

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

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

➤ “Death of a religion: Isis & the Yazidi”

blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/seanthomas/100282674/death-of-a-religion-isis-and-the-yezidi/

- Maybe the oldest religion in the world.
- After at least 6,000 years, they are being exterminated.
- Yazidism is much older than Islam, and much older than Christianity.

“Death of a religion: Isis & the Yazidi”

blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/seanthomas/100282674/death-of-a-religion-isis-and-the-yezidi/

Also deeply “peculiar”

- Scared of lettuce.
- Abhor pumpkins.
- Honor sacred trees.
- Women must not cut their hair.
- Marriage is forbidden in April.
- Avoid wearing dark blue because it is "too holy"
- Divided strictly into castes, who cannot marry each other.
- Upper castes are polygamous
- Anyone of the faith who marries a non-Yazidi risks ostracism, or worse.

“Death of a religion: Isis & the Yazidi”

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Syncretistic

- Like Hindus, they believe in reincarnation.
- Like ancient Mithraists, they sacrifice bulls.
- They practice baptism, like Christians.
- When they pray, they face the sun like Zoroastrians.
- There are also strong links with Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam.

- **Devil worship:** arguably, the Yazidi worship what Christians or Muslims might call “Satan”
- though the Yazidi call him “Melek Taus”
- appears in the form of a peacock angel.
- led a rebellion in heaven: clearly echoing the story of Lucifer, cast into Hell by the Christian God.
- "Melek" is cognate with "Moloch", the name of a Biblical demon – who demanded human sacrifice.

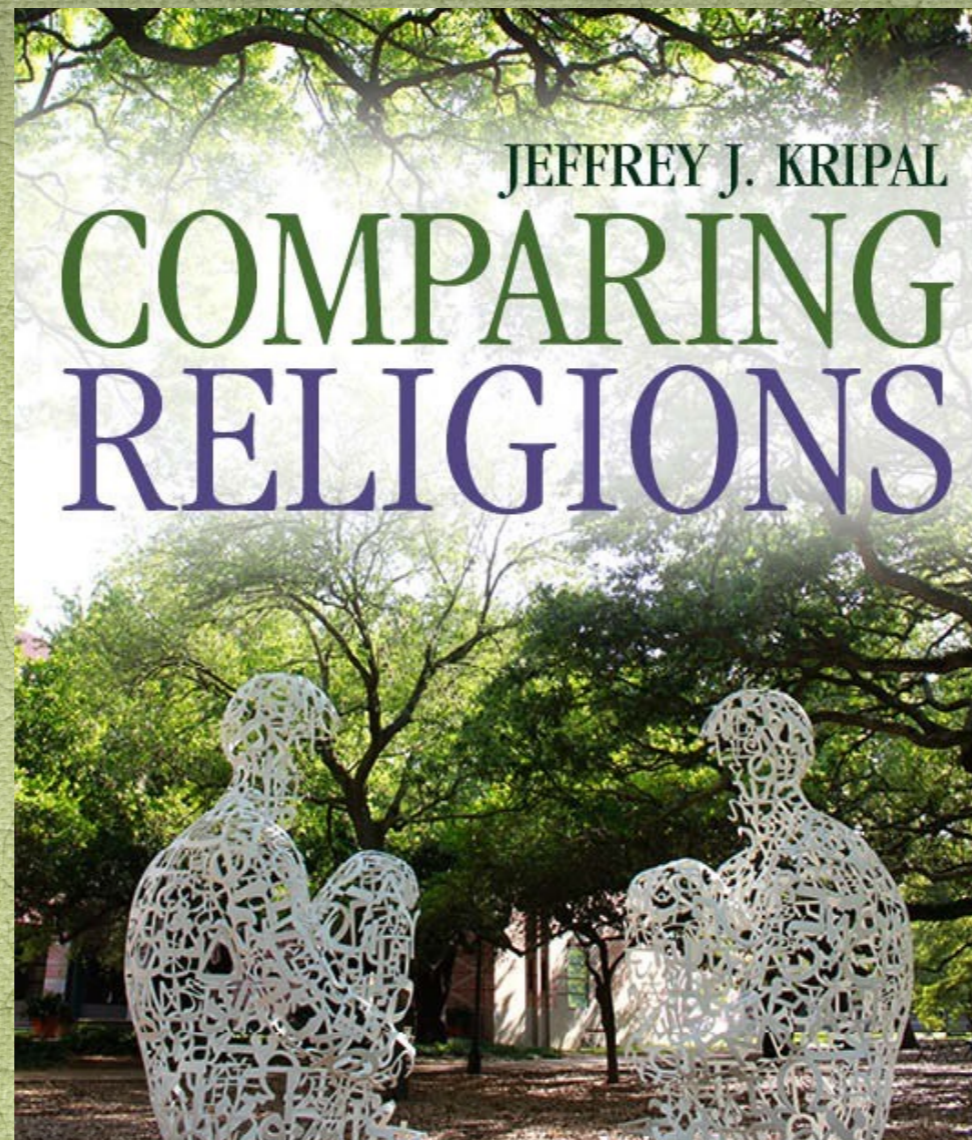
- Come from the ancient lands of Sumeria and Assyria, in modern-day Turkey, Iraq and Kurdistan.
- Reverence for birds – and snakes – also appears to be extremely old.
- Excavations at ancient Catalhoyuk, in Turkey, show that the people there revered bird-gods as long ago as 7000BCE.
- Even older is Gobekli Tepe, a megalithic site near Sanliurfa, in Kurdish Turkey (Sanliurfa was once a stronghold of Yazidism). The extraordinary temple of Gobekli Tepe boasts carvings of winged birdmen, and images of buzzards and serpents.







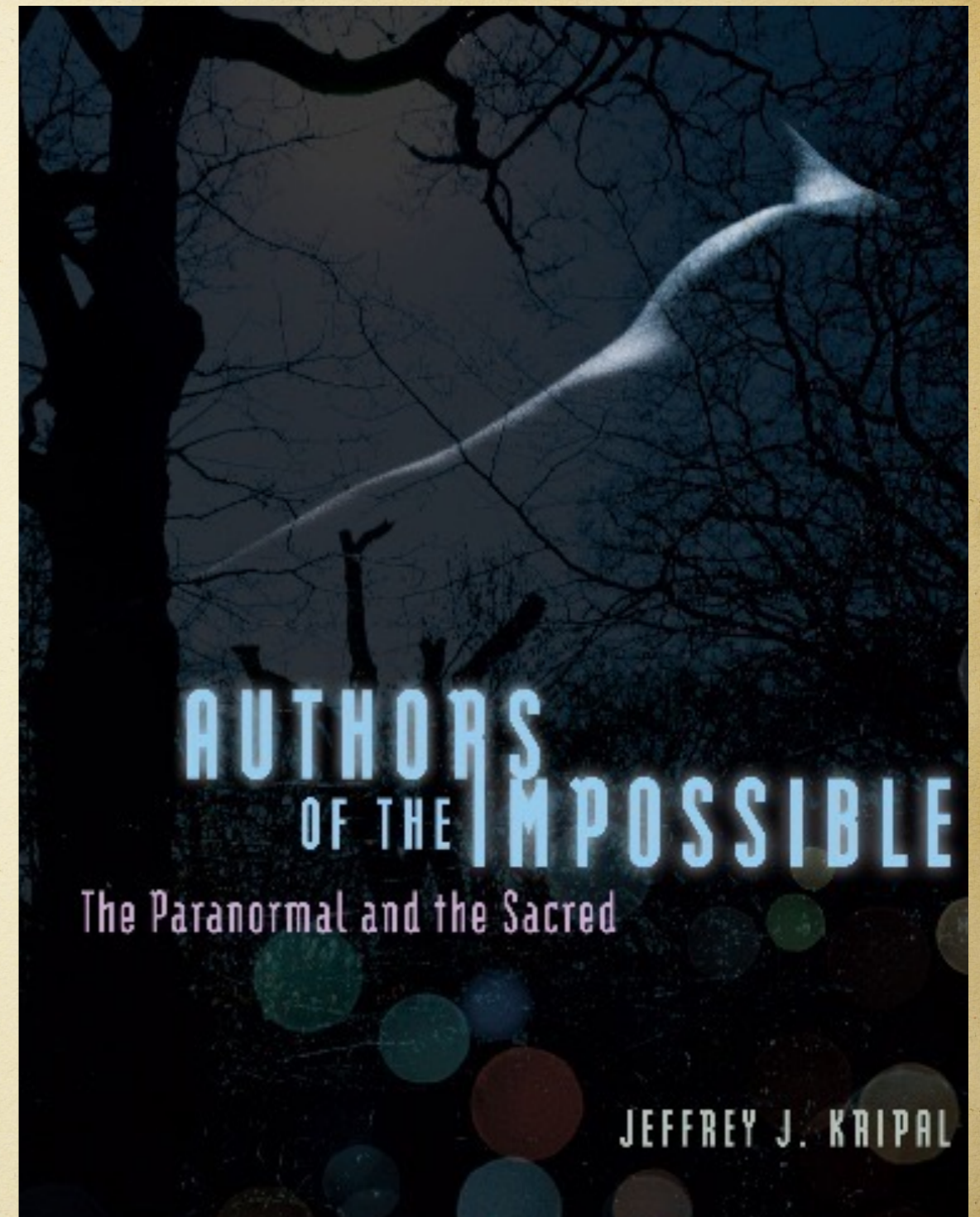
- Fair guess: Yazidism is a vastly ancient form of bird-worship, that could date back 6,000 years or more.
- “Ur-religion,” the mother ship of Middle Eastern faiths,
- It is us who have incorporated Yazidi myths and beliefs into our religions, of Christianity and Islam and Judaism.
- Now, in the dusty cities of northern Iraq, Yazidism is dying.”



Chapter 8:
The Religious Imagination & It's Paranormal Powers
Angels, Aliens, and Anomalies

