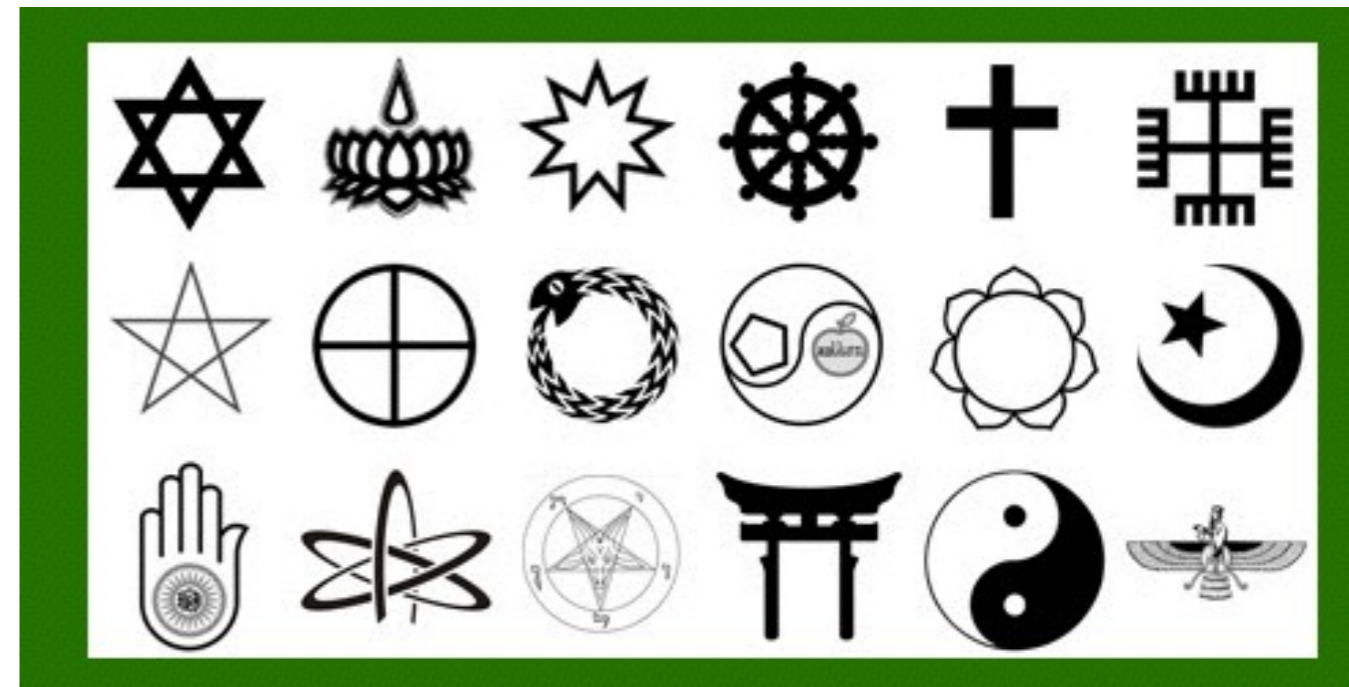


Building Your Own Theology

Tuesdays, 9:30am – 11:00am

1. **“Liberal Turn in Theology”**
2. **“Autobiography as Theology”**
3. **“Varieties of Religious Experience”**
“Human Nature” (theological anthropology)
4. **“God/Goddess/goddesses/gods/Spirit of Life/Ultimate Reality/Sacred/Divine/reality”**
“Ethics”
5. October 11
“Future”
“So What?”
6. October 18:
“Credo: This I Believe” (500 words)
In(conclusion)



frederickuu.org/fcc

Covenant

- 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.”**



-
- David Wilcox, “Get It Out of the Way” from *Live Songs and Stories*
 - [youtube.com/watch?v=awhWNnTZ4jo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awhWNnTZ4jo)



“So many things would go better by **starting with the ending.**

If you did live your life the other direction — start with the ending — you know, you’d **die first get it out of the way,**

but then you’d be able to **enjoy your retirement while you’re young** — plenty of money, travel, whatever you love.

After a while you’d get **bored with that and you’d want to be useful.**

You want to give something back, so then it’s probably time to go to work.

And that **first day of work it’s great, you get a gold watch. They show you to your corner office** and you’re thinking, man, this is cool, the money’s even better than the retirement benefits were. You can do this for a while. And you do.

But then, you’re **feeling like you want to be more with the people, you want a service-oriented type of job,** so then it’s probably time to start searching. You switch jobs and eventually you find your **true calling at the pinnacle of your career working at a summer camp.** And it’s good.

But see now you're **ready to give up on work because money's not that important to you anymore. You're older and wiser now and it's probably time to go to college.** You get your money's worth going to college now. You got some wisdom you know, so you go to college, probably **take enough drugs so that you're ready for high school.**

Well as you go through your education, you find yourself learning simpler and simpler things 'til with that Zen-like simplicity you're learning language itself. Then you **realize anything really worth saying kind of slips past language**, so you quit talking. Not a big deal, you don't have lot to say.

You're taking yourself a lot lighter. You are a lot lighter. But when you decide this whole incarnation is just too much of a burden, you decide to **go out as a glimmer in someone's eye.**

You see, it's a life well-lived 'cause you start with the ending. You die first, get it out of the way.

So there's no pretending. The truth is safe to say. Start with the ending, get it out of the way.

So there's no defending. No one has to win. Start with the ending, it's the best way to begin.

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 an *eternity* in heaven or hell.



