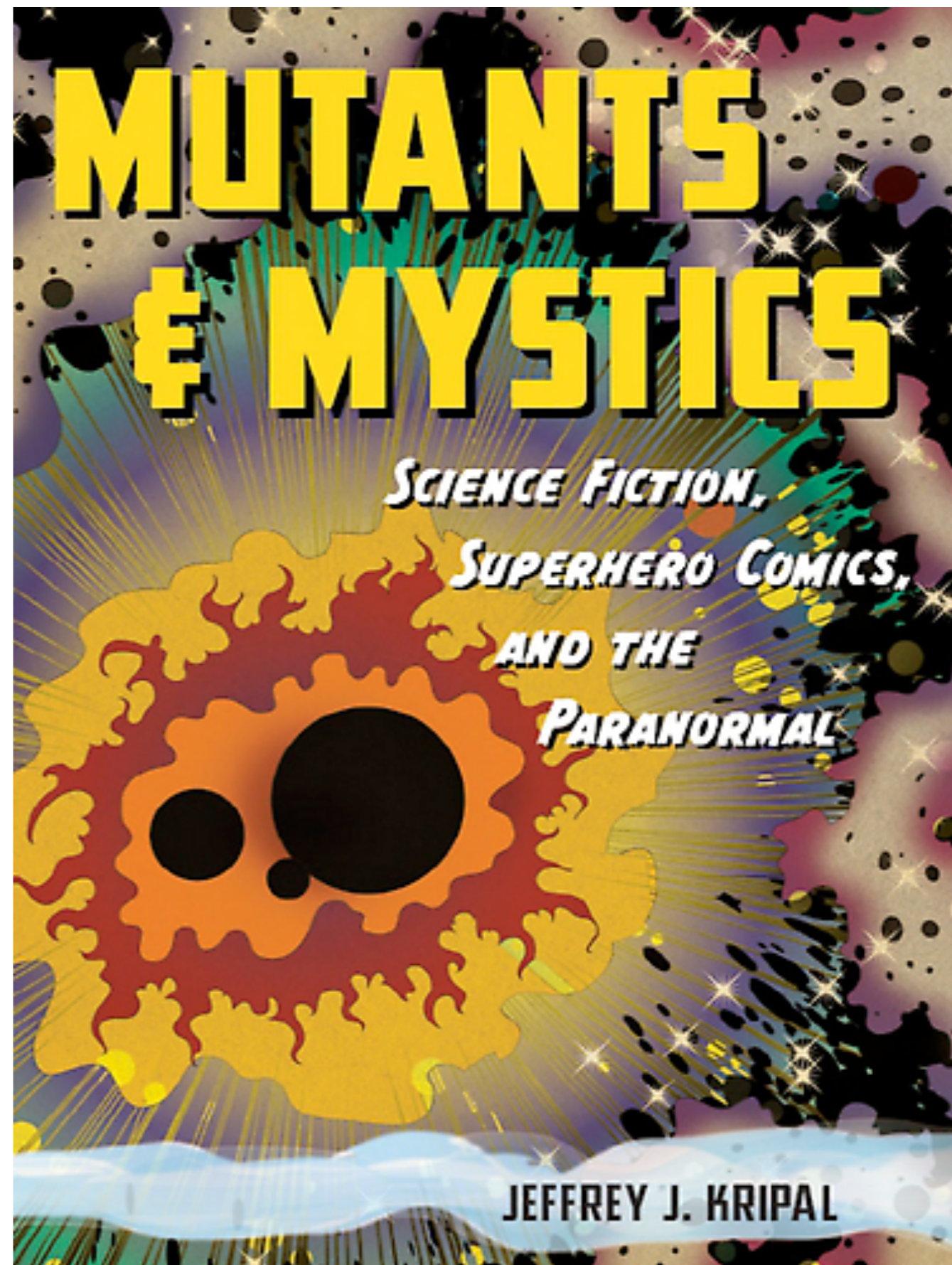
# Religion Professor at Rice University

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(a) I had one major, mind-blowing paranormal experience that changed my life and has since inspired all of my books

(b) after such an experience, I know that paranormal phenomena are real in the simplest sense that **people really and truly experience such things** (that is, they are not always fraudulent, mistaken perceptions, and so on), and

(c) I think the ways such phenomena offend or subvert our usual dualistic epistemologies (subjective/objective, mind/matter, meaning/causality, and so on) represent one possible future of critical theory.”





# Chair of Religion Department at Rice

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It's all the same  
**social binary system** [*mind/matter*]  
(*which is very useful but finally illusory*)

and the same  
basic **metaphysical nonduality**  
(*which is seldom experienced but very real*)  
playing themselves out in different historical  
contexts and cultures.

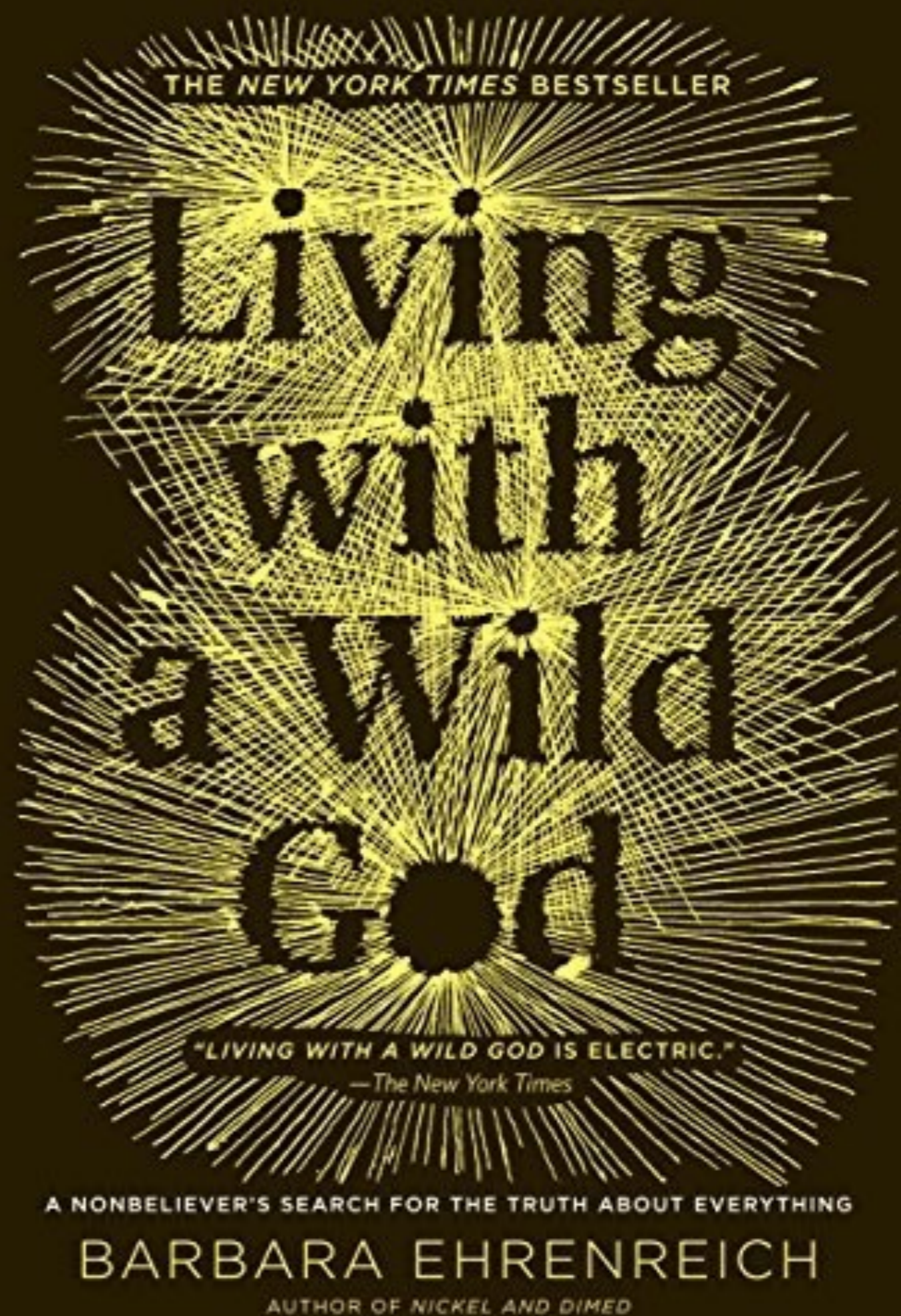
It's all one reality, which is fundamentally  
nondual.”

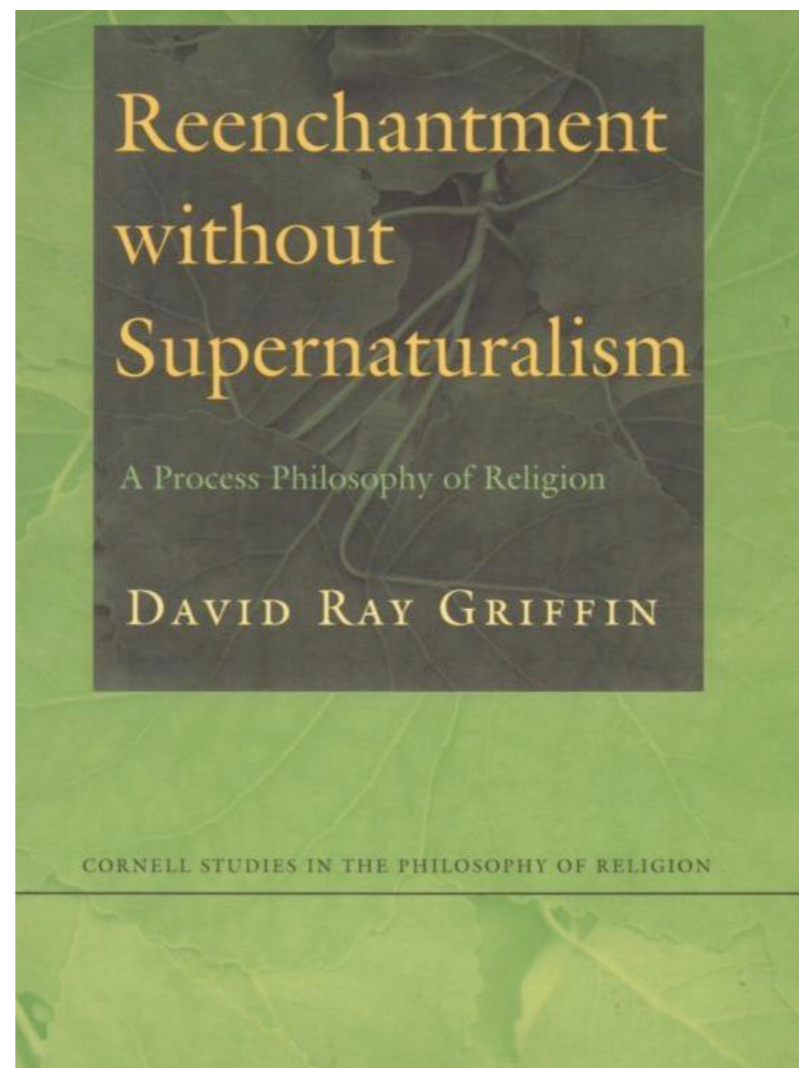
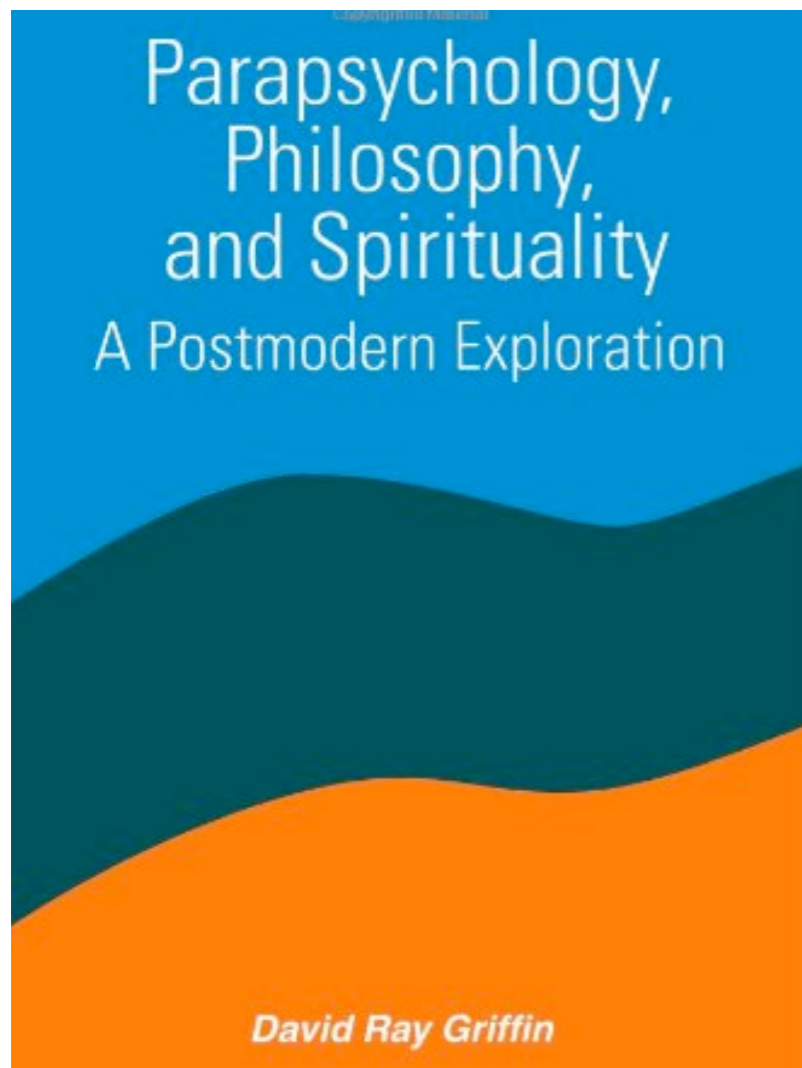


Educated as a scientist, Barbara Ehrenreich rediscovered the journal she had kept during her tumultuous adolescence, which records an event so strange, so cataclysmic, that she had never, in all the intervening years, written or spoken about it to anyone. It was the kind of event that people call a "mystical experience" - and, to a steadfast atheist and rationalist, nothing less than shattering.