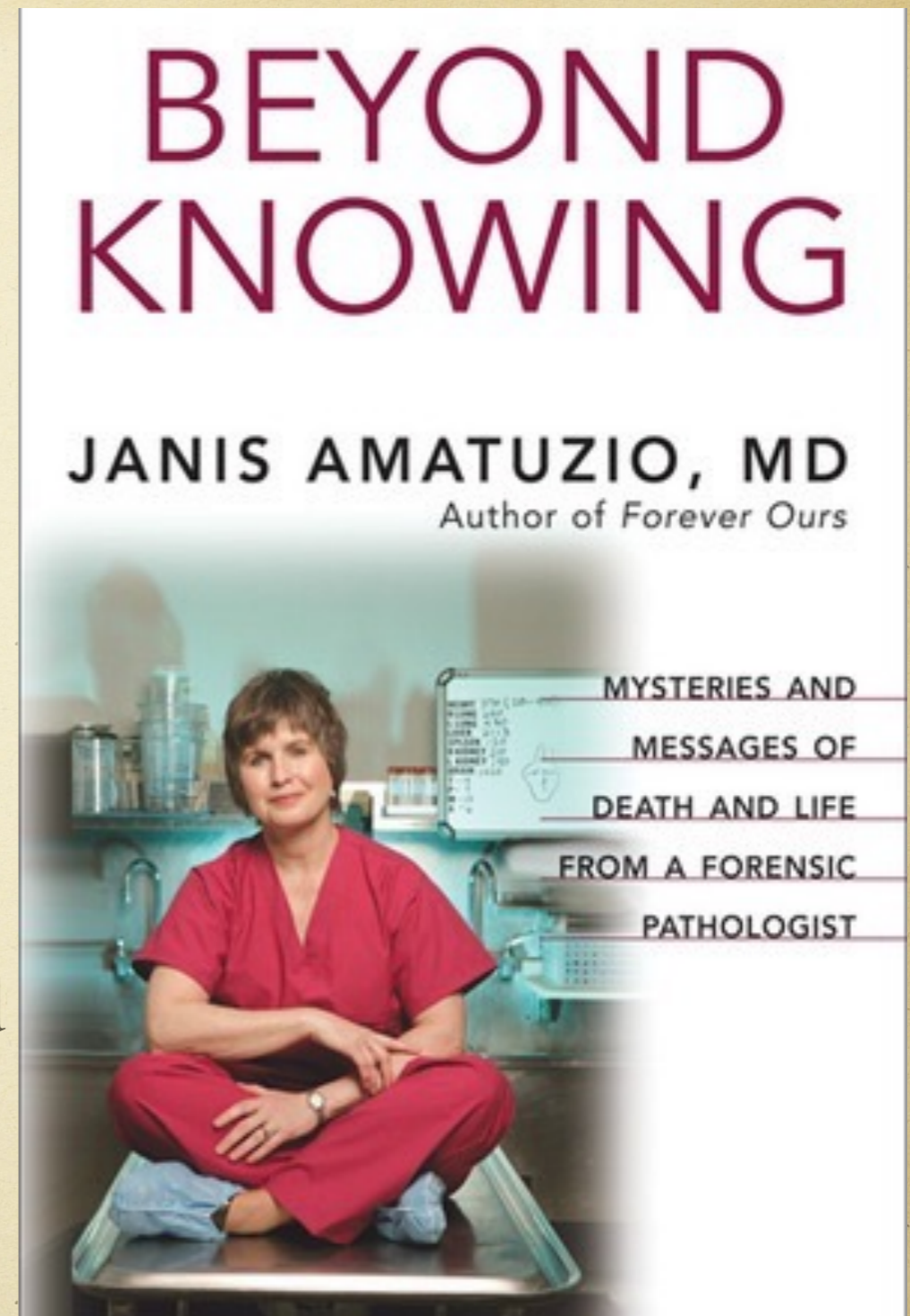
Psychical

- 1870s: “psychic” & “psychical” in writings of a prominent British chemist named Sir William Crookes
- Studying “Psychic Force” of a medium
- “Psychical”: as yet unexplainable force, pertaining to the human psyche. (combination of)
- Paranormal: modern reframing of Catholic term preternatural (“*beyond the natural*”)



Psychical

- A woman has a vivid dream of her husband standing next to her bed, apologizing and explaining that he had been in a car accident. And that his car was in a ditch where it could not be seen from the road.
- She awakes immediately at 4:20am, and calls the police to tell them with absolute certainty that her husband had been in a car accident not far from their home in a ravine that could not be seen from the road.
- They recovered the body twenty minutes later.

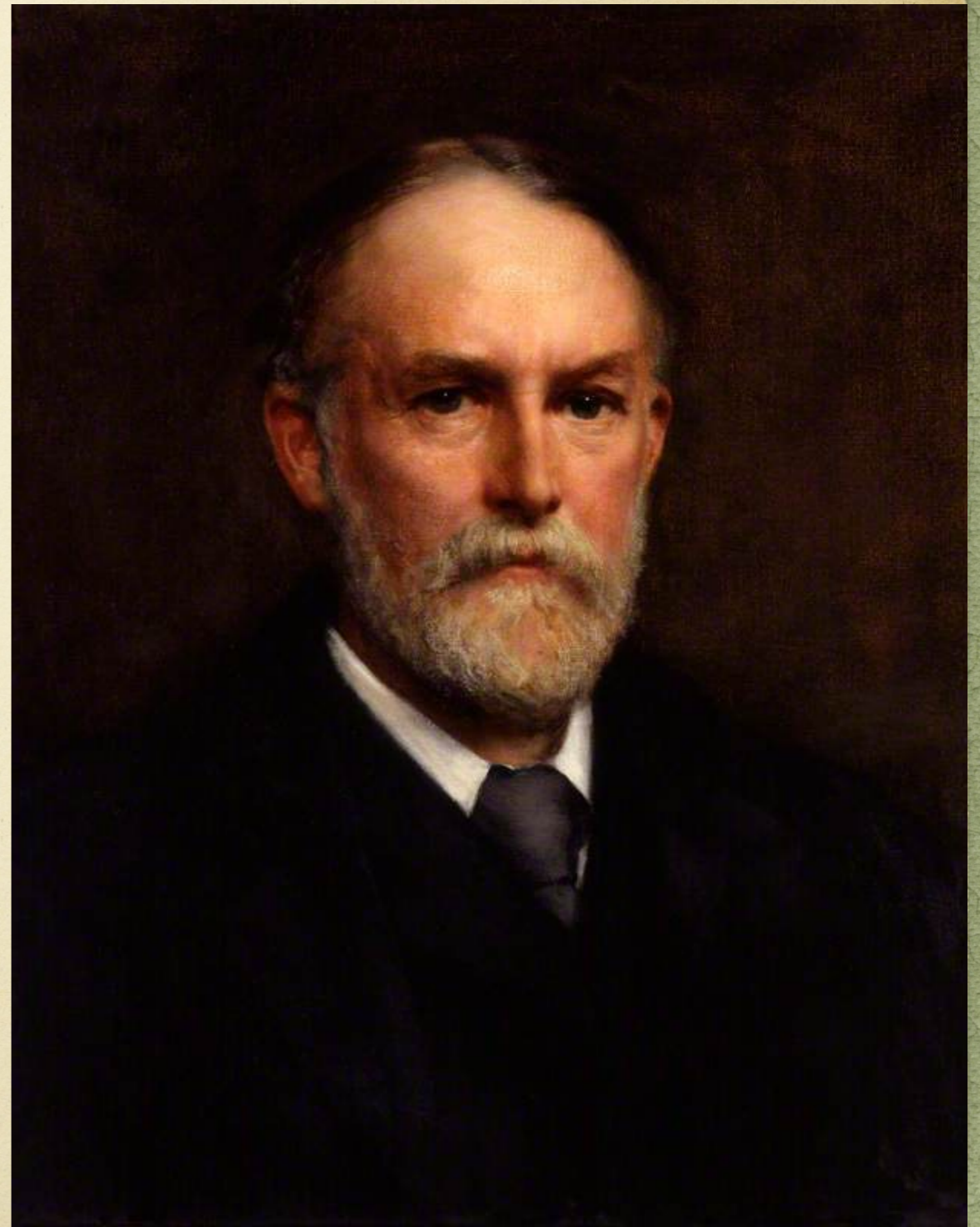


2008

Telepathy

tele (“at a distance”) + *pathos* (“suffering/affected”)

- 1882: coined by Frederic Myers , a Greek and Latin professor at Cambridge
- Dramatic psychical communications between loved ones in *extreme emotional states*.
- Connection between trauma/death and paranormal events is one response to sneering about why psychics don't get rich on the stock market or can't replicate in controlled laboratories.



1843-1901

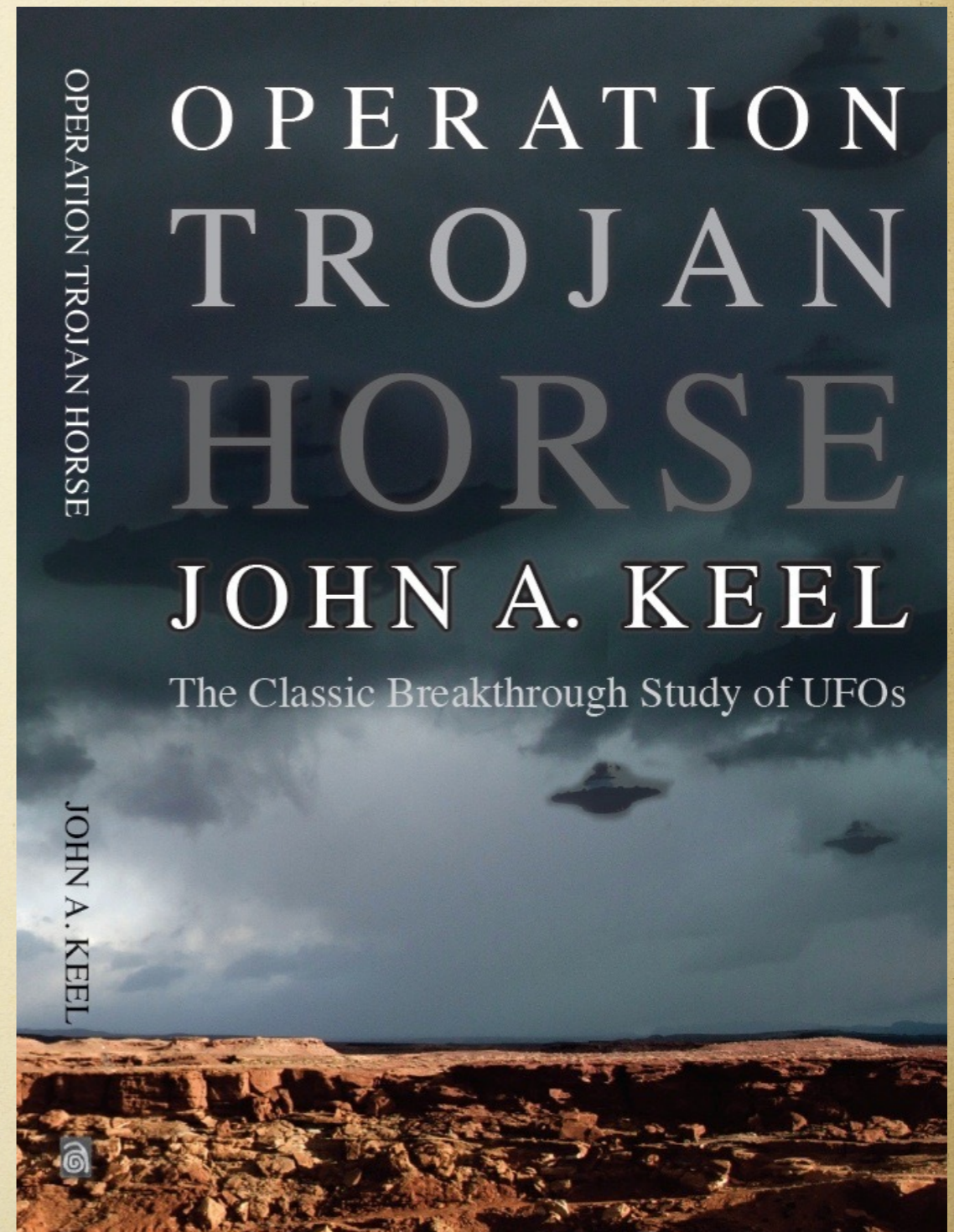
UFOs

Not:

- hard, stable objects
- much less high-tech space ships

Theory:

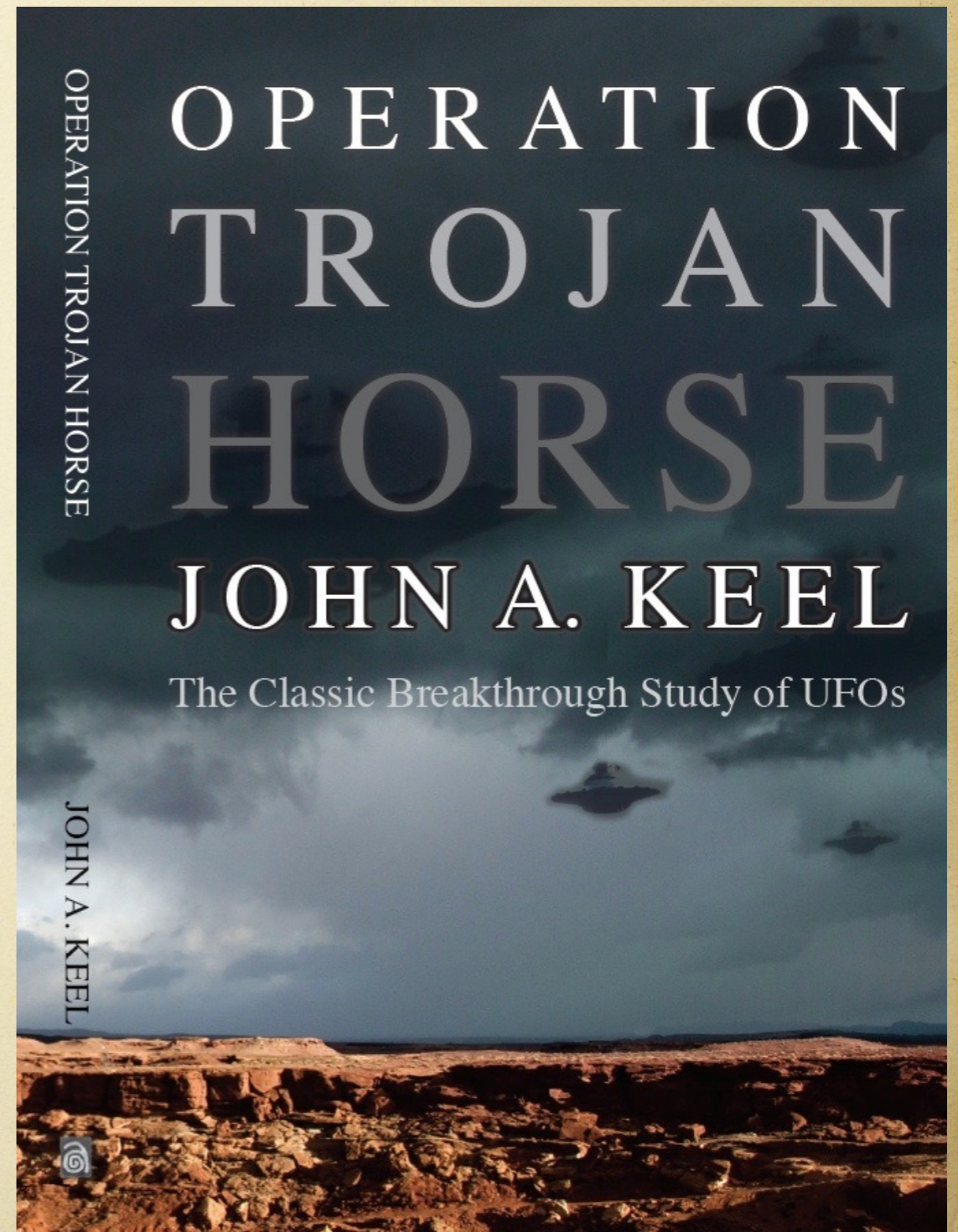
- “soft” parapsychical manifestations
- *manifestations of the cultural imagination, now dominated by sci-fi and Cold War terms.*



1970

UFOs: Through the Lens of *Reflexivity*

- Medieval Catholicism:
demons/angels
- Early modern European folklore:
elves/fauns/fairies
- Cold War America:
sci-fi invading Martians and
beneficent Venusians
- Similar reports of sexuality with
modern UFO abductions and
premodern incubi/succubi/fairies/
sylphs

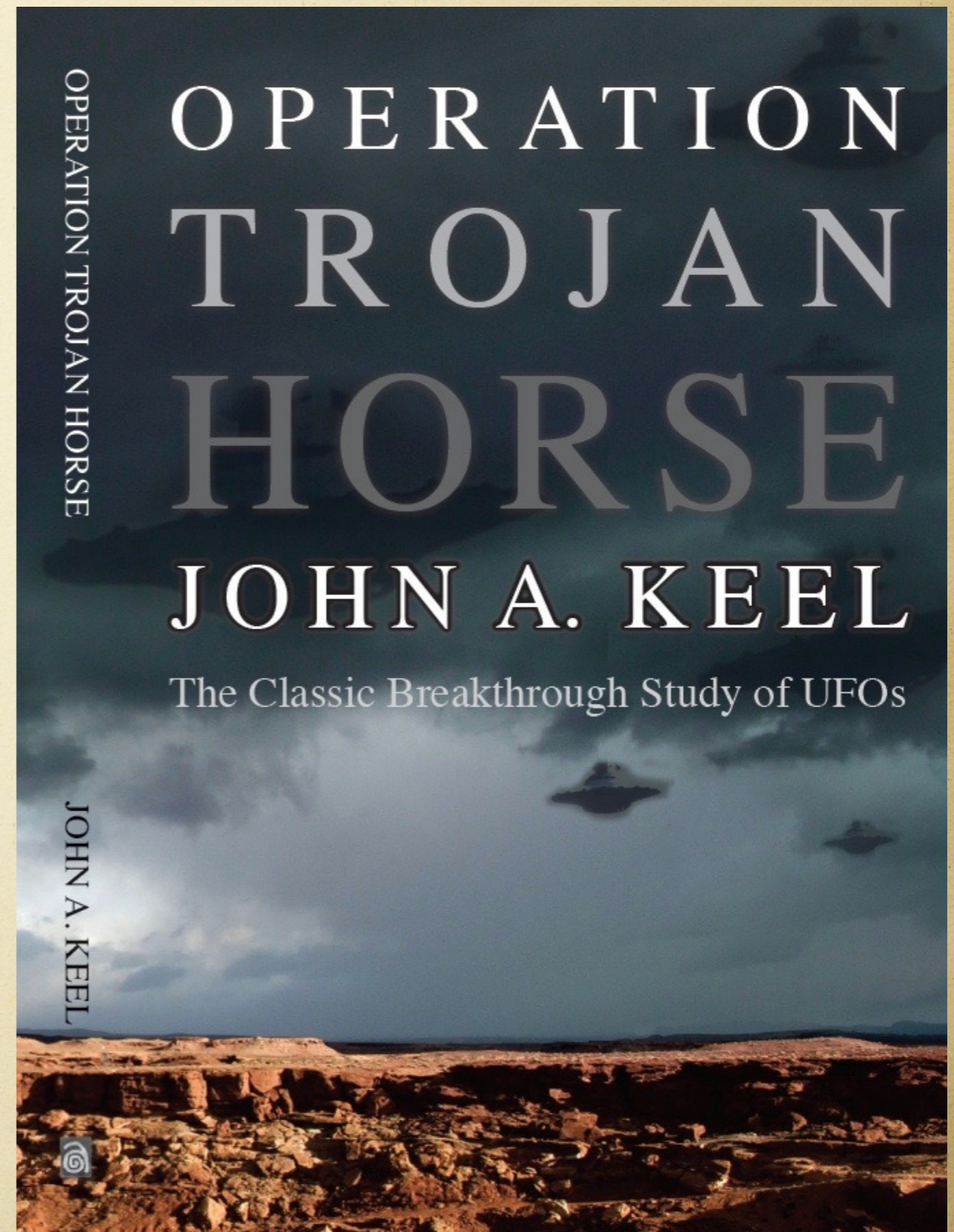


1970

- Keel: “veridical hallucinations”

- Part of an “in-between”

- Another space-time continuum, where life, matter, and energy are radically different from ours.



1970

Charles Fort: “Intermediatism”

- Refusal of all easy, polarizing answers regarding the paranormal

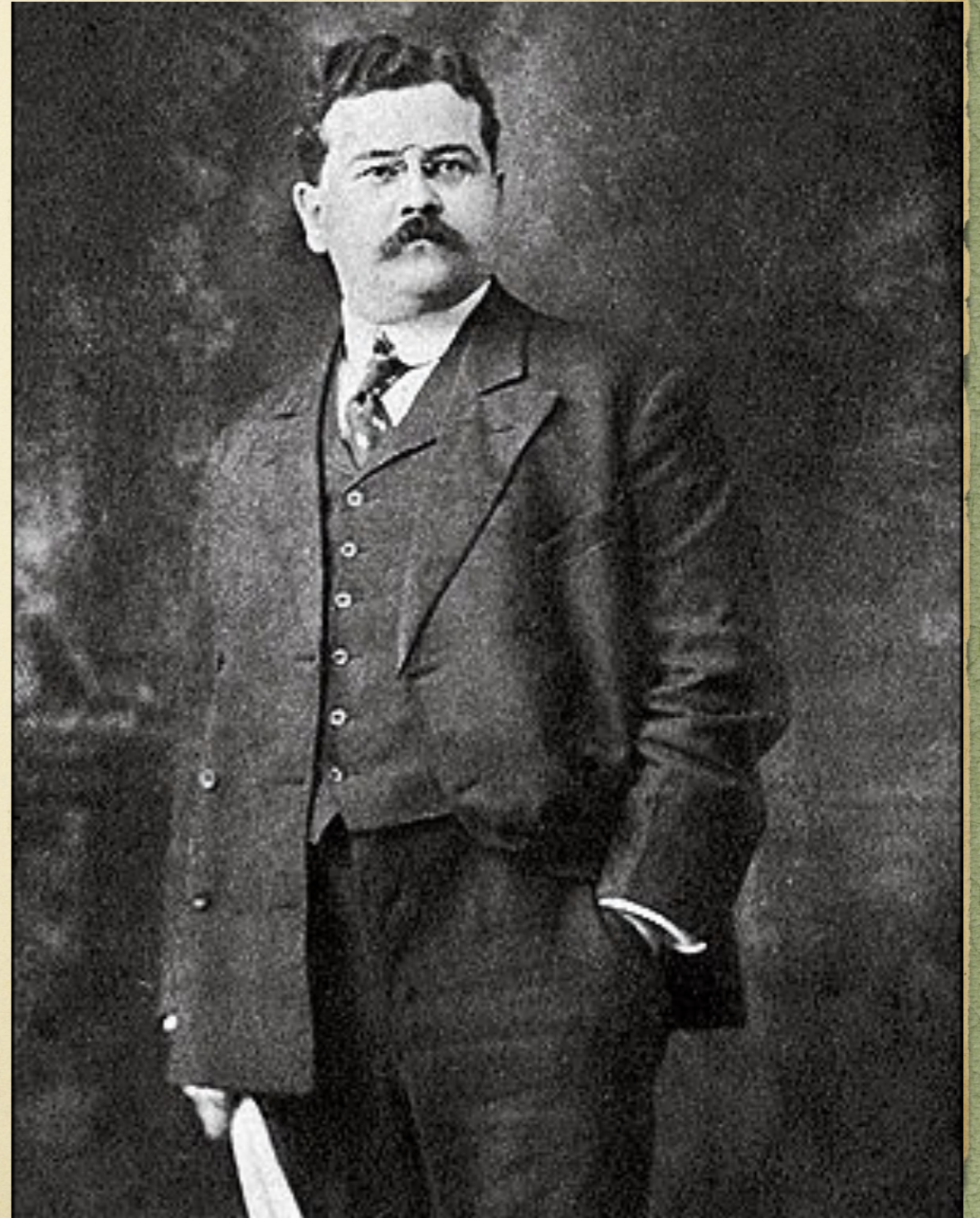
- Such phenomena *cannot* be mapped onto the cognitive grids of binomial oppositions