Eschatology

"I do not pretend to understand the moral universe;

the arc is a long one,

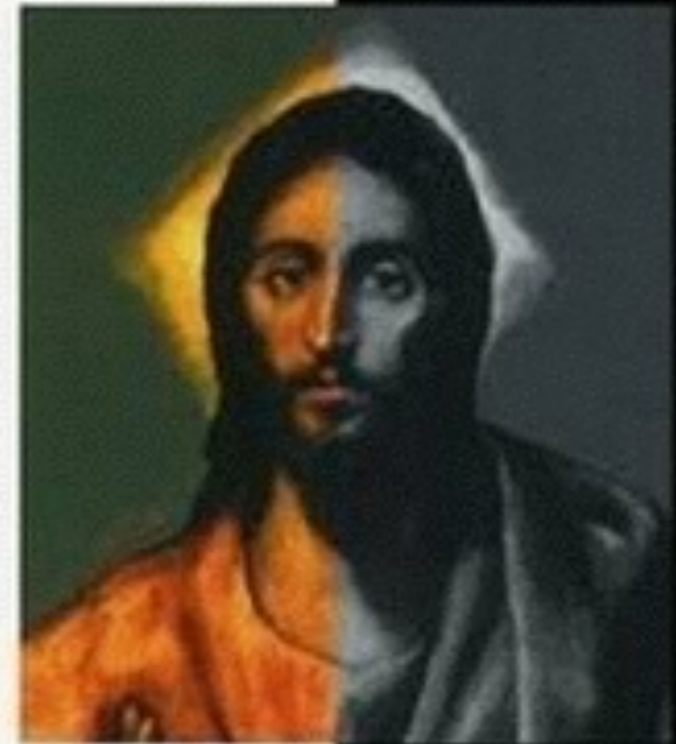
my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight;

I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."

- Theodore Parker (1810-1860)

The Apocalyptic Jesus

A Debate



Dale C. Allison
Marcus J. Borg
John Dominic Crossan
Stephen J. Patterson

Robert J. Miller editor

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.”



Emily Saliers

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

“Philosophy of Loss,”
Come on Now Social



(1965 -)

[O]ne **trillion, trillion, trillion years** from now,

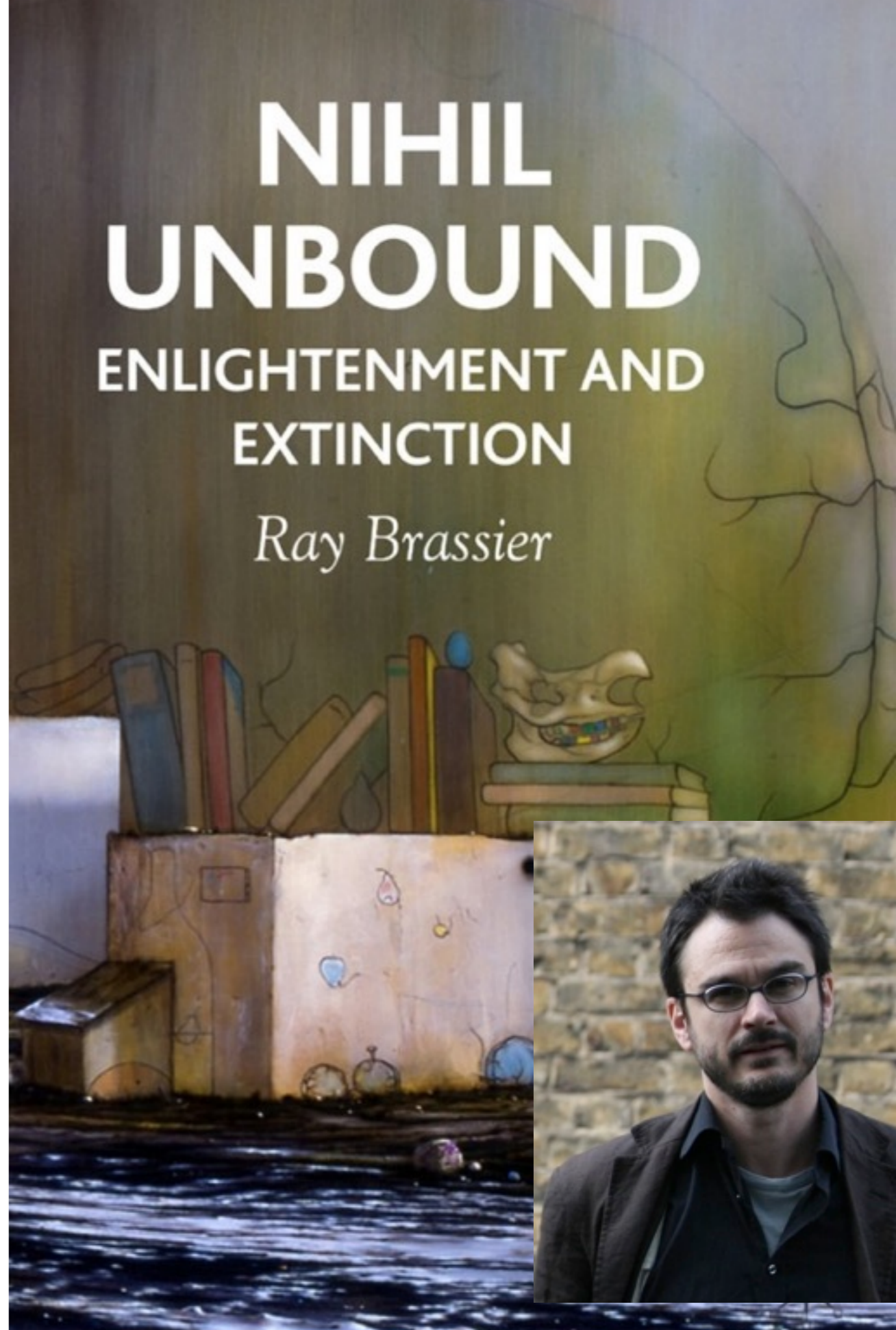
the accelerating expansion of the universe will have disintegrated the fabric of matter itself, terminating the possibility of embodiment. **Every star in the universe will have burnt out,**

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



(1965 -)

[T]he stellar corpses littering the empty universe will evaporate into a brief hailstorm of elementary particles.

Atoms themselves will cease to exist.