Ehrenreich reconstructs her childhood mission to find "the Truth" about the universe and everything else, bringing an older woman's wry and erudite perspective to a young girl's impassioned obsession with the questions that, at one point or another, torment us all.

The result is both deeply personal and cosmically sweeping - a searing memoir and a profound reflection on science, religion, and the human condition.

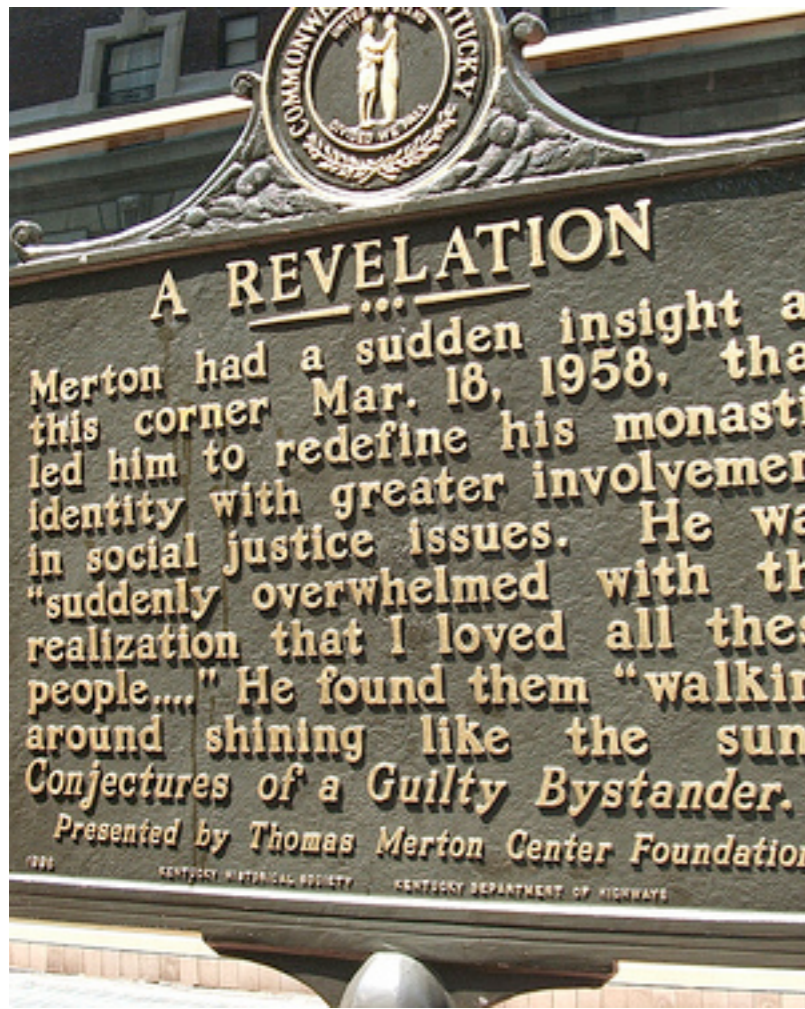




## Process-Relational Theology

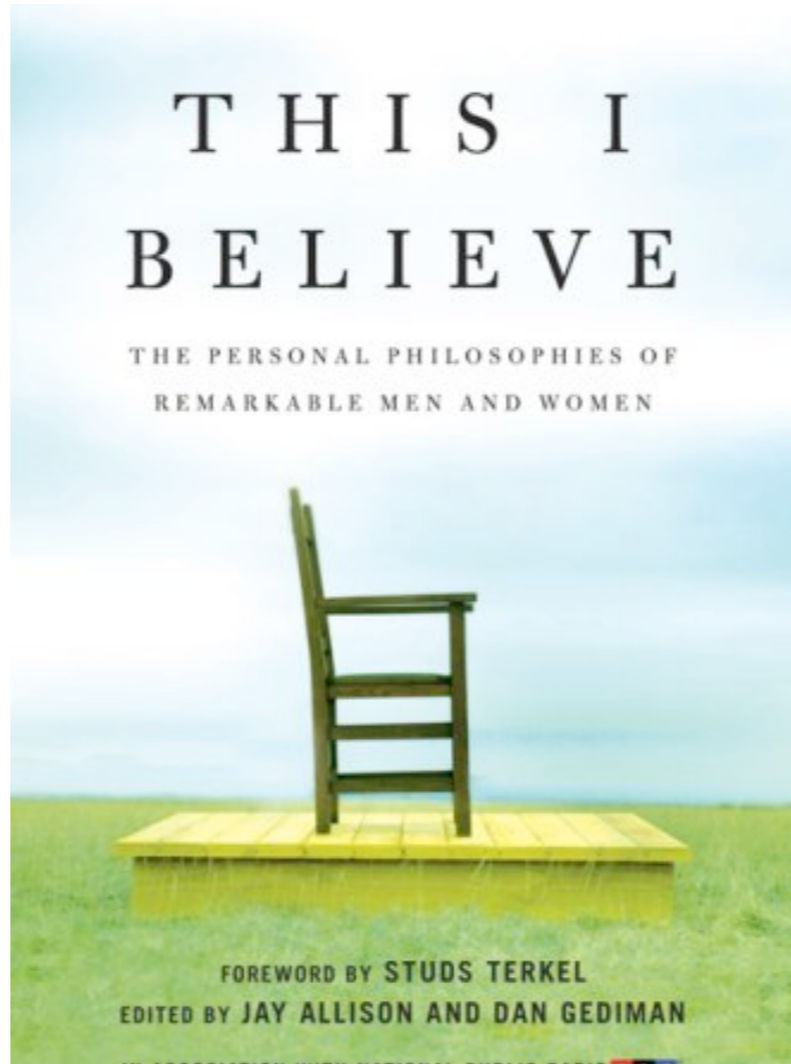


## **Intense Religious Experiences (IRE)**

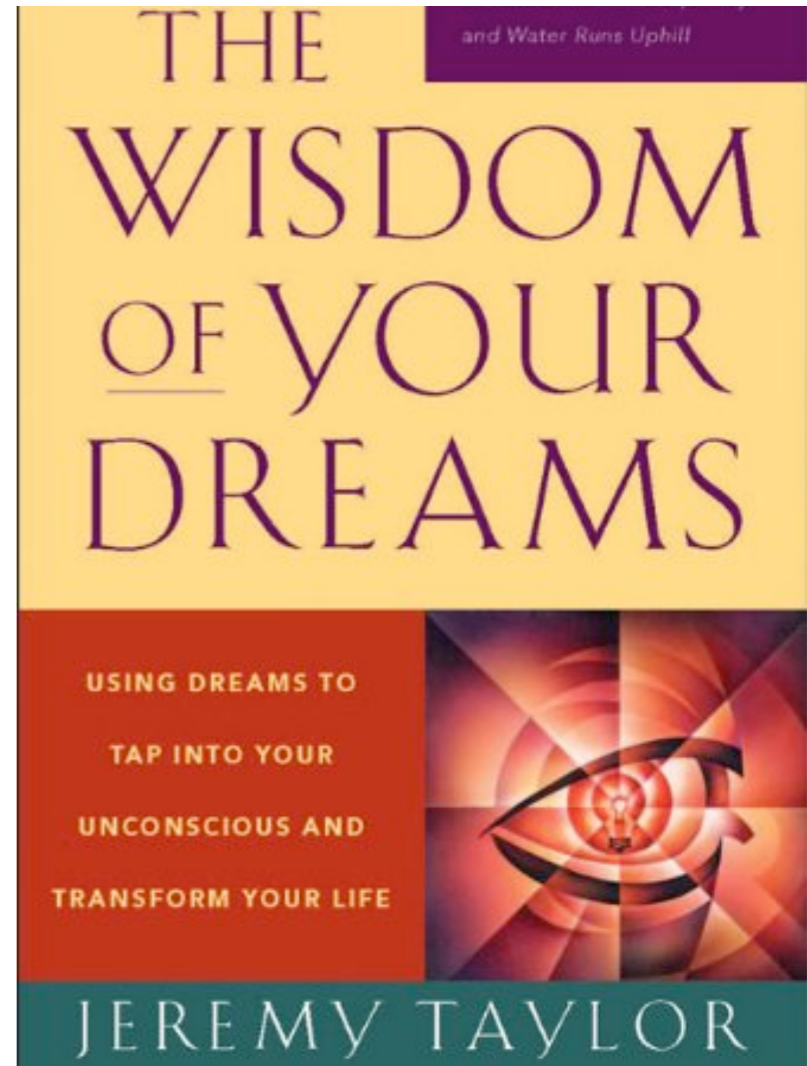
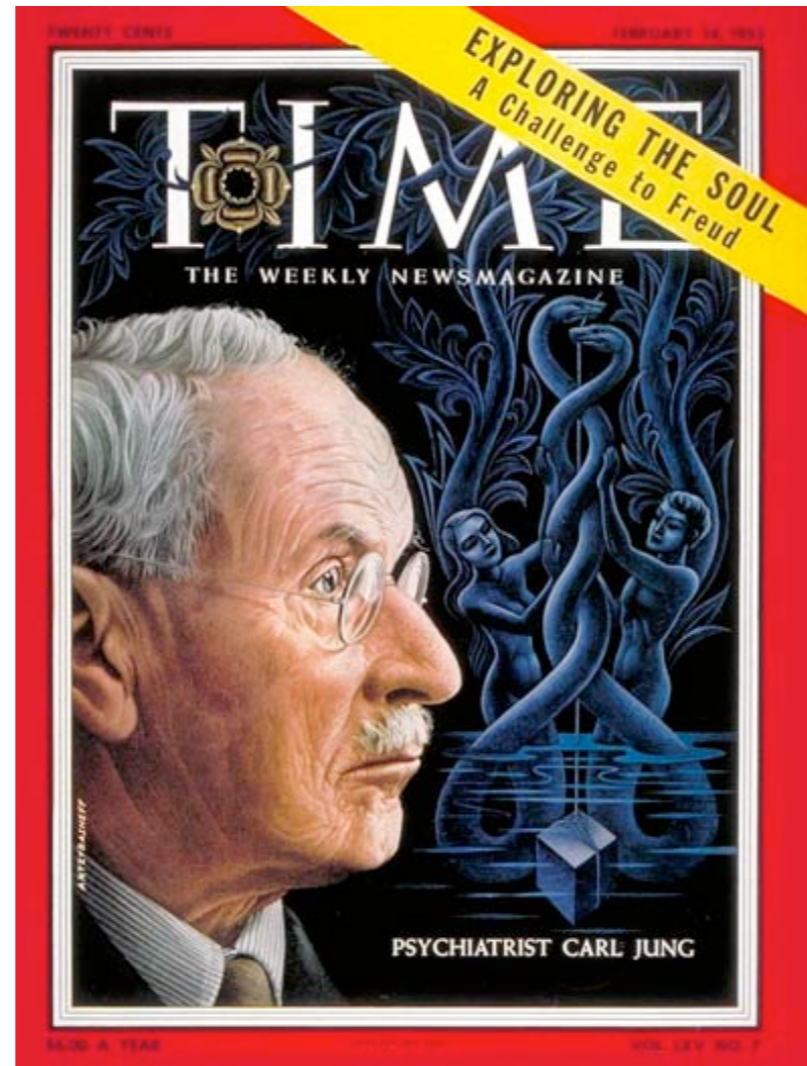
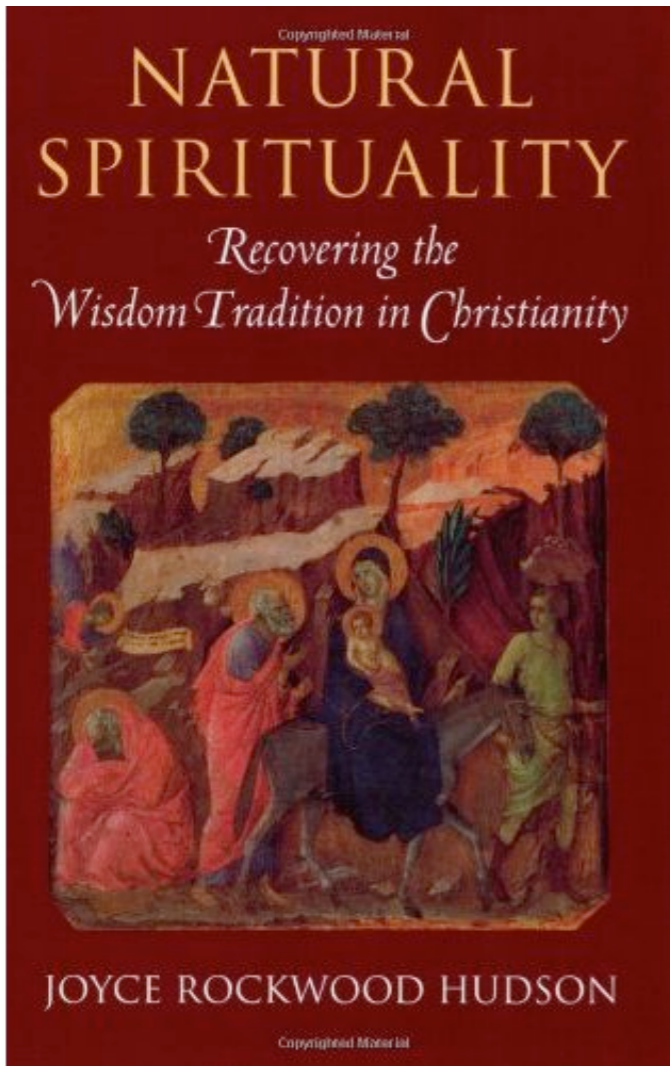