- mental/material

- real/unreal

- subjective/objective

- *[limitations of language/human]*



1874-1932

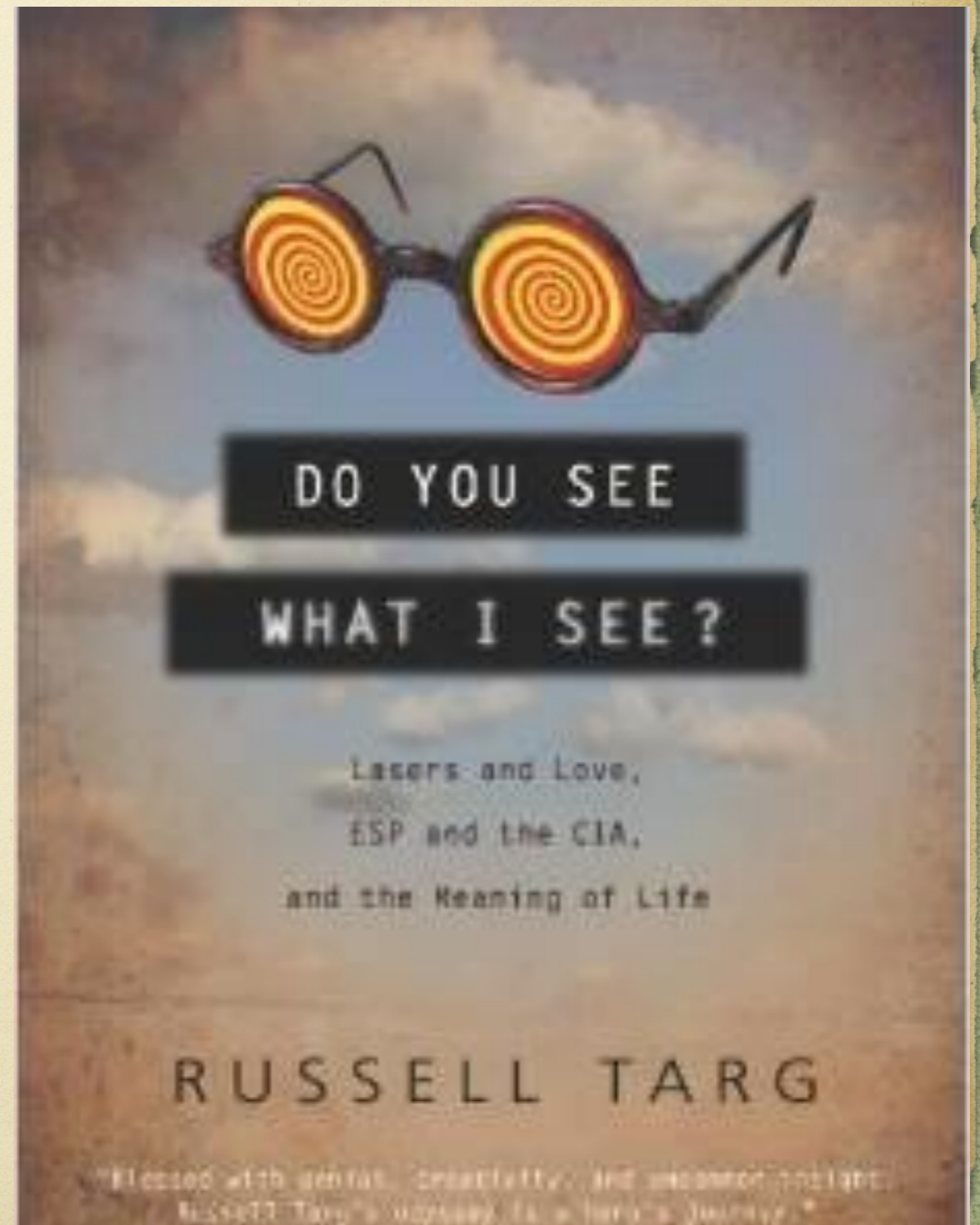
Russell Targ

1970s: Led psychical espionage program for U.S. government

Teenager: amateur mentalist, who faked psychical abilities on stage.

One day during a show, he realized that *real* telepathic information was coming through the stage trick.

Truth will sometimes only manifest itself as a trick (*not a bad definition of religion!*)



The Trick of the Truth

• Secular high school football teams praying the Lord's Prayer in the locker room.

• Praying to...win?...defeat other team?...protection?

• “Worked”: ritually united team, raised adrenaline levels (implied danger, scared/sacred).

• “Worked”: because remained ambiguous, never explained or rationally justified.

• Worked???: (*Both teams praying!*)

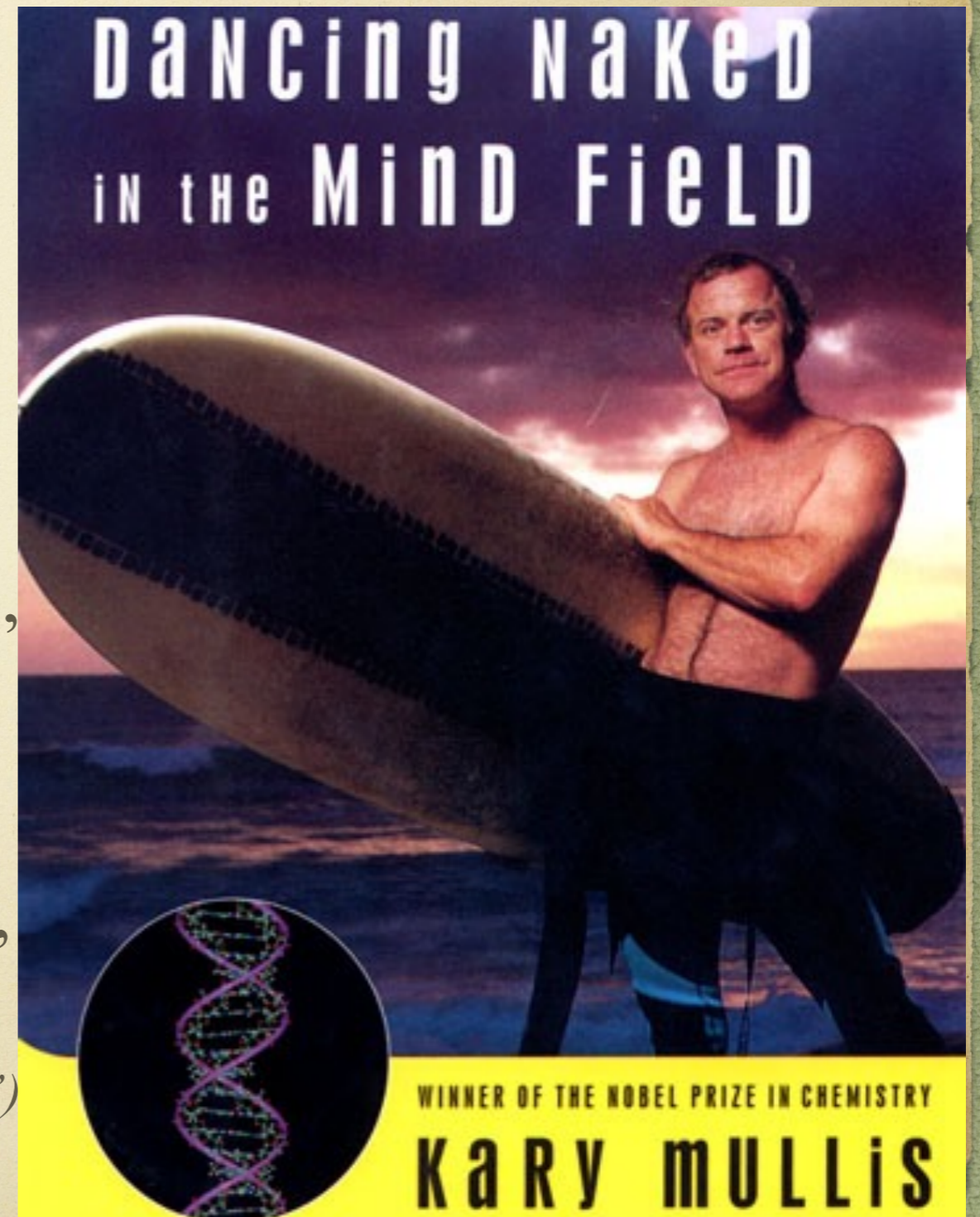


1993: Nobel Prize for inventing the polymerase chain reaction, making possible the Human Genome Project (*was on LSD intermittently*)

“To say it was aliens is to assume a lot. To say it was weird is to understate it...*extraordinarily weird.*”

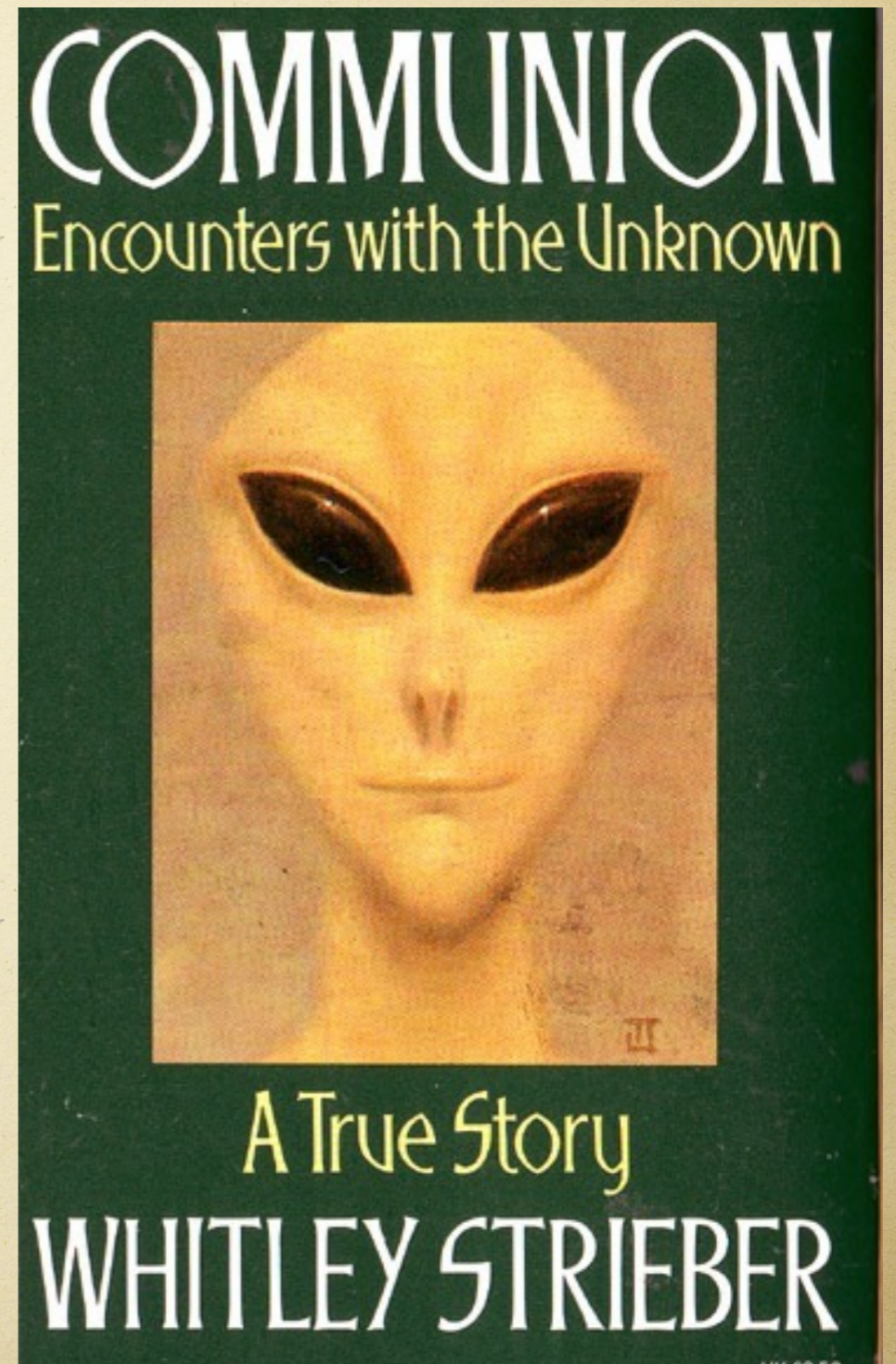
Can't do science with such a single anomalous experience, but “I don't deny what happened.... it happened.”