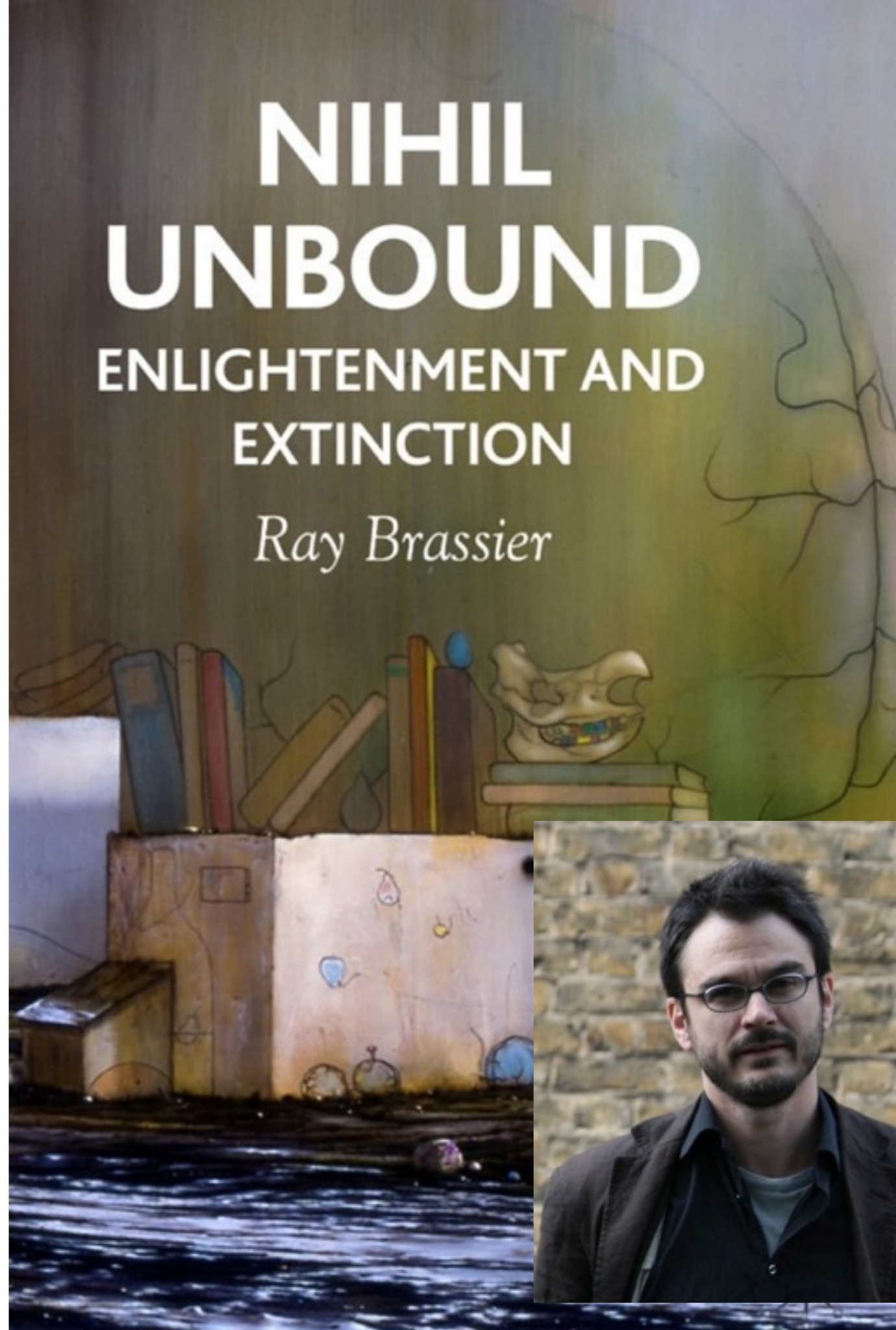
Only the implacable gravitational expansion will continue, driven by the currently inexplicable force called 'dark energy', which will keep pushing the extinguished universe deeper and deeper

into an eternal and unfathomable blackness." (228)