**Interspirituality: "heart & unity consciousness"**

**(Ken Wilber's *Integral Spirituality*)**



## Intense (Religious) Experiences



## Jungian Spirituality

**Joyce Rockwood Hudson** is the founder and director of the Natural Spirituality Program at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Athens, Georgia. She is the daughter of an Episcopal priest, and was happily enmeshed in the life and rituals of the Anglican Christian tradition from an early age. But in her late thirties, she had a number of unexpected firsthand experiences that radically altered her worldview.

Two friends, along with their respective children, had recently stayed with Joyce's family. On a previous stop on their road trip, the two friends had been to visit their respective parents. Susan, one of her two friends, was particularly elated about how well her visit with her mother had gone. Joyce's friend was an actress, and her mother disapproved both of her secular lifestyle and of the amount of time her acting career caused her to be away from her husband and two children. Over the years, her mother's frequent disappointment had carved an increasingly large gulf between mother and daughter.

But on this recent trip — only the day before arriving at Hudson's home — Susan and her mother had gone to see ***Terms of Endearment*** in the theater. This 1983 film stars Shirley MacLaine, Debra Winger, and Jack Nicholson, and won five Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Supporting Actor for Jack Nicholson, and Best Actress for Shirley MacLaine. The film spans three decades of the relationship between a mother and daughter. The wrenching plot twist is the daughter's diagnosis with cancer, and the mother's emotional journey to come to terms with her daughter's death. Susan was also the mother of two young children, making the parallels between the film and real life particularly poignant. After the film, Susan and her mother had a beautiful breakthrough conversation of confession, apology, healing, and reconciliation. The next day at Joyce's house, Susan couldn't stop talking about how overwhelmed and grateful she was for that day with her mother.



In the morning, the two friends packed the car and hit the road. Twenty minutes later, Joyce's phone rang. There had been a wreck. Everyone was fine except for Susan, who was in critical condition. Joyce writes:

*For several hours we clung to hope. But then I began to think about what had happened between her and her mother — the two of them watching that particular movie and the reconciliation that had followed. It was too perfect. I could see that the end had already been arranged. Susan was going to die.... I suddenly saw vividly in my mind's eye a newspaper page, more than half of which was taken up with an obituary for Susan, including her picture. It was very clear, no mistaking what it was. I began to cry. At this same time my husband called with news that Susan had just died.*

***This tragedy marked the end for me of the world I had always known and that everyone around me seemed only to know — a world in which human consciousness is the highest source of knowledge and human will is the greatest purposeful power.... The world of ordinary consciousness did not allow for purposefulness in such events as Susan's last day with her mother. (5-6)***

From a materialistic perspective, Joyce's experience would be deemed a coincidence: it was *merely coincidental* that Susan and her mother went to see that particular film and had a transformative reconciliation on the day before Susan's death; it was *merely coincidental* that Joyce had a vision of Susan's death at the moment her friend died, even though she was miles away from the hospital. And **we should be extraordinarily careful about attributing causation to "God"/"The Universe" and meaning to events.** And I am, by no means, promoting a variation of the harmful canard that "everything happens for a reason." **But, at least for Hudson, calling these two events "mere coincidences" did not adequately explain the powerful impressiveness of her personal experience.**

Joyce's day-to-day life, on one level, was not substantially different in the period after the wreck. She still lived in the same house, and had the same job. She cared for her family and had fun with friends, ran errands and did chores. But while going about her normal life, it was as if a new level of meaning had been layered on top of her old worldview. **She increasingly had eyes to see and ears to hear "very personal and specific meaning" in events that would have previously seemed coincidental, random, and generic** (8). She writes:

*A door would slam as certain words were being spoken.... I would notice them and think about them and see that something of importance to my own life was being emphasized. An image would arise in my mind as I was driving down the road, or perhaps a line from a song.... I would catch it and think about it and understand that something was being hinted at. Dreams would come tumbling darkly in the night, punctuating the patterns of meaning I was struggle to patch together in my waking life.* (8)

After about a year of increasingly discerning meaning where others might find only coincidence, Joyce stumbled upon the autobiography of the twentieth-century Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875–1961), who brought intellectual acumen, cross-cultural sensitivity, and psychological insight to bear on his similar firsthand experiences with "meaningful coincidences."

**In Jungian terms, Joyce was experiencing a "confrontation with the unconscious" (9).** She was increasingly open to the ways in which the everyday material world that we experience through our five senses is *infused* with a larger sense of meaning and purpose. She began to see how experiences in the outer world had strong parallels to her inner experience and vice-versa. And **when she examined these resonances between the inner and outer world, she found guidance, insight, and encouragement on her journey toward spiritual growth and greater wholeness.**

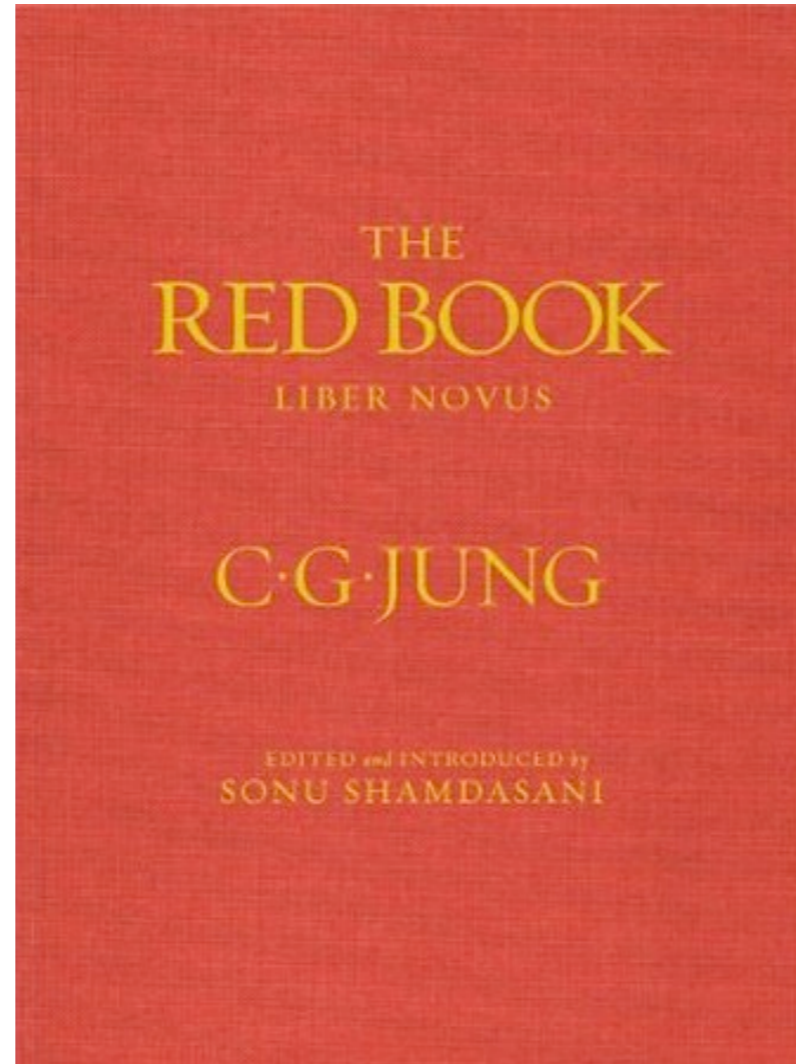
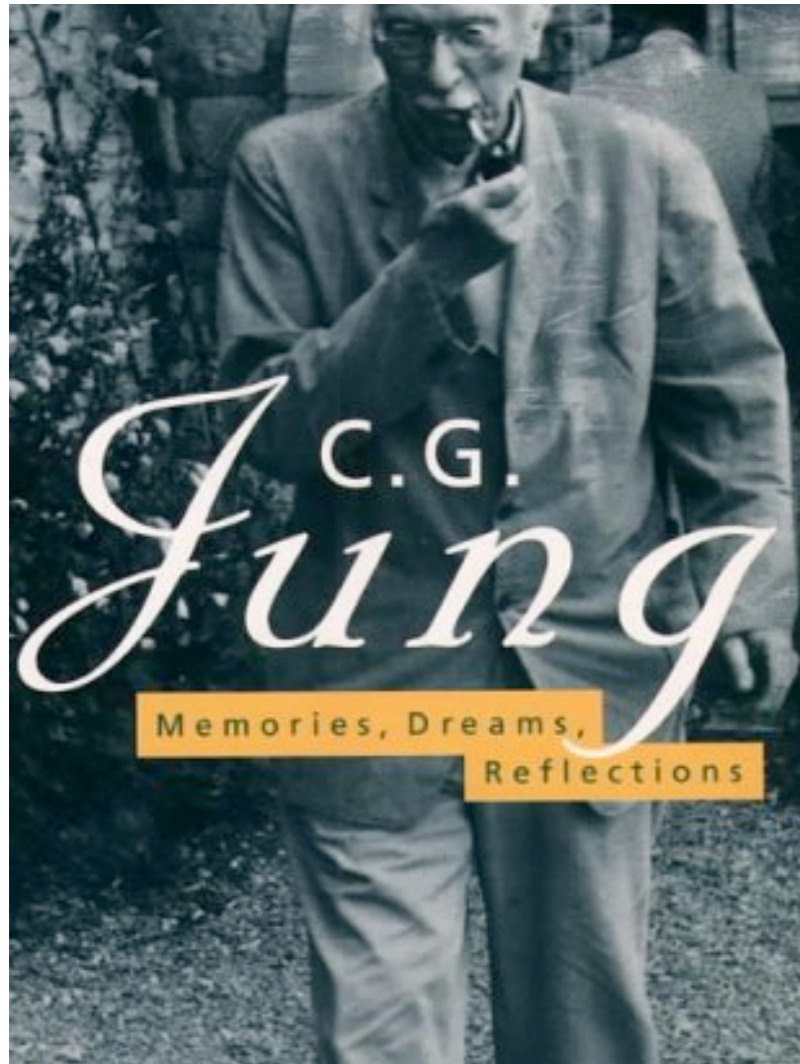
Joyce and Jung particularly focuses on discerning meaning

**during the *day* through “synchronicities”**

(which is Jung’s term for meaningful coincidences) and

**at *night* through our dreams,**

which Sigmund Freud (Jung’s mentor) called the  
“royal road to the unconscious” (25).