(Kripal, page 260ff, “The Glowing Raccoon”)



Supernatural Assault Traditions

- Received a quarter million letters from individuals all over the world
- recognized either the iconic “gray” on the cover
- or traces of their own spiritually traumatic experiences in his.

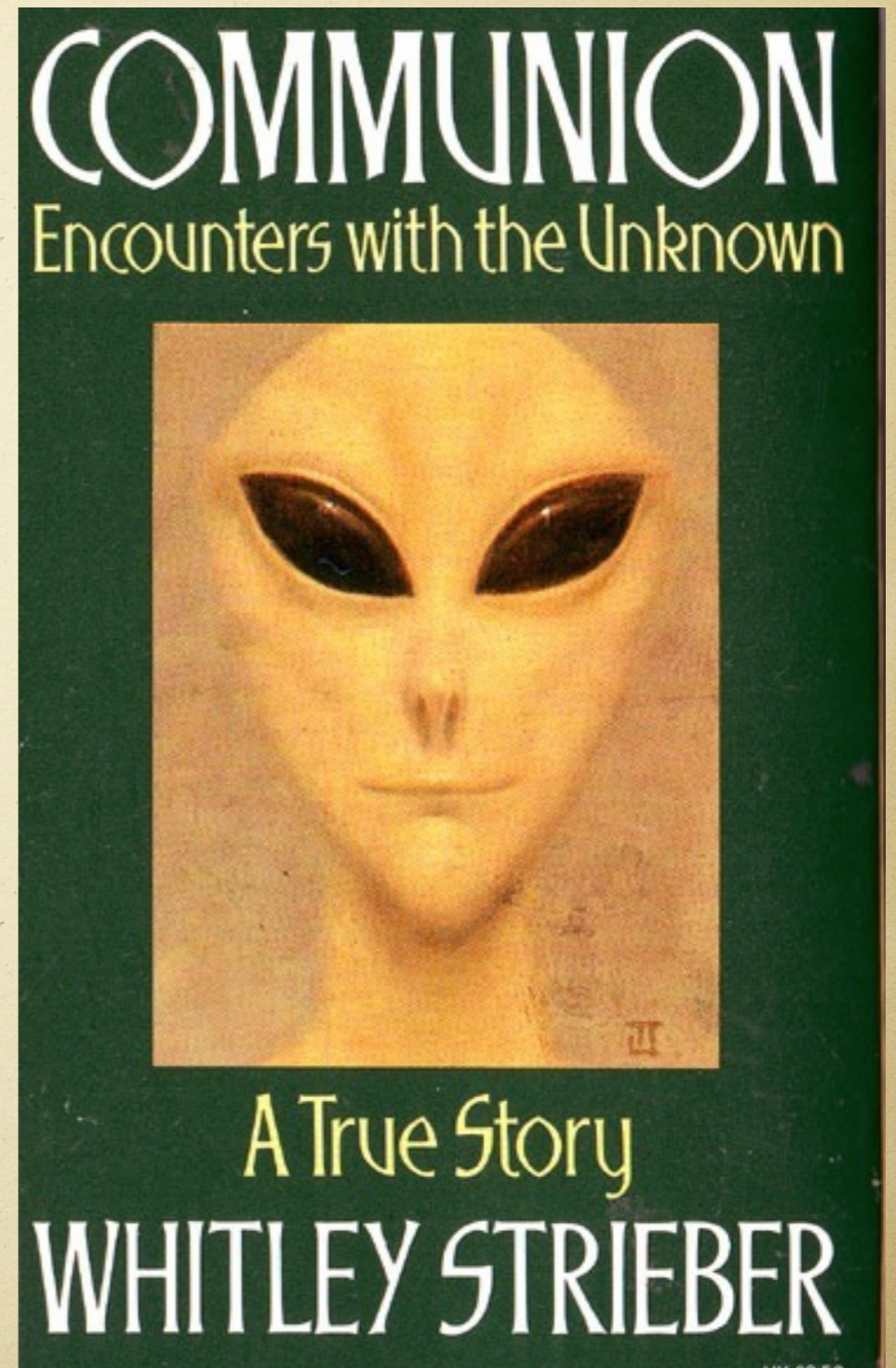


1987

Supernatural Assault Traditions

Kripal

- Right-brain: reads the emotional nuances of upper part of face (eyes).
- Left-brain: focuses on lower part (mouth).
- Thus, the classic alien face looks like an exaggerated version of what the right brain would put together if it were to imagine and process an anomalous encounter.



1987

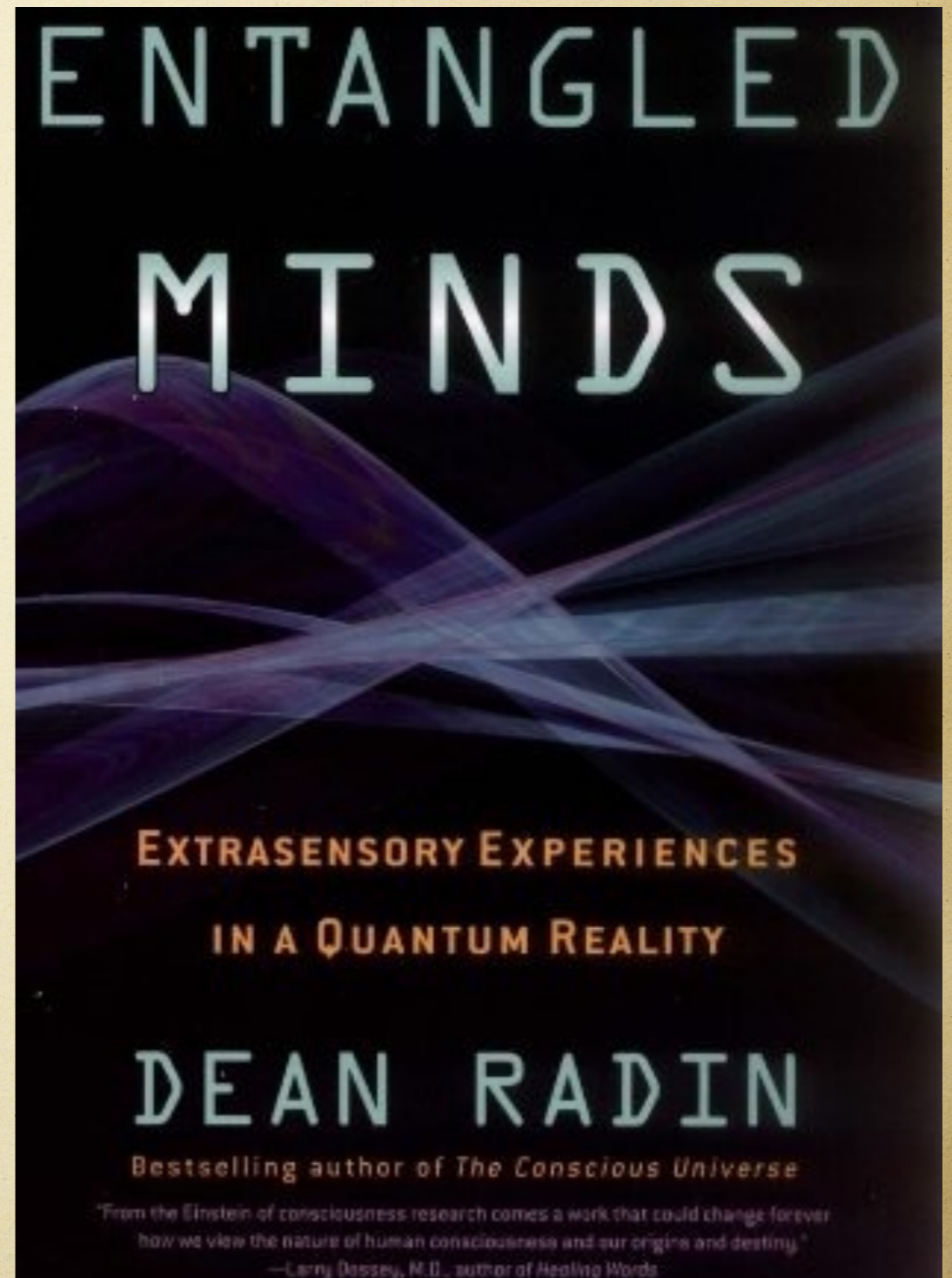
Comparative Toolkit

- Rational Offense of the In-between: paranormal is the “dirt/impurity” of the present orthodoxy of scientific materialism — commonly met with excessive/hysterical forms of rejection, shaming, and humiliation.
- Imaginal: paranormal commonly mediated by the imagination, but does *not* mean that they are all imaginary/unreal.
- Triggers for Paranormal: emotional bonds, trauma/danger, illness/death
- Trick of the Truth: relationship between fact/fraud not always simple — also true with “tricks” of myth/ritual/magic/religion.

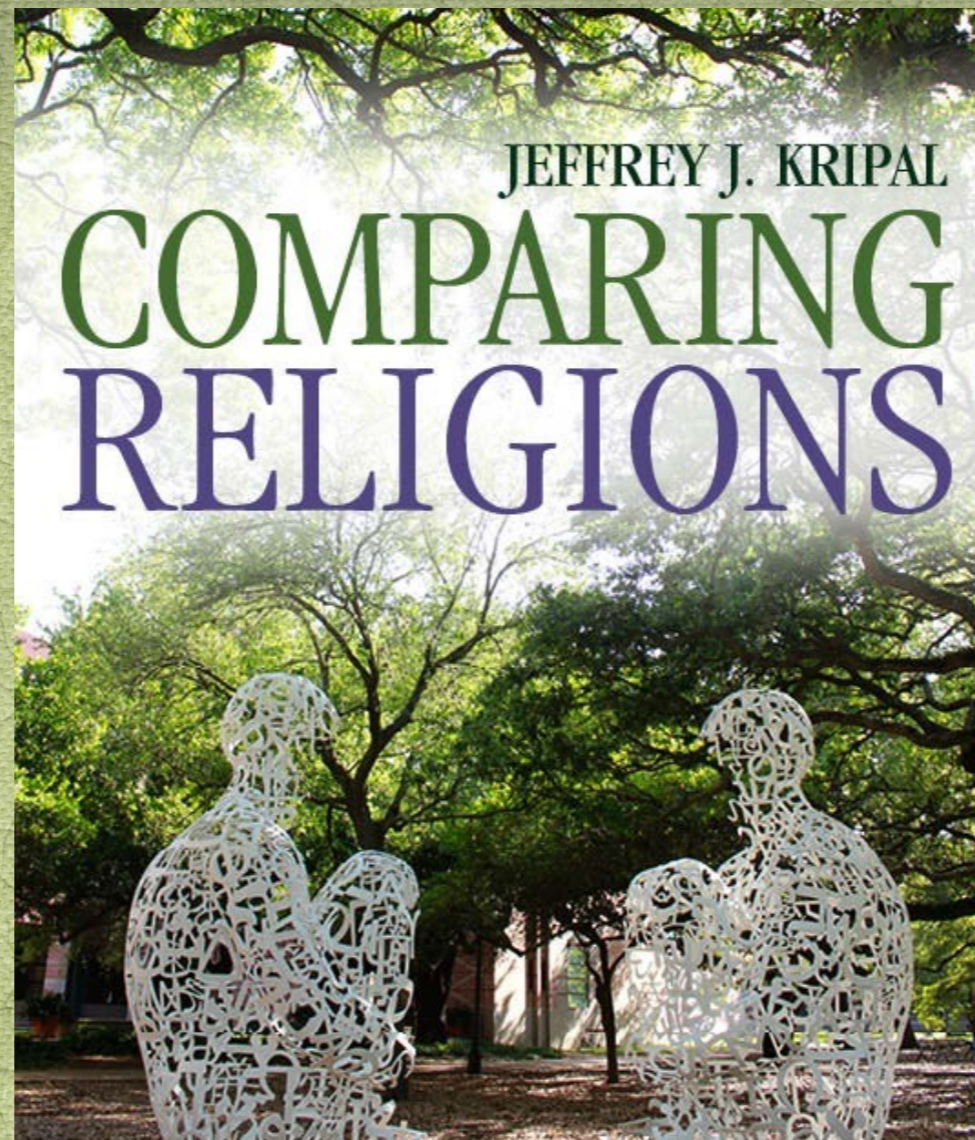
Kripal's Tough Questions

Read 2011 *New York Times* piece on Daryl Bem's scientific research on precognition:

“Top Journal Plans to Publish a Paper on ESP, and Psychologists Sense of Outrage”



2006



Chapter 9: Final Questions:
Soul, Salvation, and the End of All Things
The Human as Two

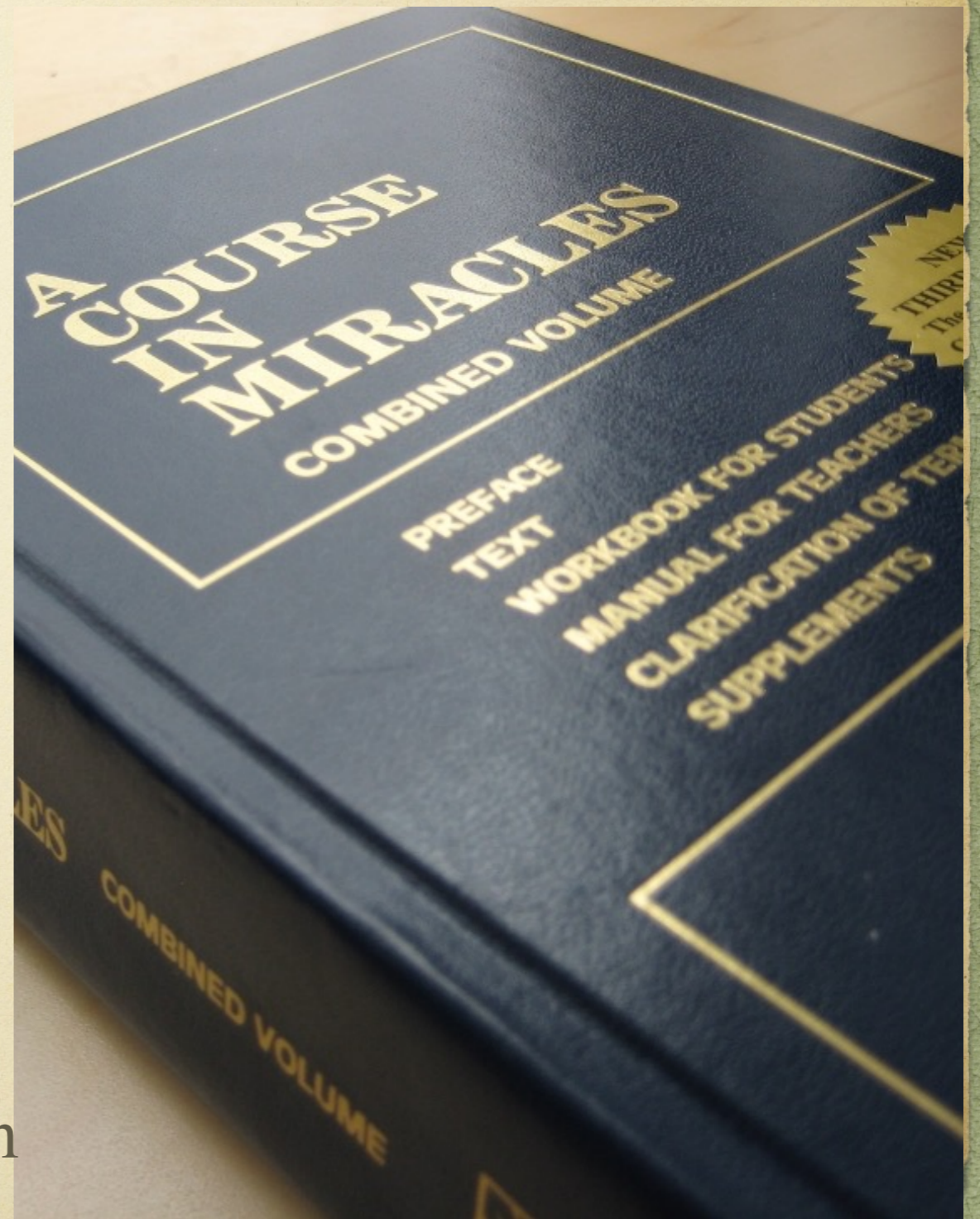
A Course in Miracles (1975)

• Channeled from 1965 to 1973 through Helen Shucman,

- reluctant NY, Jewish, atheistic psychologist,
- encouraged by her colleague Bill Thetford to accept and transcribe the material.

• Both were professors of medical psychology at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons.

• Edited by a third psychologist, Kenneth Wapnick. (All three were Ph.D.s)



A Course in Miracles (1975)

Origins

- felt overwhelmed by a series of highly symbolic dreams
- finally submitted to a kind of inner-directed source she came to call “the Voice.”
- When she did not give expression to “the Voice,” she would get sick or could not sleep.



A Course in Miracles (1975)

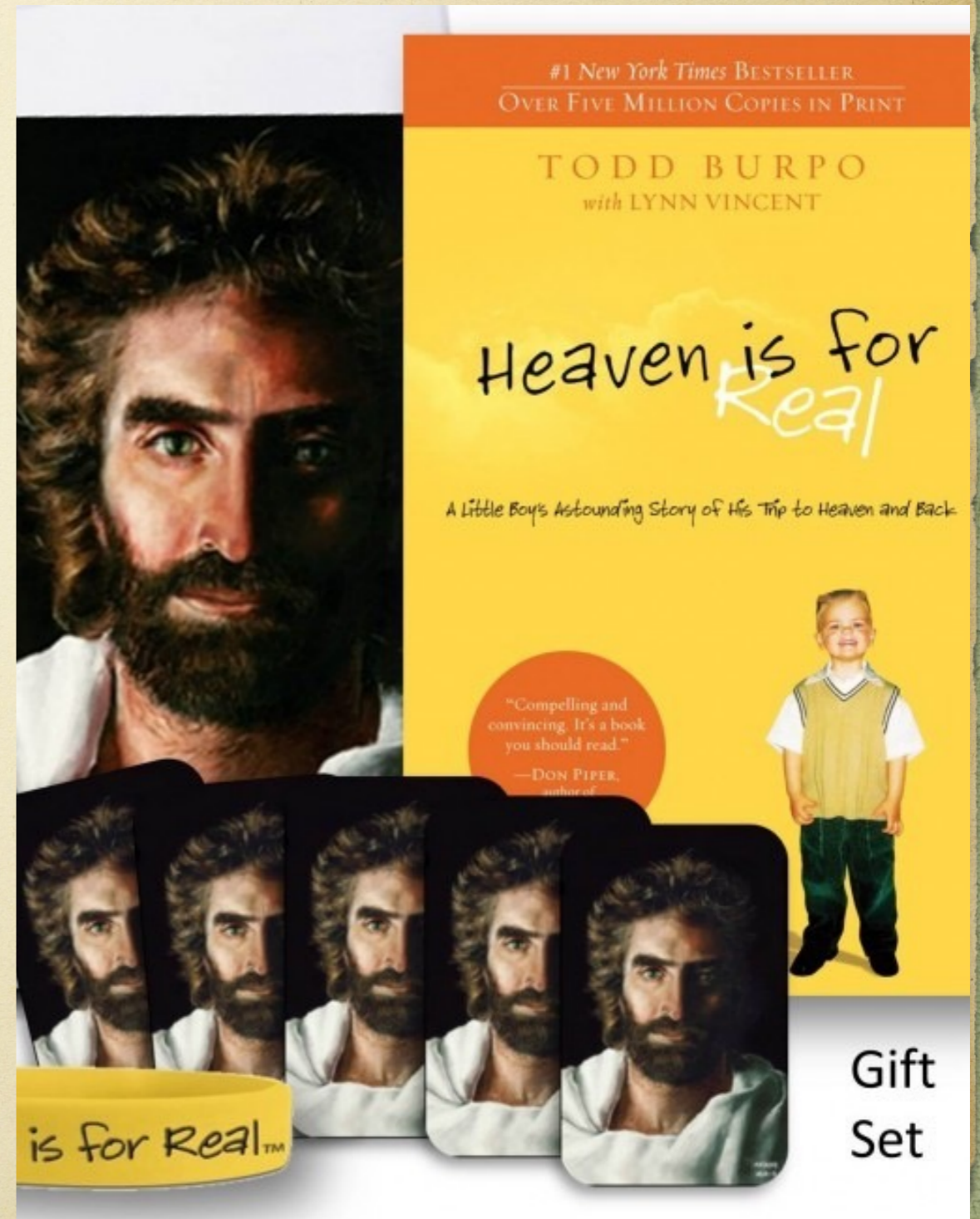
- Schuman: “I know the Course is true, but I don’t believe it.”
- Thetford: “I always thought that a Higher Authority must have goofed in selecting Helen and me for this assignment.”



Near Death Experiences

Do we have few records of “negative” or “hellish” NDEs because people are too afraid or embarrassed to report them?

Is religion, at base, a human response to death?



Definition of Religion

"Human response to the dual reality of being alive & having to die."

The CATHEDRAL of the WORLD

A UNIVERSALIST THEOLOGY



Forrest Church

Eschatology

- “Everything will be all right in the end...
- if it's not all right then it's not yet the end.”



Eschatology

- A monk asked a Zen master, “What happens when you die?”
- The Zen master replied, I don’t know.”
- The monk said, “What do you mean? Aren’t you a Zen master?”
- And the Zen Master replied, “Yes, but I’m not a dead one.”



Eschatology

- Christian Pacifism (*“With the grain of the universe”*)
- Most Christians do not act as if they only have eighty-five (or so) years on this earth, followed by either to heaven or hell.
- "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."
- Theodore Parker (1810-1860)



De-centering

- Copernicus
- Darwin
- Freud
- Einstein



Emily Saliers

“The end of my youth
was the possible truth
that it all happens
randomly.”