NIHIL UNBOUND

ENLIGHTENMENT AND EXTINCTION

Ray Brassier



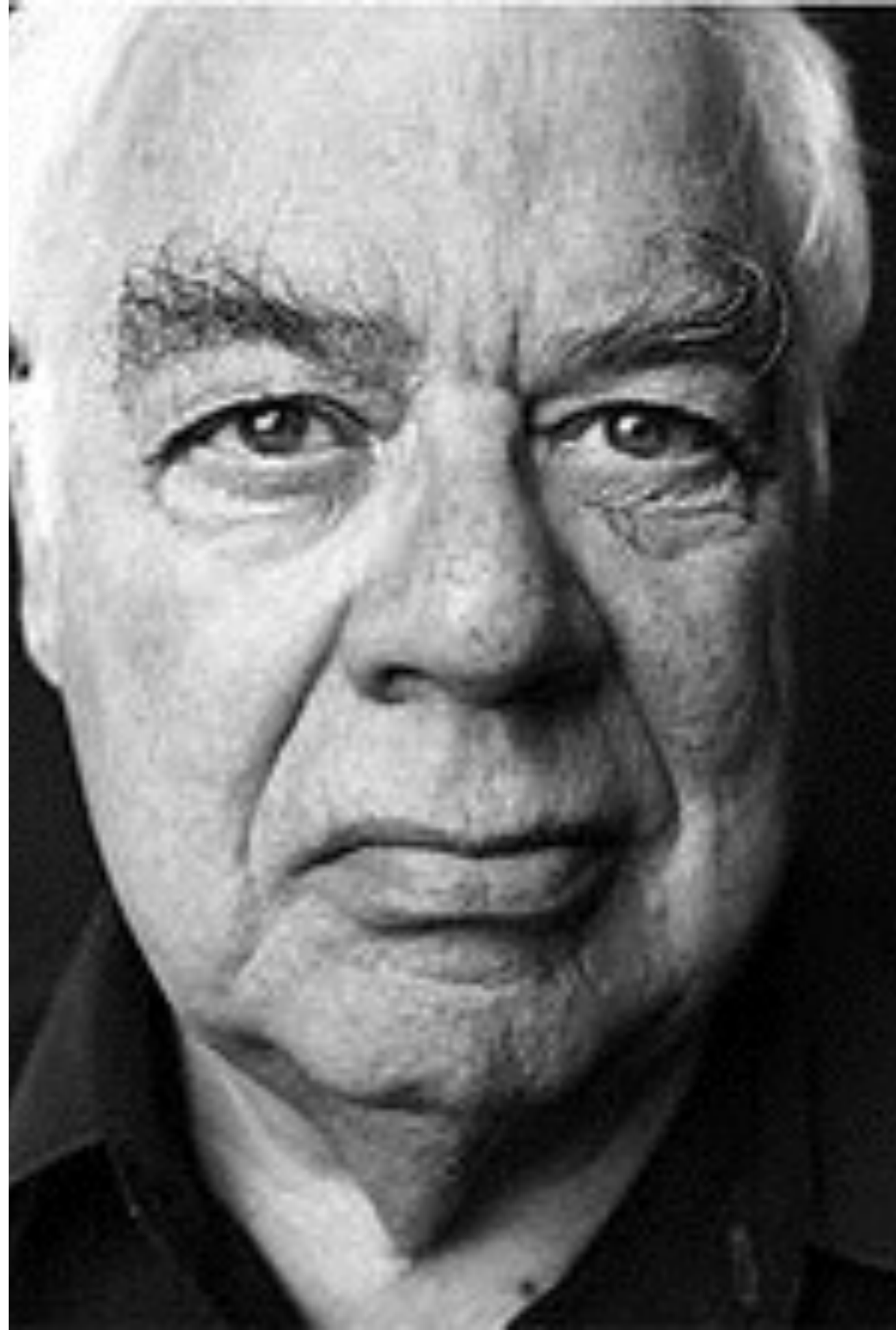
Richard Rorty

“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

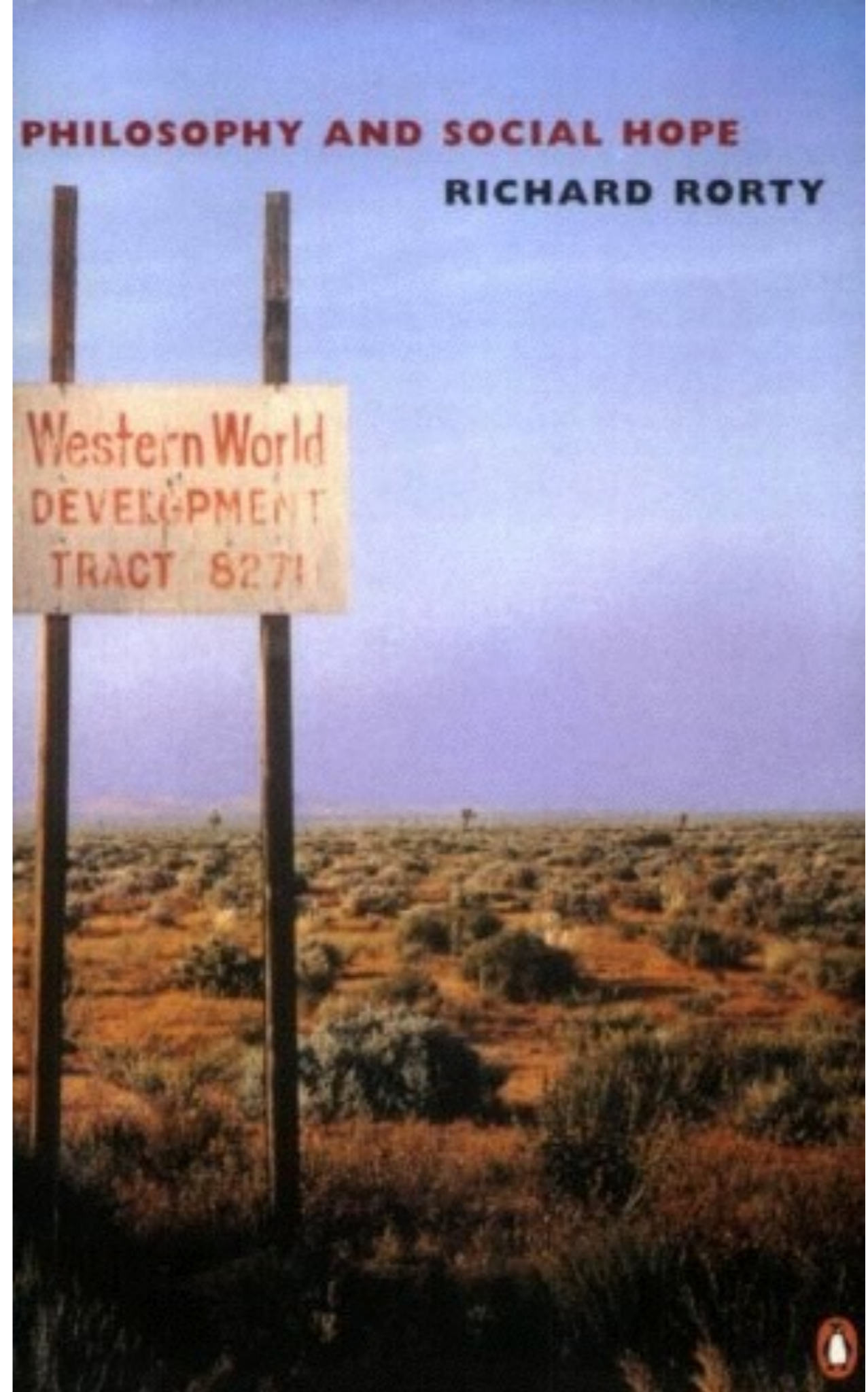
“As it turned out, **willingness to endure suffering for the sake of future reward**

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*





So What?!

What is the **purpose** of life?
What are your sources of **meaning**?