Jung on “Communion” vs. *The Red Book*

# Primer on Dream Interpretation

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- Water: the unconscious (*other common archetypes for the unconscious are “underground realms, wild places like forests and jungles, and great beasts like whales and dragons”*).
- Light - new level of consciousness
- Earth - material world
- Air and Sky - realm of spirit
- Vehicles - how you get around in the world (*pay attention, for example, to who is driving your car. If it's not you, then who may be directing your life that you need to perhaps pay attention to as a way of getting back in the driver's seat?*)
- Animals - instinct
- Child - something new or growing
- Circle - the Self as it arises spontaneously in nature (sun; moon; many fruits, nuts, seeds, and flowers; eyes of animals).
- Toilets and bathrooms - privacy
- Defecation - eliminating residue of life gone by, need to let go of something now obsolete in your life.
  
- TTAQ: Title, Theme, Affect, Question
- Record in 1st person
- If this were my dream...

# Philokalia

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So long as [meditation] remains in the head, in the intellect...it is incomplete and imperfect.

It is necessary to **descend from head to heart** —

to “find the place of the heart,”  
to “bring down the mind into the heart,”  
to “unite the mind with the heart.”

Then [meditation] will become [not only mindfulness, but *heartfulness*] —

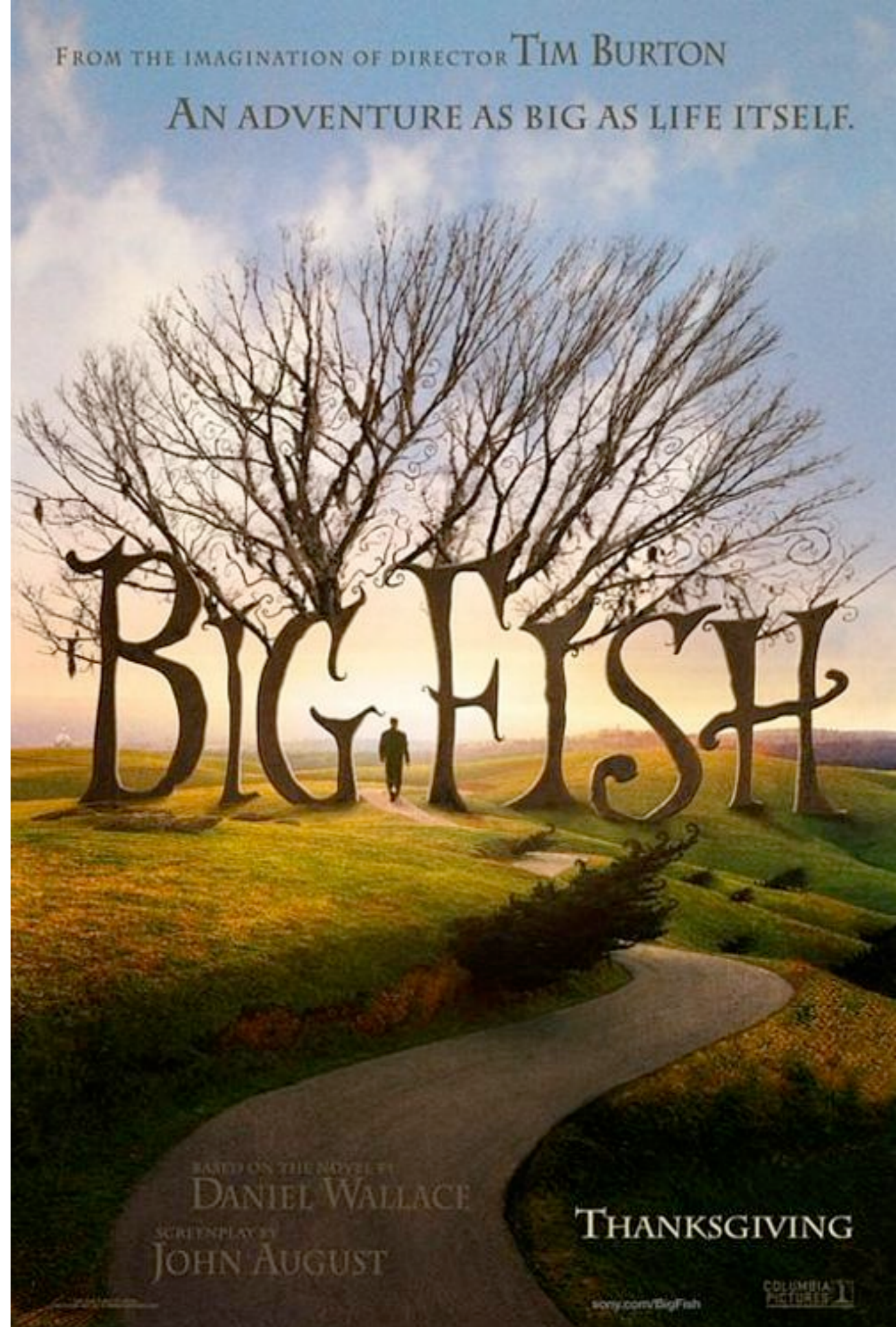
the prayer not of one faculty only, but of the whole [human being], soul, spirit and body: the prayer not only of our intelligence, of our natural reason, but of the spirit with its special power of direct contact with God [or the whole of reality].



# Modern Rationalism to Postmodern Myth

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- **Trailer:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-d-kjzBmz6l>
- **Edward's death:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtkvKz1Fg0Y>



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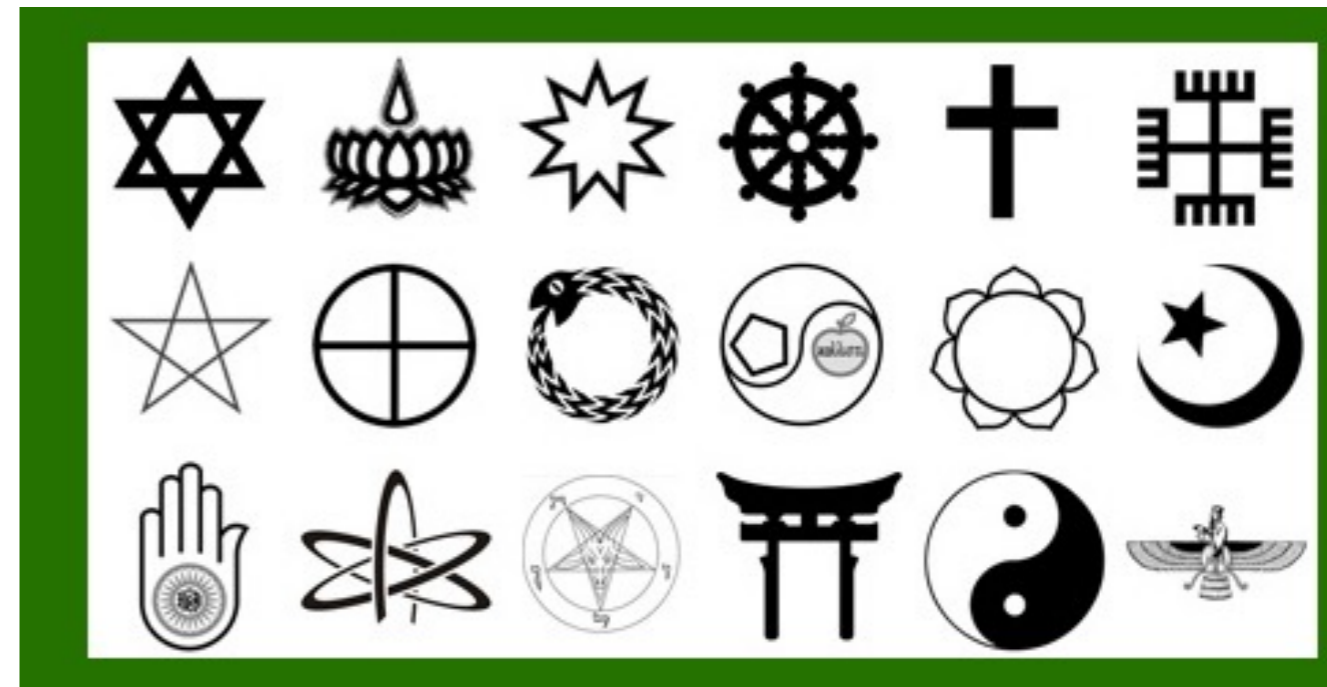
**“Future”**

**“So What?”**

6. October 18:

**“Credo: I Believe”** (500 words)

In(conclusion)



[frederickuu.org/fcc](http://frederickuu.org/fcc)



# Peter Mayer “Introvert Song”

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[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j\\_8UkYshoGQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_8UkYshoGQ)



*People bug me when they interrupt me with calls / And unannounced visits / And on top of that when they chat about nothing at all / And I ask "What is it?" / I do have a lot to do / Can you return at two? / I will not be here by then / Just leave what you need me for / On a note on my door / So I can ignore it, my friend*

You may think it maddening when you ring my answering machine / And I'm right there listening / But I'd like to hire my own secretary who's mean / Someone who says things like: / "Mr. Mayer can't be reached / He is not in, you see / He's in a meeting till ten / I suppose I could take your name / Who are you anyway? / Please never call here again."

If I see you before you see me in the hall / Then while you're not looking / I'll find the nearest bathroom and hide in the stall / Till I think the coast is clear / Then I will take a peak / And, if you're gone, I'll sneak / Back to my private abode / There in my world of one / I have a lot more fun / Because people bug me you know

**CHORUS**

**THE BEST LACK ALL  
CONVICTION, WHILE  
THE WORST ARE FULL  
OF PASSIONATE  
INTENSITY.**



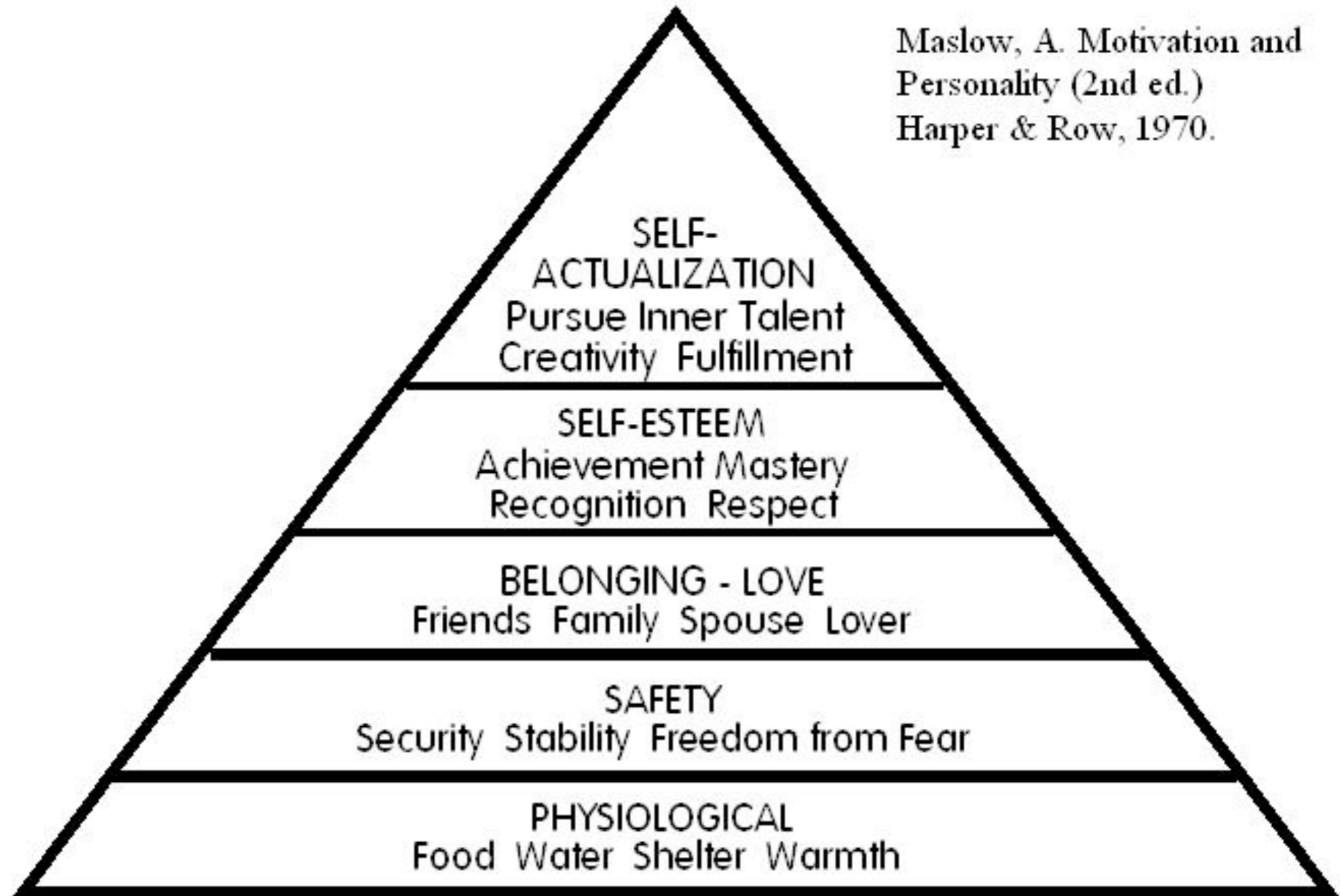
**William Butler Yeats**  
Irish Poet

*QuoteHD.com*

1865 - 1939

# ABRAHAM MASLOW HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Maslow, A. *Motivation and Personality* (2nd ed.)  
Harper & Row, 1970.