~“Philosophy of Loss,” *Come
on Now Social*



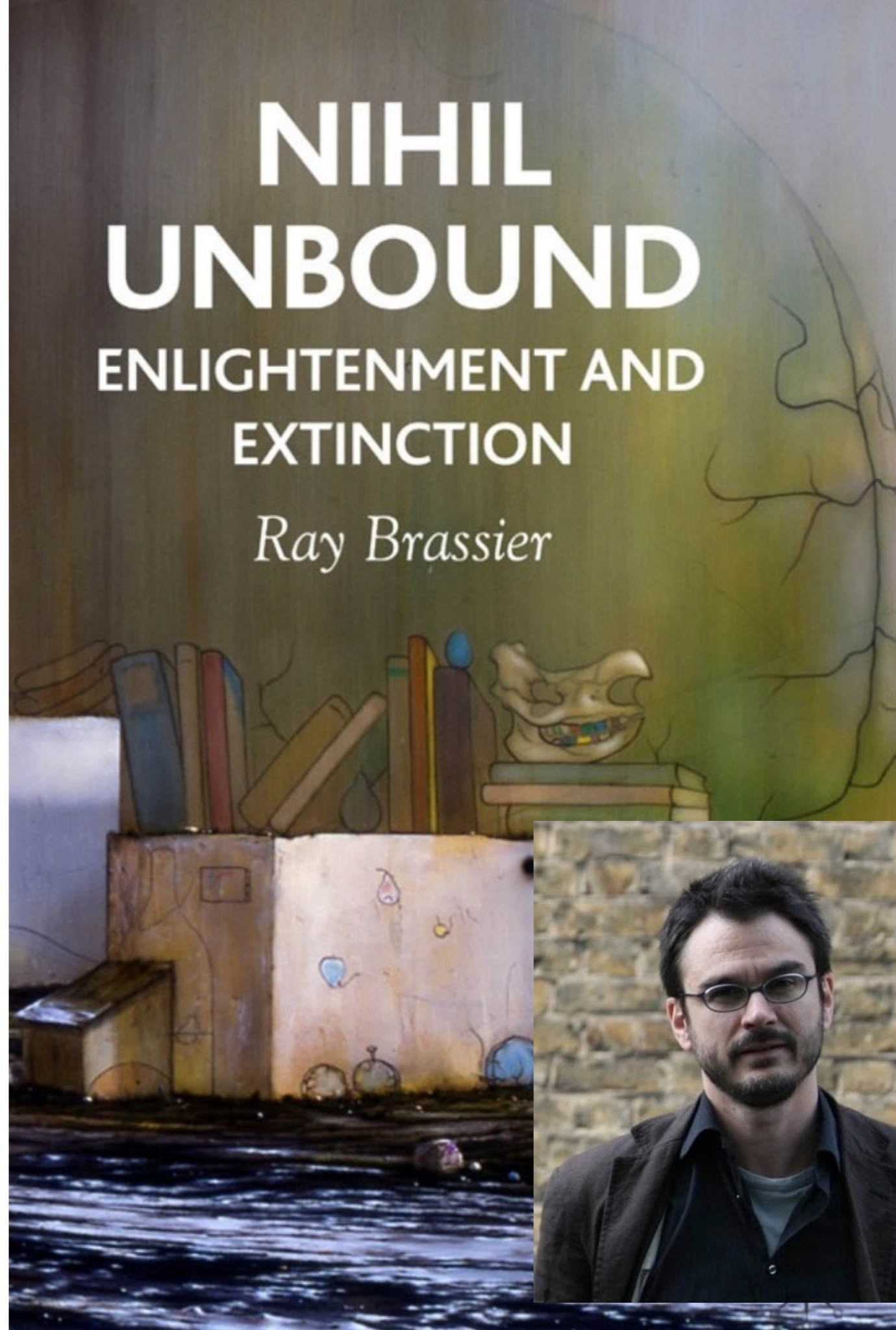
Love Wins?
Entropy Wins?

[O]ne trillion, trillion, trillion years from now, the accelerating expansion of the universe will have disintegrated the fabric of matter itself, terminating the possibility of embodiment. Every star in the universe will have burnt out, plunging the cosmos into a state of absolute darkness and leaving behind nothing but spent husks of collapsed matter. All free matter, whether on planetary surfaces or in interstellar space, will have decayed, eradicating any remnants of life....

NIHIL UNBOUND

ENLIGHTENMENT AND EXTINCTION

Ray Brassier



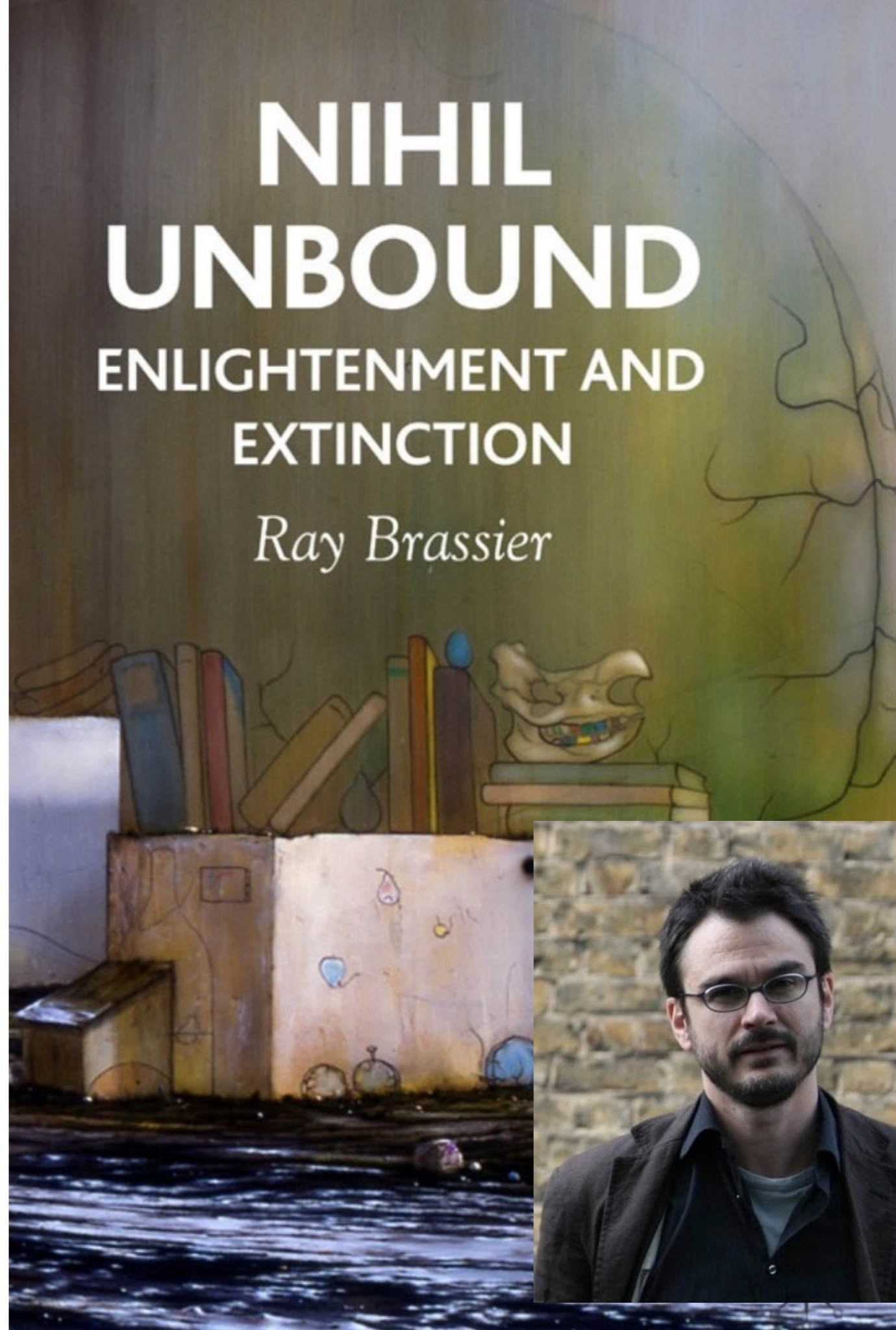
Love Wins?
Entropy Wins?

[T]he stellar corpses littering the empty universe will evaporate into a brief hailstorm of elementary particles. Atoms themselves will cease to exist. Only the implacable gravitational expansion will continue, driven by the currently inexplicable force called 'dark energy', which will keep pushing the extinguished universe deeper and deeper into an eternal and unfathomable blackness." (228)

NIHIL UNBOUND

ENLIGHTENMENT AND EXTINCTION

Ray Brassier



Sub Specie Aeternitatis

- (1937 -)
- University Professor of Philosophy and Law at New York University
- Atheist (not religious or ID)
- can't account for mind and consciousness; therefore, incomplete
- anti-reductionist (*teleological*)