Emerson's definition of success

“To laugh often and much;

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

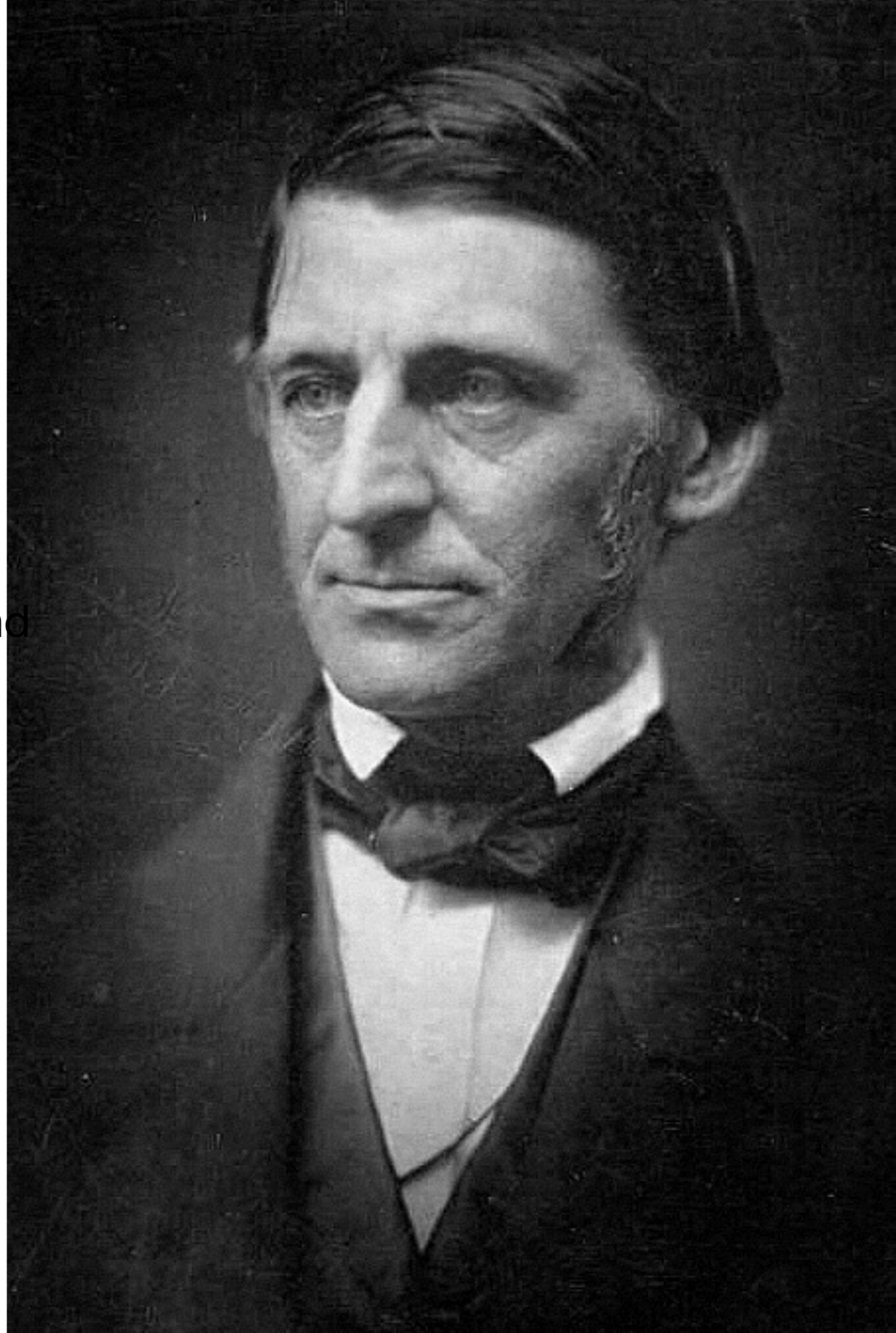
to earn the appreciation of honest critics and
endure the betrayal of false friends;

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;

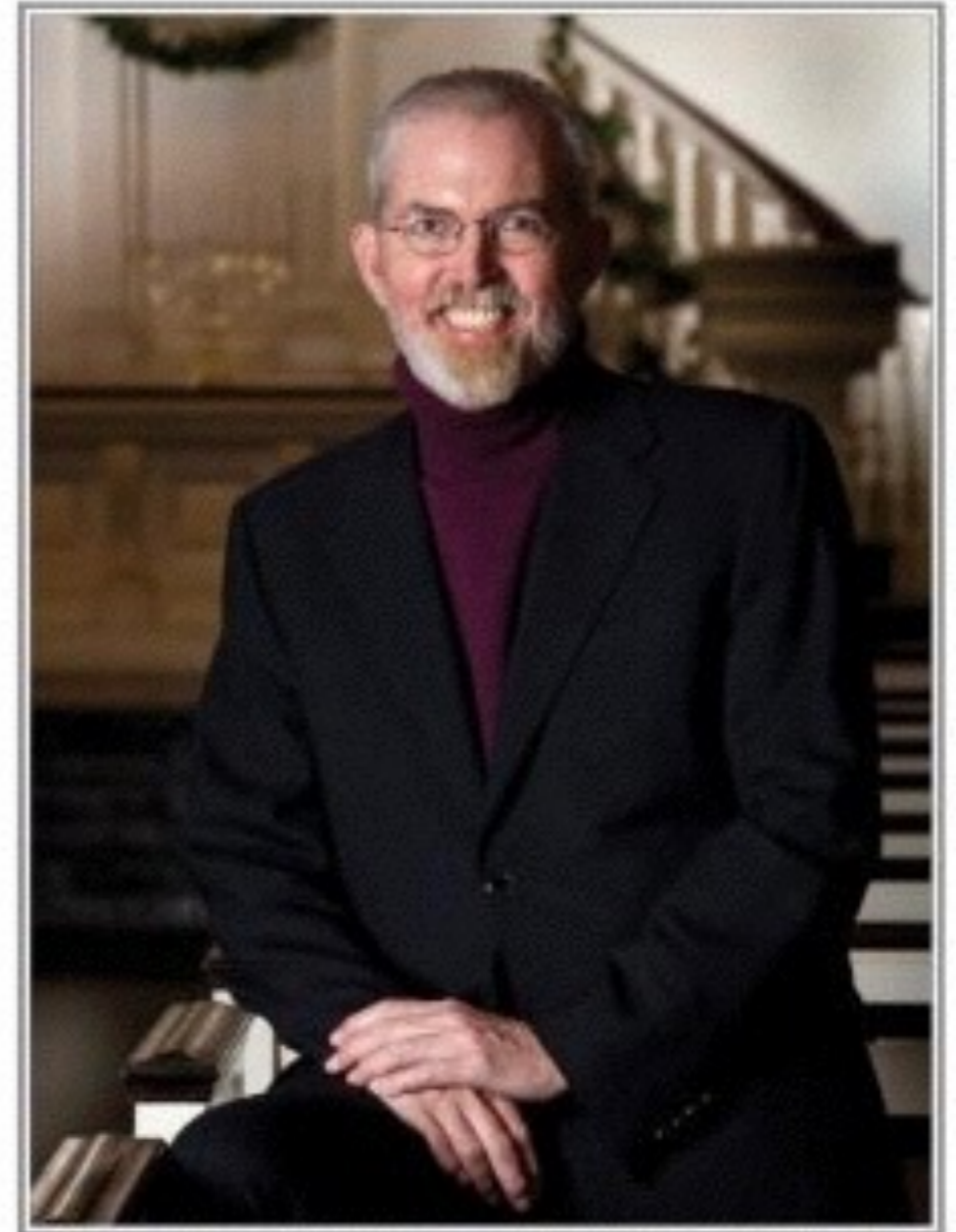
to know even one life has breathed easier
because you have lived.”