WE'D ALL LOVE TO LIVE  
IN A WORLD WITHOUT  
MINDLESS GREED OR  
ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION-

-BUT THAT'S NOT  
HUMAN NATURE,  
IS IT..?

THANK  
GOD



*Polyp.org.uk*

THANK GOD'

# DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

# HOUSE of TURDS



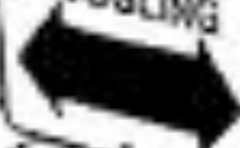
House Speaker John Boehner and Tea Party faction he can't seem to control have nothing on Kevin Spacey's diabolical "House of Cards" character, as the GOP holds the country hostage.

**● D.C. cess-pols shut down government**  
**● They get paid while nation suffers** PAGES 4-5

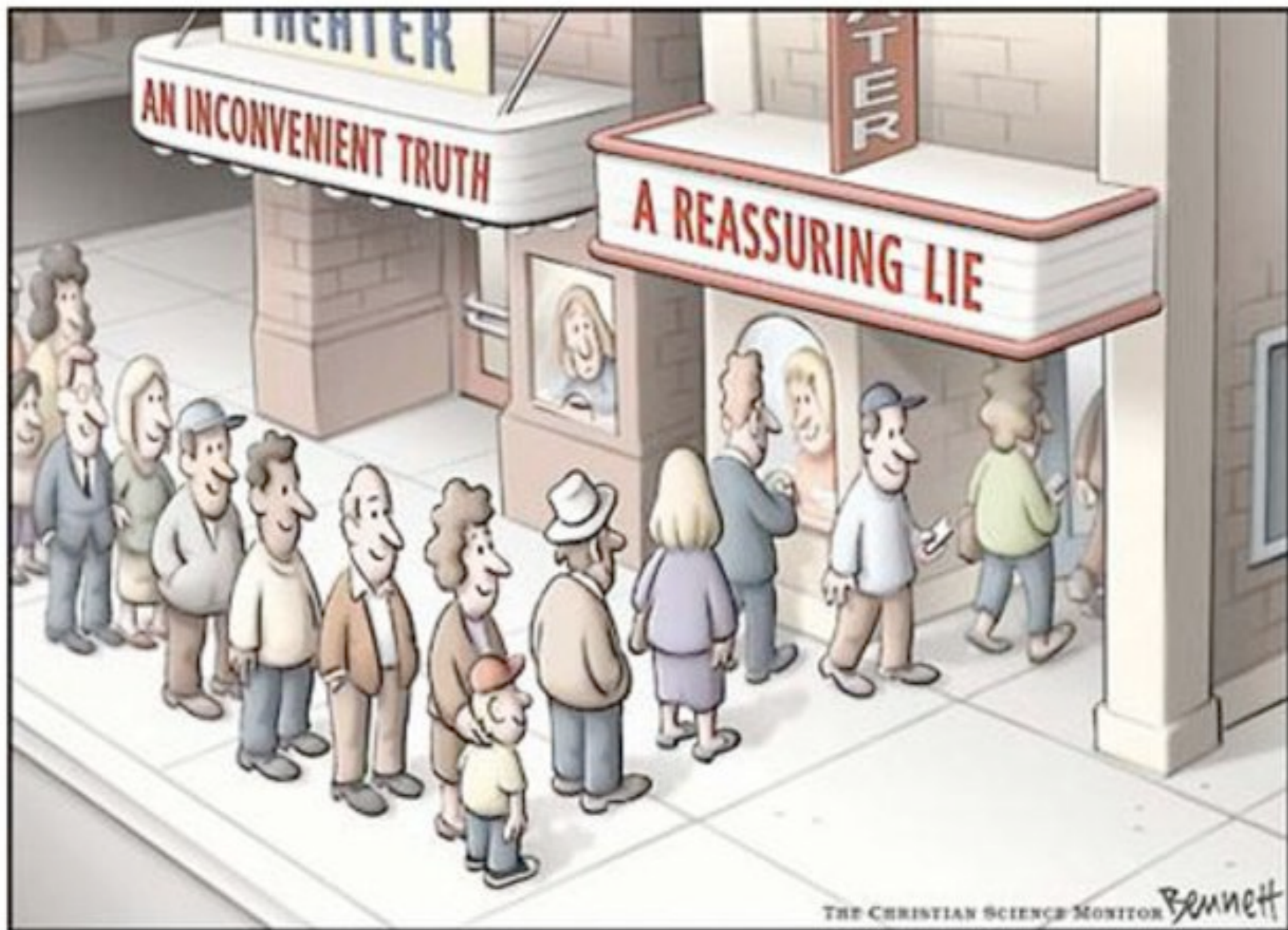
SUDDENLY  
I HAVE  
AN URGE  
TO JUGGLE  
MACHETES...



ABSOLUTELY  
**NO**  
MACHETE  
JUGGLING



THE ESSENCE OF  
HUMAN NATURE



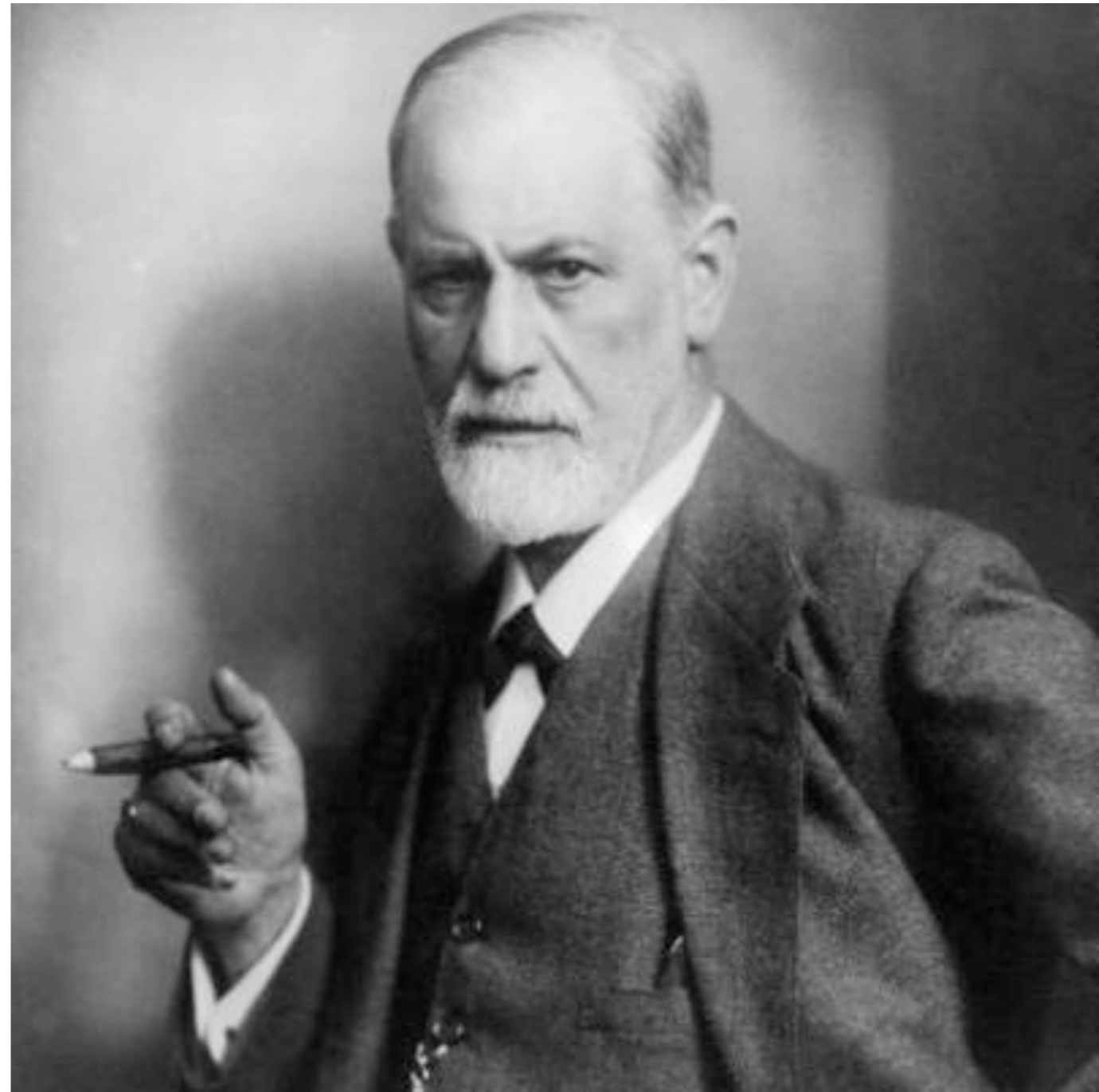
THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR *Bennett*