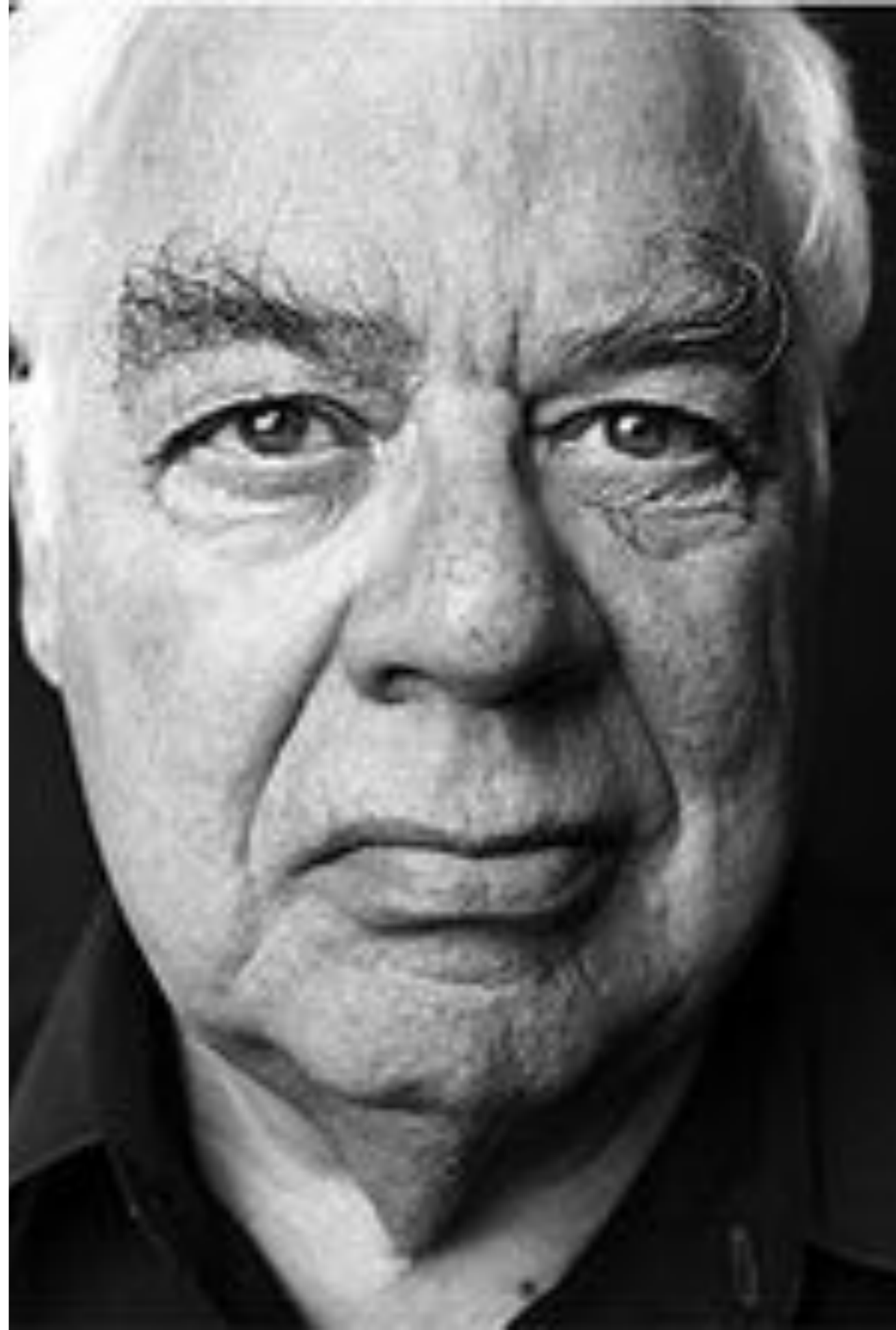


MIND &
COSMOS
WHY THE
MATERIALIST
NEO-DARWINIAN
CONCEPTION
OF NATURE
IS ALMOST
CERTAINLY
FALSE

THOMAS NAGEL

Richard Rorty

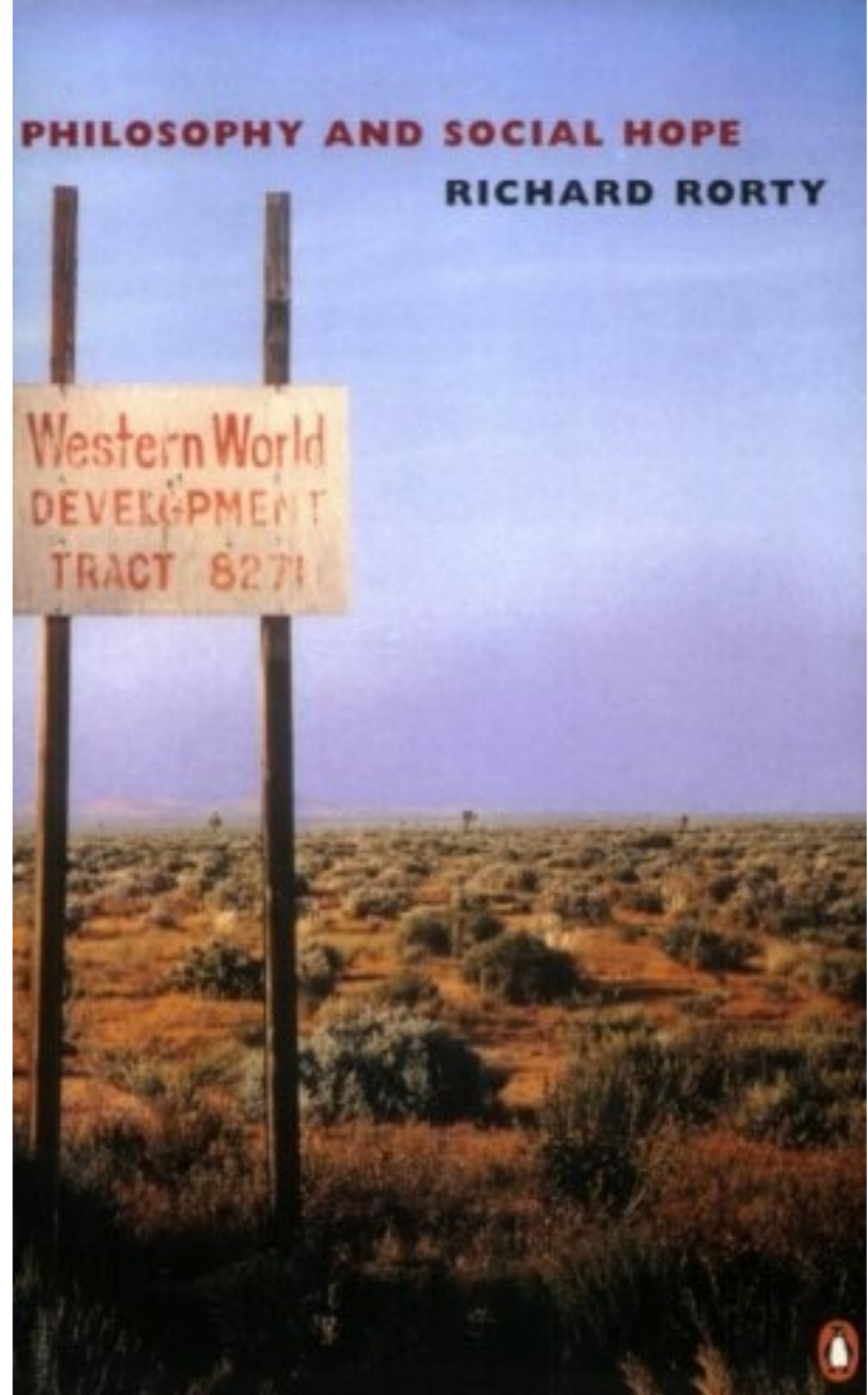
- “Nowadays, to say that we are **clever animals** is not to say something philosophical and pessimistic but something *political* and *hopeful* –
- namely, if we can work together, we can make ourselves into whatever we are clever and courageous enough to imagine ourselves becoming.
- This is to set aside Kant’s question ‘What is man?’ and to substitute the question ‘**What sort of world can we prepare for our great grandchildren?**’”




Richard Rorty

- “As it turned out, willingness to endure suffering for the sake of future reward was *transferable* from individual rewards to social ones, from one’s hopes for paradise to one’s hopes for one’s grandchildren.”

—*Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*





Do Klingons
have gods?

"Not any more. They were all slain
by Klingon warriors a millenium ago.

They were more trouble than they were worth."

Lieutenant Commander Worf

Emerson's definition of success

“To laugh often and much;

to win the respect of intelligent people and
the affection of children;

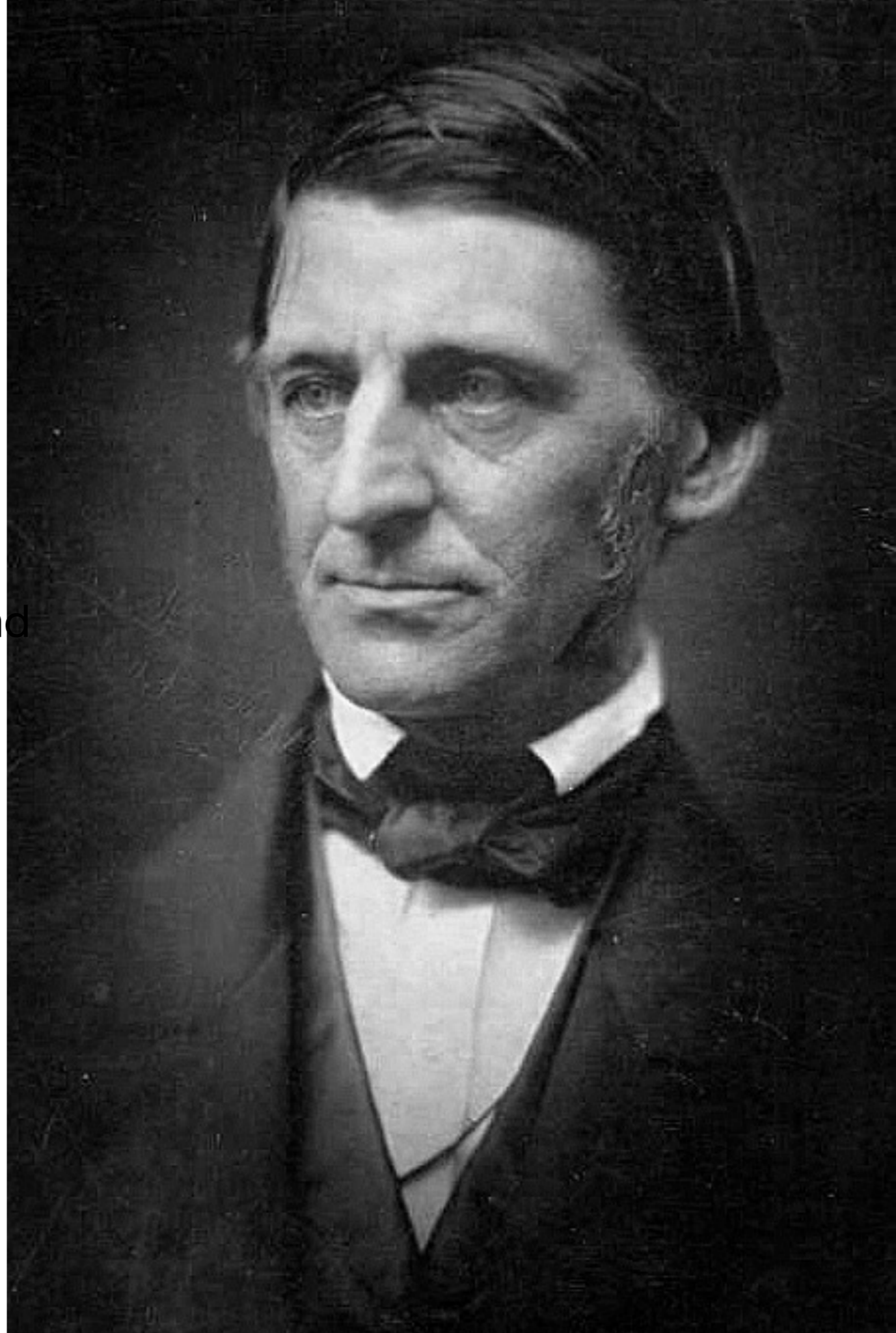
to earn the appreciation of honest critics and
endure the betrayal of false friends;

to appreciate beauty;

to find the best in others;

to leave the world a bit better, whether by a
happy child, a garden patch or a redeemed
social condition;

to know even one life has breathed easier
because you have lived.”



Victor Frankl's Sources for Meaning

- Experiential - love & beauty (*intrinsic worth*)
- Attitudinal - capacity to find meaning even in suffering/tragedy/death (*our response*)
- Creative - commitment to person/cause beyond oneself (*artistic or social*)



Kripal's Tough Questions

• What would happen to our religions if we understood religious doctrines as mediating “**symbols**” (*mediums of the paradoxical*)

• rather than as literal “dogmas,”

• that is, if we came to terms with the role of the *imagination* in religion?

• [Muslim mystic: “*The color of the water is that of the vessel which contains it.*”]

• [Jung: *pay attention to synchronicities during the day and dreams during the night.*]

Kripal's Tough Questions

- Is the **death experience** of a Hindu (who is taught reincarnation) *fundamentally different* from that of a Jew, Christian, or Muslim?
- Does your body “have a soul”? Or does your soul “have a body”? Or do you think of yourself as only a material body that somehow produces the illusion of spirit or soul? What difference do your answers to these questions make? [*If the witness of the history of religions means anything, there is more than one “you” in you. (“The Human as Two.”)*]
- How do some religious beliefs about the soul and “the end” encourage a lack of concern (and here impede effective responses) to issues like global climate change?

Firsthand Experiences

- Class 1: Part I: “Prehistory, Preparation, & Perspective” (chapters 1-2)
- Class 2: Part I: “Prehistory, Preparation, & Perspective” (chapters 2-3)
- Class 3: Part II: “Comparative Acts”: Chapter 6: “Sex and Bodies”;
- Class 4: Chapter 8: “Imagination and Paranormal”; Chapter 9: “Soul, Salvation, and the End”
 - (*Not covered*: Chapter 4: “Myth/Ritual”; Chapter 5: “Nature/Science”; Chapter 7: “Charisma and Power”)
- Class 5: Part III: Putting It All Together Again:
Chapter 10, “*Faithful* Re-readings: Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism, and Justice.”
Chapter 11, “*Rational* Re-readings: Masters of Suspicion, Classical and Contemporary”
- Class 6: Part III: Putting It All Together Again: Chapter 12:
“*Reflexive* Re-readings: Looking at the Looker”

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