"Religion is our human response to the dual reality of being alive and having to die."

The CATHEDRAL of the WORLD

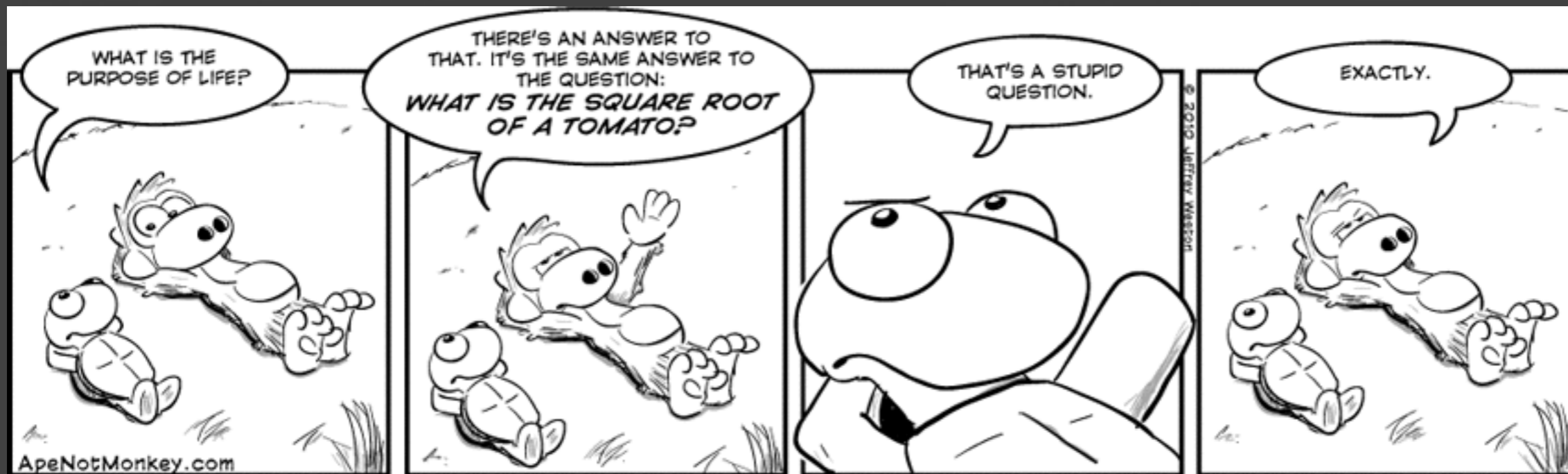
A UNIVERSALIST THEOLOGY



Forrest Church



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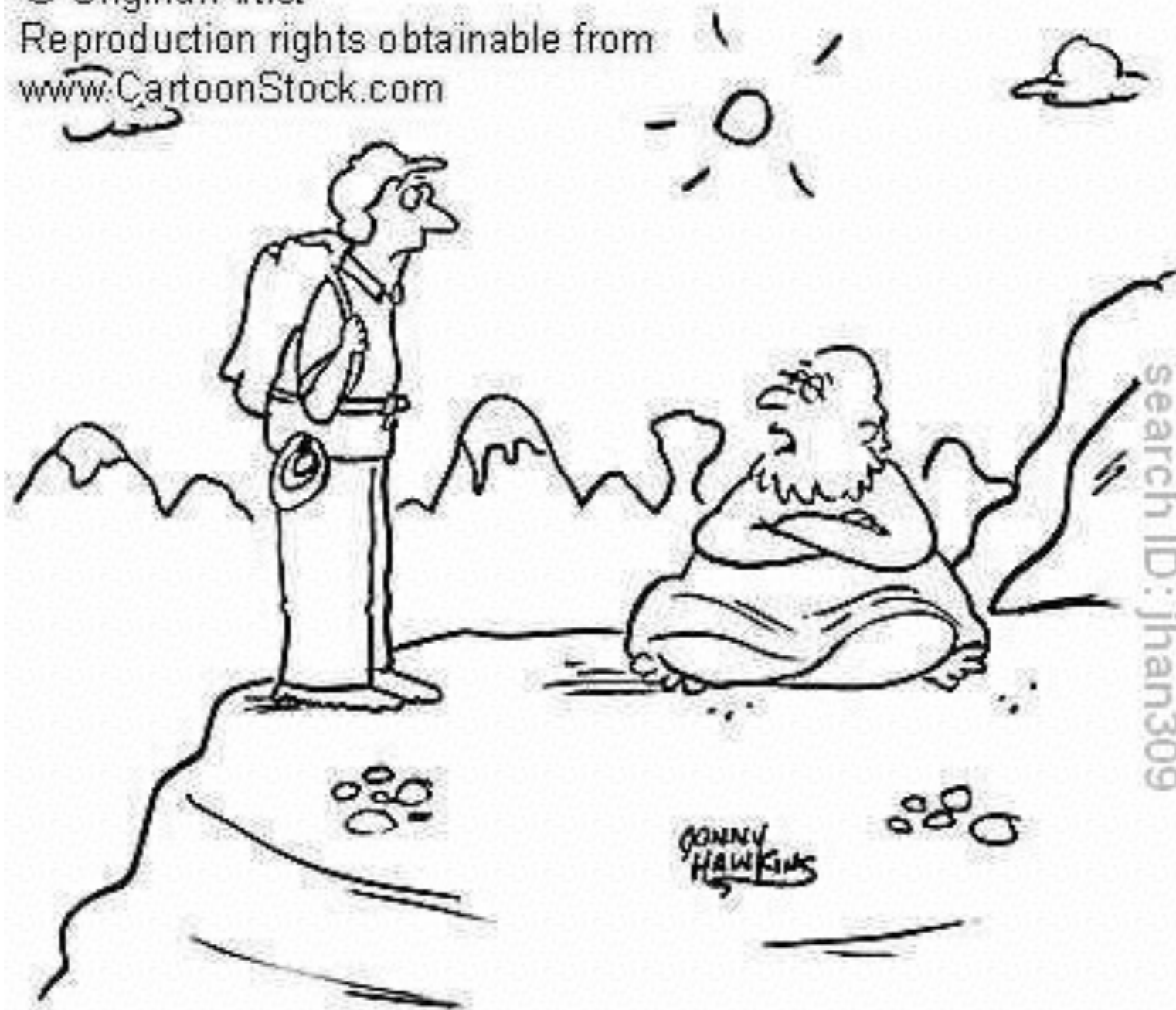
WHAT IS MY PURPOSE?

the purpose of life
is to live it,
to taste experience
to the utmost,
to reach out eagerly