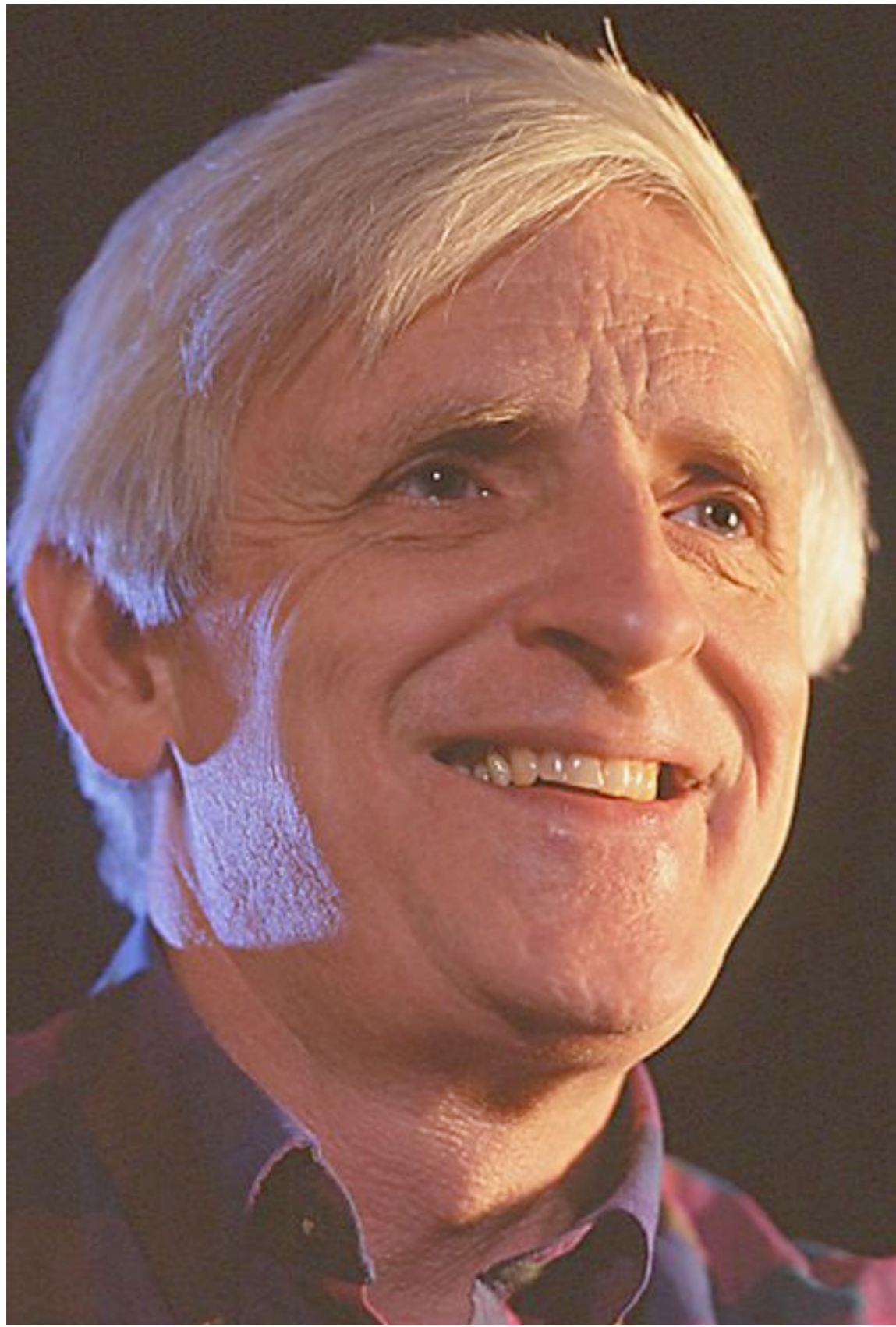


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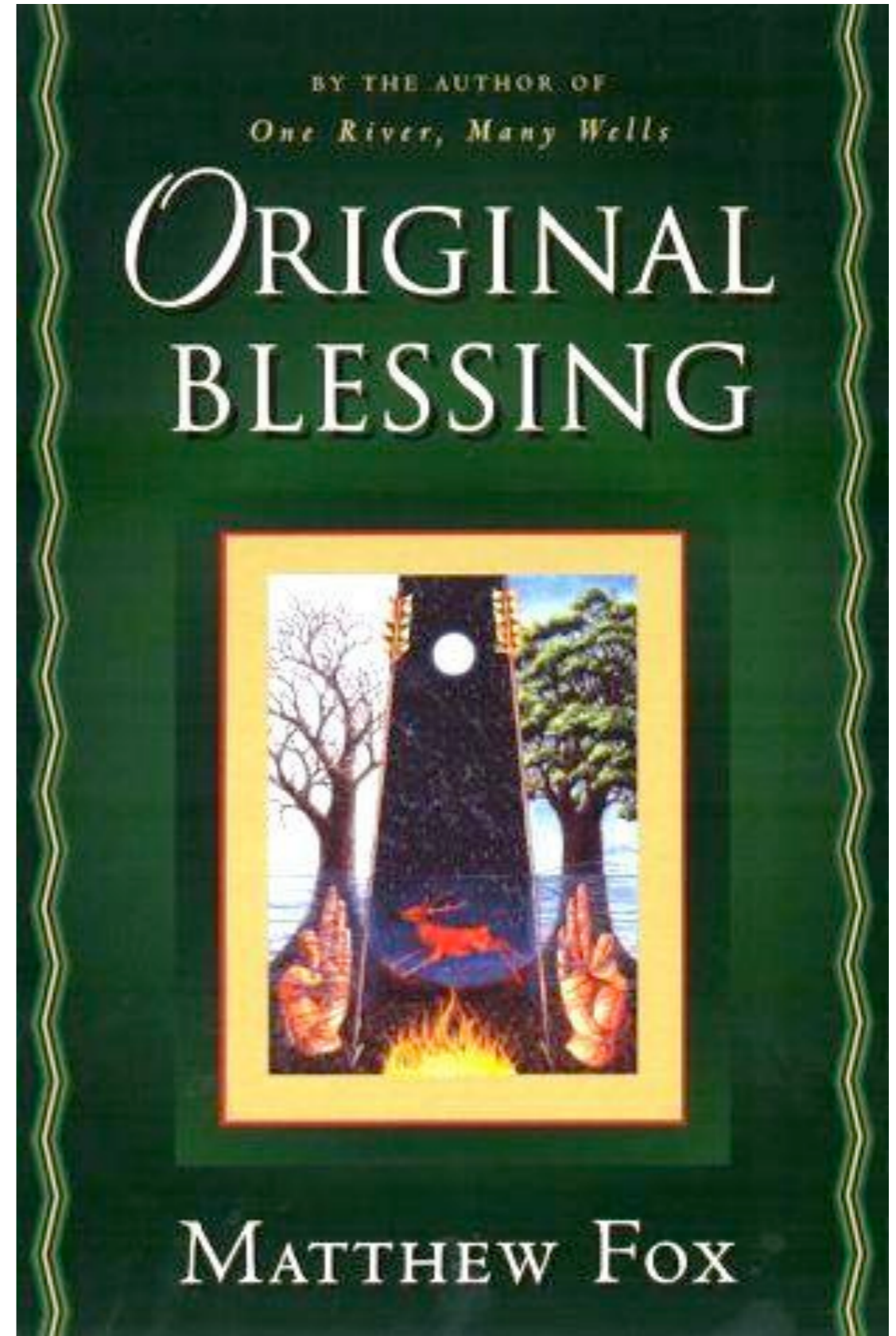
- “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” (Romans 7:5)

- Freud: power of unconscious drives





Imago Dei...theosis.  
William Ellery Channing, "Likeness to God" (1828)



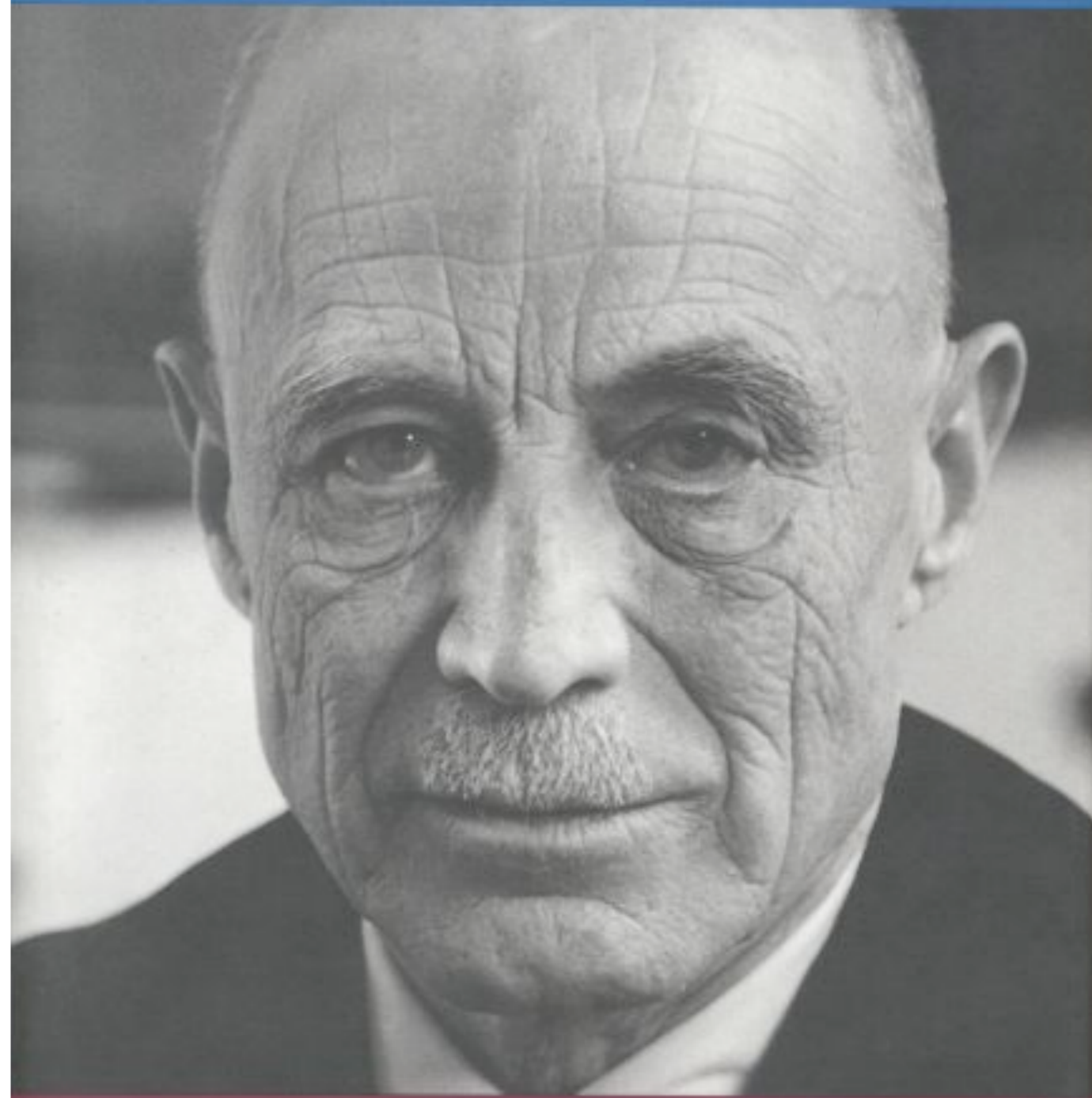
*The Kingdom of God in  
America (1937)*

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"A God  
*without wrath*  
  
brought men  
*without sin*  
  
into a kingdom  
*without judgment*  
  
through the ministrations of a  
Christ  
*without a cross.*"

H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

Theology, History, and Culture



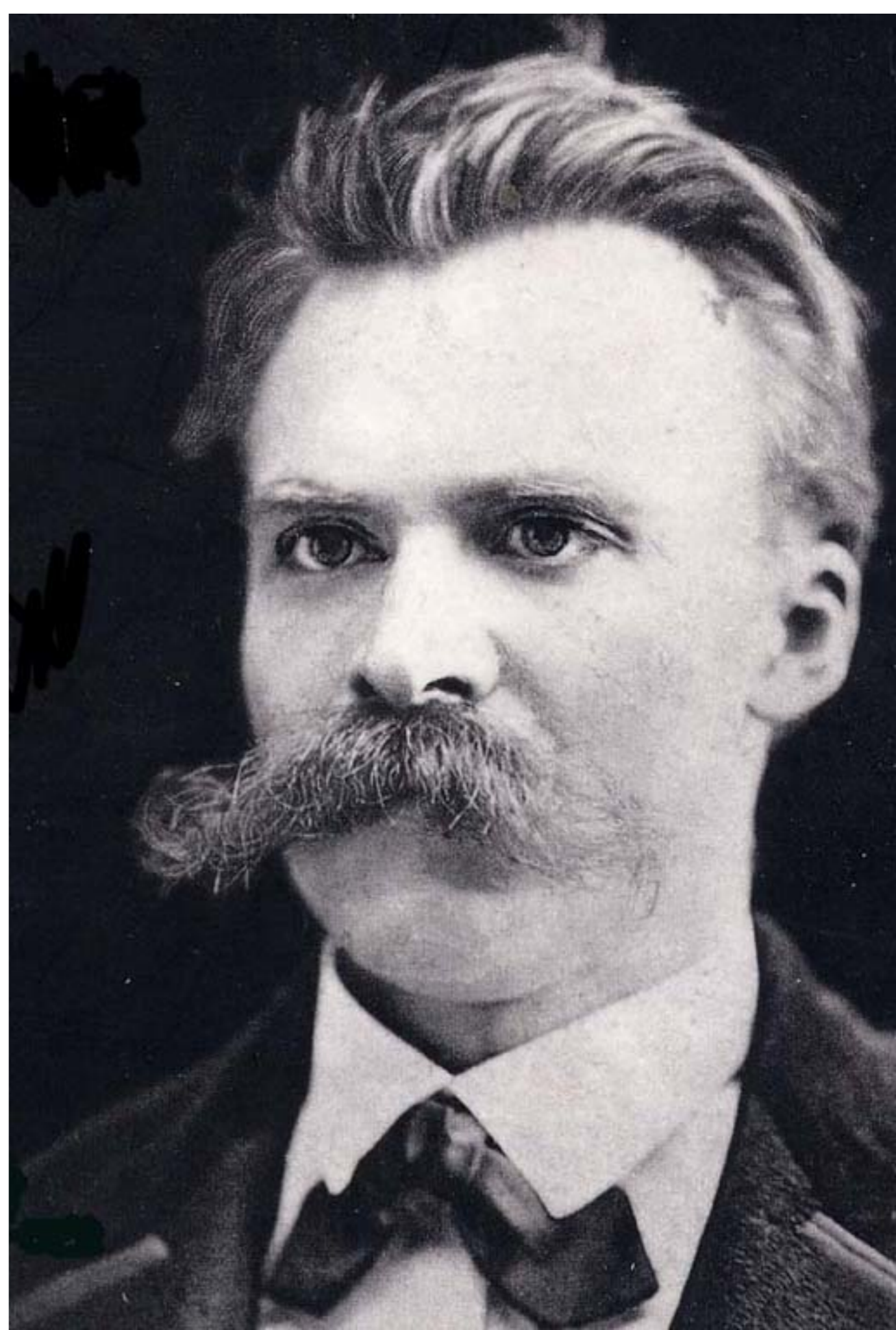
*Edited by William Stacy Johnson*

*Foreword by Richard R. Niebuhr*

# Nietzsche

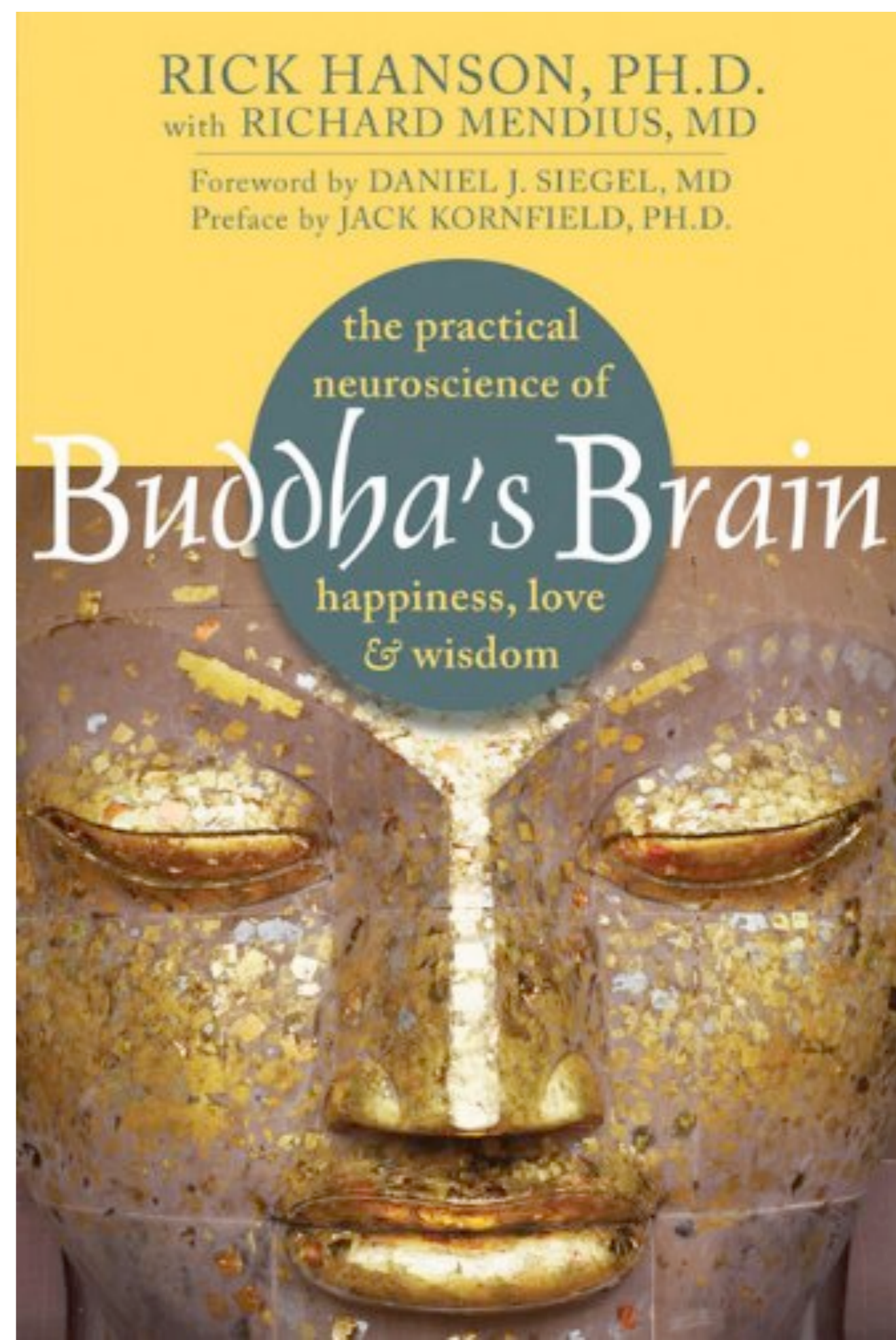
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Humans may really be  
just **“interesting pieces  
of meat”**

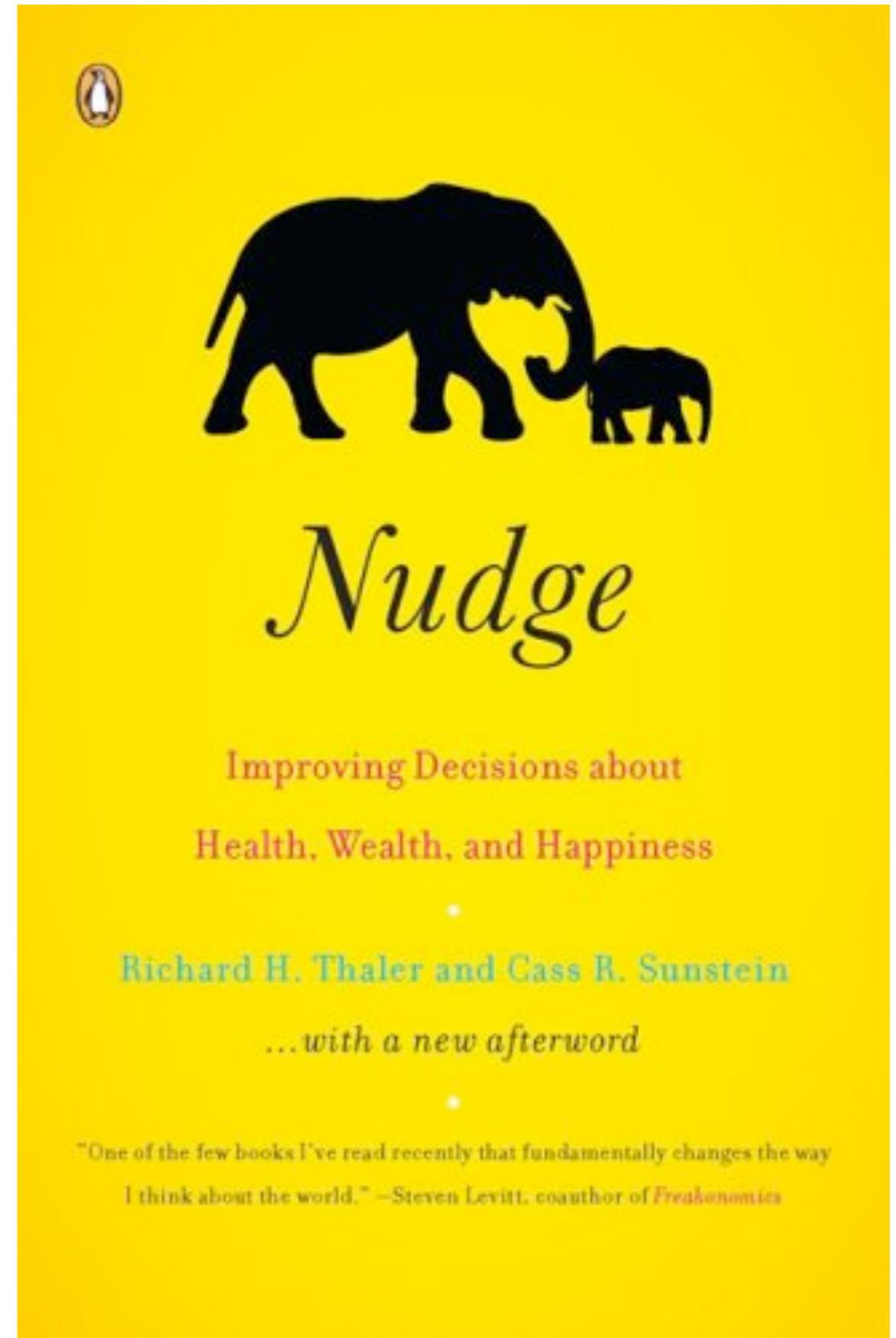


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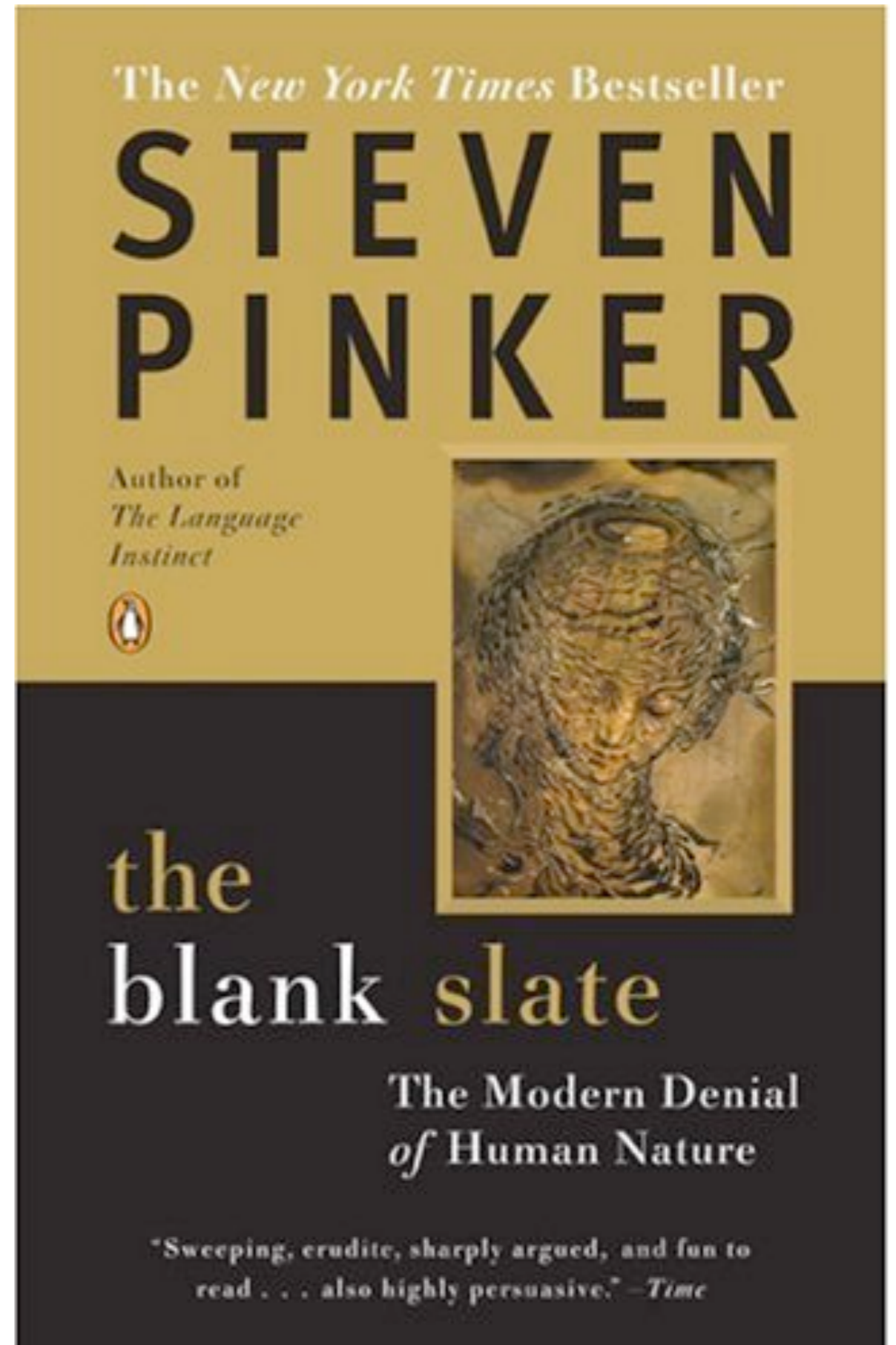
“Your brain is like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positive ones” (41)