and without fear
for newer and
richer experience.

(eleanor roosevelt)



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**“You’d better have a seat – people tend to fall
down the mountain when I tell them the
meaning of life.”**

Find
your
Gift

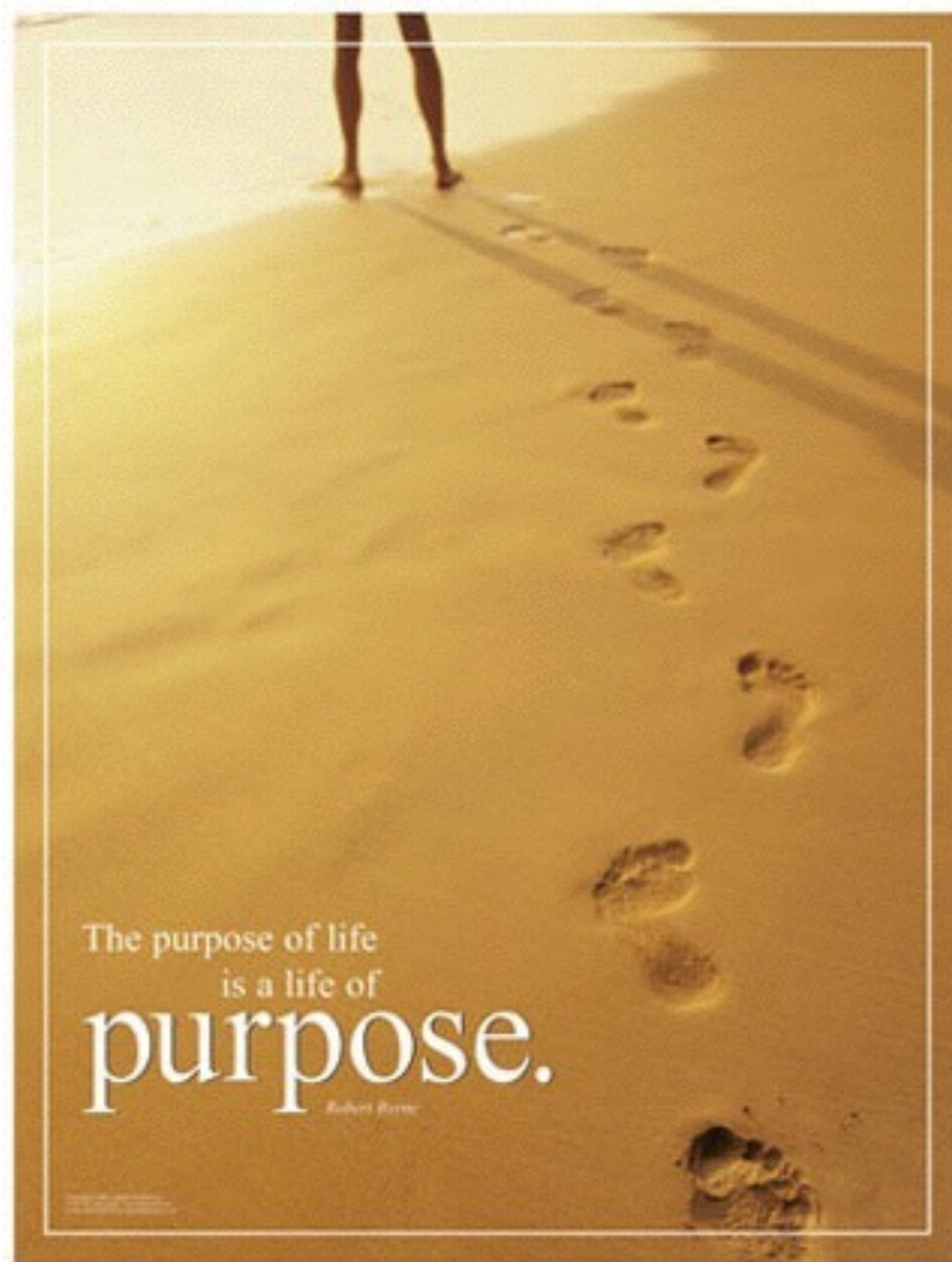
Share
your
Gift

The purpose
of LIFE

**WHAT IS THE
MEANING
OF LIFE?**

**WHATEVER YOU
WANT IT TO BE.**

(JAMES FREY)