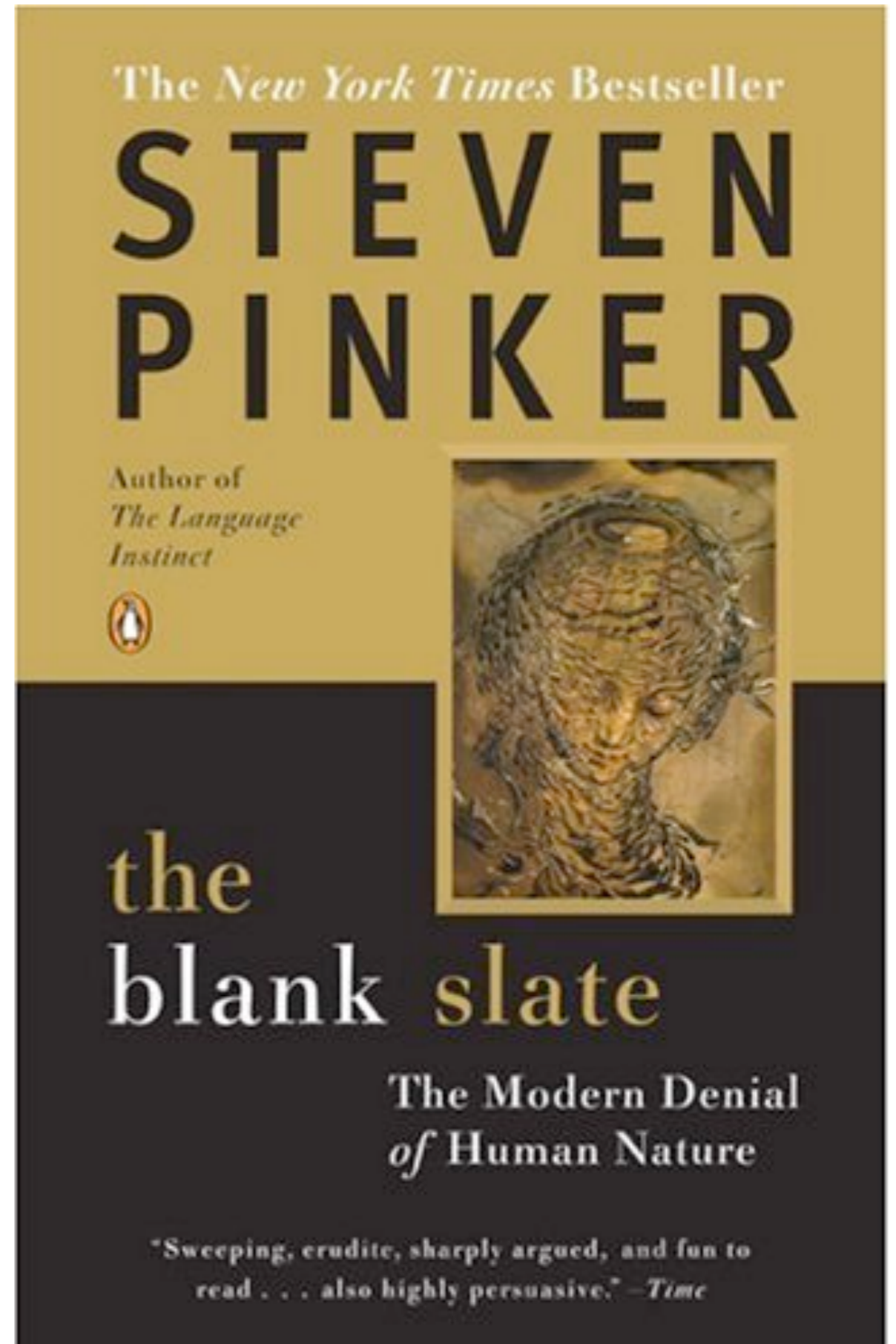
- 
- soft libertarian paternalism
  - Mayor Bloomberg (*sodas, smoking*)
  - Change default (*organ donor, retirement*)



- 
- *Tabula Rasa*
  - Children have different temperaments (relatively same environment)
  - Pets don't learn to speak English, but grow up in same environment as children
  - LGBT grow up in heterosexist environments
  - Appeal: If born with blank slate, can perfect society through social engineering.
  - Fairness ≠ Sameness



- 
- Parenting-Industrial Complex:
    - *physical activity,*
    - *intellectual stimulation,*
    - *diet,*
    - *etc.*
  - Shaped in part by heritability, home environment, larger culture — and to large extent by *chance* (in utero and in life)





# Twin Studies



*Separated at birth, the Mallifert twins meet accidentally.*

- 
- Environment
  - vs. Genetics



# Humanism

- Progressive philosophy of life that, **without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives** of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.
- The lifestance of Humanism—guided by **reason**, inspired by **compassion**, and informed by **experience**—encourages us to live life well and fully.
- Humanists recognize **nature as self-existing**. We accept our life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be.
- **Ethical values are derived from human need and interest** as tested by experience. Humanists ground values in human welfare shaped by human circumstances, interests, and concerns and extended to the global ecosystem and beyond.
- We are committed to treating each person as having **inherent worth and dignity**, and to making informed choices in a context of **freedom consonant with responsibility**.

- Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals. We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a **deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence**, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and **finality of death**.
- Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for and strive toward a **world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences**, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with **interdependence** enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.
- Humanists are concerned for the well being of all, are committed to **diversity**, and respect those of differing yet humane views.
- Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to **progress** toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.

(from The Humanist Manifesto)

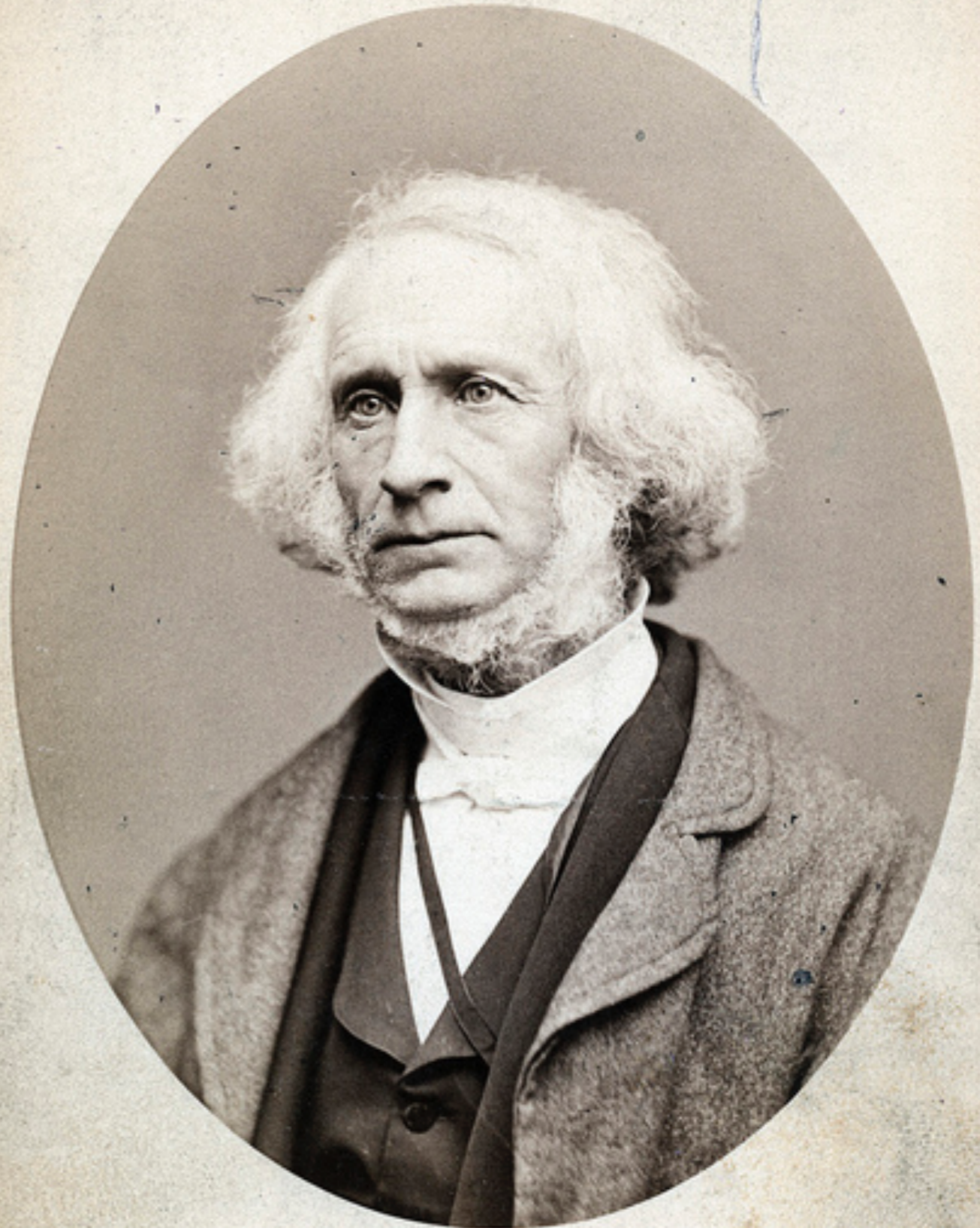
# Cyrus Bartol's *Radical Problems* (1872)

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“I spell  
my God  
with two o's  
and  
my devil  
without a d” (111)

**G(o)od**

**(d)evil**



April 20, 1999

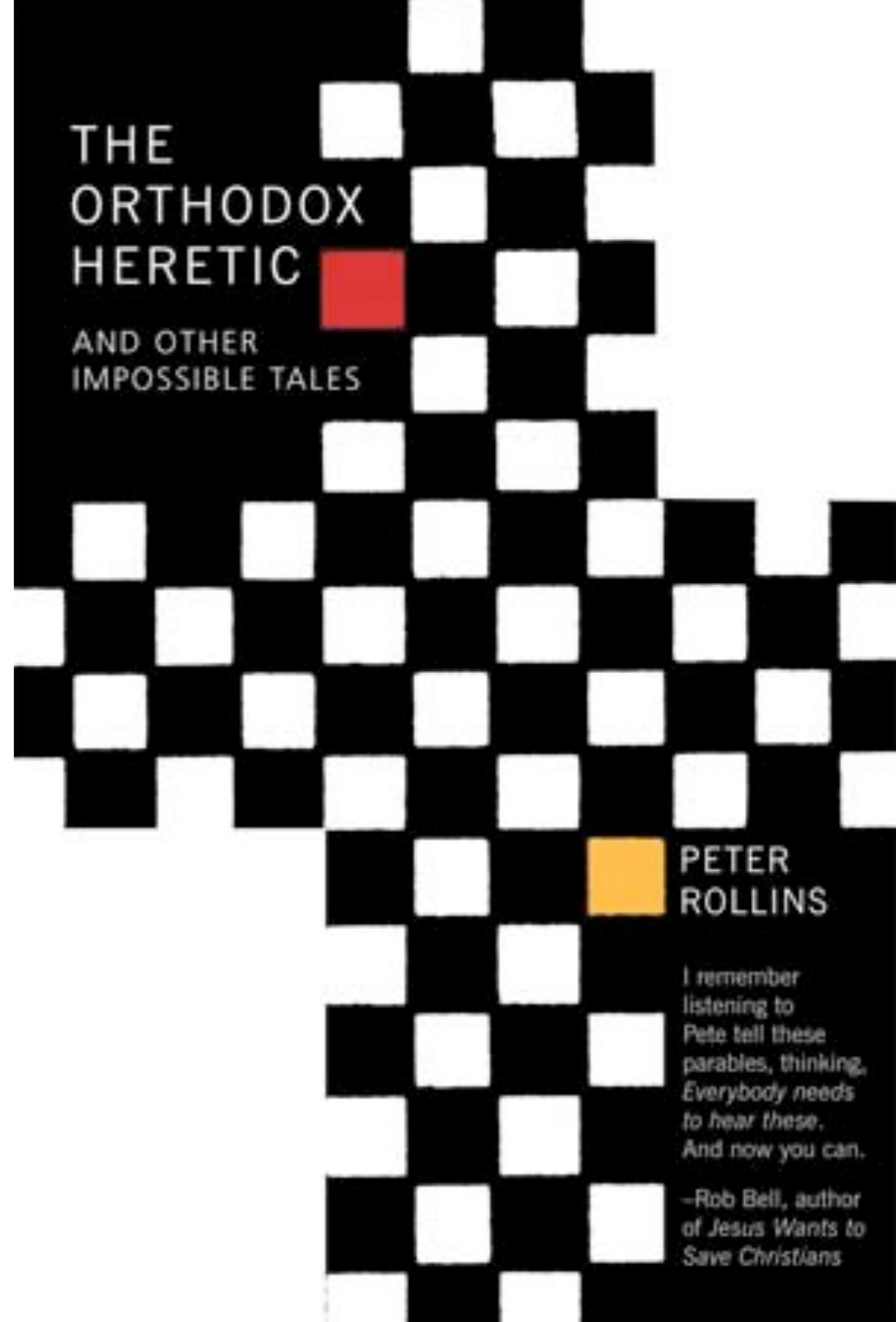
U.N. Declaration of Human Rights



p. 57

Safety Valve: “What if the activities we think critique the unjust world are really just an air vent in the machine.” [get rid TVs...?!]

If law were absolutely unbending, we would rebel.



# Credo

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Behavior is believable.

Practice makes permanent.

Reorient *from* speciesism *to* the interdependent web of all existence

We need a better “conveyer belt” (*ego-centric to ethnocentric to globocentric to cosmo-centric*) [Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*]





# Experience & Human Nature

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- Have you had religious experiences (peaks/valleys/plateaus) that **revealed truth to you through the crucible of your firsthand experience?** If so, were your religious experiences spontaneous/unbidden or the result of a spiritual practice (meditation/prayer, journaling, yoga, etc.) or corporate worship?
- Are there some **central meanings or values** that emerge from your various religious experiences?
- How might your **experience** inform how you/we construct theology?
- What is human nature? (theological anthropology)
- [Start working on your draft credos]



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