The purpose of life
is a life of
purpose.
Robert Byrne

|

Purpose in Life Test

- What are the **central meaning(s)** for your life?
- Do your life's meanings come in a **philosophical framework** or in the **mundane details** of the ordinary life?
- How do they relate to **Victor Frankl's three sources of 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)



Eschatology/Meaning/Purpose

[youtube.com/watch?v=zRBI0GPBm4o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRBI0GPBm4o)
(2 min)



Earth-like Planets Dot the Galaxy

- As many as **40 billion habitable Earth-size planets** in the galaxy (*new analysis of data from NASA's Kepler spacecraft.*)
- 1-in-5 sunlike stars in the galaxy has a planet the size of Earth circling it in the **Goldilocks zone** — not too hot, not too cold — where surface temperatures should be compatible with liquid water,
- “Earth 2.0” might be only 12 light-years away.
- “Such a star would be visible to the naked eye,”
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pffF4S-2BCw>



- The **fraction of stars with Earth-like planets is 22%**, plus or minus 8%, depending on exactly how you define the habitable zone.
- Although these planets are Earth-size, **nobody knows what their masses are** and thus whether they are rocky like the Earth, or balls of ice or gas, let alone whether anything can, or does — or ever will — live on them.
- “I would say that **small planets are everywhere and very common,**” she said, “no matter how you slice and dice the data. But Kepler is dead and we have no way to get any further data. So we’ll have to be satisfied with this as the final word, for now.”

"You Are Theist,
I Am Humanist"

[youtube.com/watch?v=YMqgy7_S55s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMqgy7_S55s)
(4 min)



*sung by J.T. Bakes & Max Gibson;
by Meg and Scott Bassinson of Albany, NY*

You are theist / I am humanist / I think that you're **naive**
You have **no proof** to offer as truth, You simply say "I believe"
New age bubbles get you in trouble / Lost in a feel-good fluff
True understanding is quite demanding
Praying is not enough.

Totally unprepared are you to make a case that's plain
Maybe the incense, chants, and drums
have ruined your poor brain.

You need someone older and wiser telling you what to do,
You are theist, I am humanist **I will think for you!**

I am theist, you are humanist / **You're locked inside your head.**
You're existential, self-referential, claiming that God is dead,
Occam's razor, Pascal's wager, soul-less tautology
Wisdom, traditions, not erudition make much more sense to me.

Totally unprepared are you to let go of your mind.

How 'bout a leap of faith, my friend

You might like what you find.

When you find that you're out of answers,

you won't know what to do

I am theist, you are humanist, **I will *pray* for you.**

We cannot agree on anything

Each has a point of view,

I am theist, I am humanist

That's why we're UU.

Tweets

- “I do not believe in the existence of God but in God’s *insistence*.... God *insists*, while we exist.” #WeaknessOfGod
- ”I am trying to open thinking & practice to the **event that is playing itself out under the name of God.**”
- “Risk w/o safety net; call w/o identifiable source, clear command or guaranteed response; insistence w/o existence” #ReligionWithoutReligion
- ”You get the atheism you deserve, depending on the theism you are serving up.” #Projection/#Projectile



- “Can’t you say everything you want to say by talking about ‘**Being**’ & ‘**finitude**,’ and never bringing up religion? I could.”
- “**Hegel** is the grandfather and **Tillich** the father of radical theology & of the new species of theologians for which I am calling.”
- “In **theopoetics**, everything turns on *rejecting* supernaturalism.... Demythologized & re-poeticized in a poetics of the John Caputo event.”
- “**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.**”

- “*If* God is taken to be an entity, the right religious and theological reply is atheism.”
- “Dogmatic atheistic metaphysics have a **tin ear for religion**...like computer geeks trying to understand poetry.”
- “The **treatment is over when patient accepts the *nonexistence* of the big Other**. Holy Spirit is the community w/o the big Other” #Lacan/#Žižek
- “**The secret is, there is no Secret**, no big Other who has the Secret.” #Derrida/#Deconstruction (A/theology)

- “The call is not work of a Prime Caller, but ‘**get itself called**’ in the middle voice...like Žižek’s auto-formative collective.”
- “In Greek, the middle voice signifies a **reflexive action** that *begins and ends with the subject*: ‘I give myself time to deliberate.’”
- “I strike a position **b/w** supernaturalism, which annuls human activity, & pure anthropologism, which makes everything human doing.”
- “Milbank: in the beginning was the Word & everything will be fine. Žižek: in the beginning was the Void & nothing will be fine.”



Tweets

- “Only things that can be valued are mortal/finite/temporal...**impermanence is the condition under which we hold them dear**” #NihilismOfGrace
- “My entire idea is to reclaim religion as an event of this world...religion for the world & the world for religion.”
#MundaneGrace



Carrie Newcomer

- “Holy As the Day Is Spent”

(So What?)

[youtube.com/watch?v=2qZyoRiBtel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qZyoRiBtel)



Holy is the dish and drain

The soap and sink, and the cup and plate

And the warm wool socks, and the cold white tile

Shower heads and good dry towels

And frying eggs sound like psalms

With bits of salt measured in my palm

It's all a part of a sacrament

As holy as a day is spent

Holy is the busy street

And cars that boom with passion's beat

And the check out girl, counting change

And the hands that shook my hands today

And *hymns of geese* fly overhead

And spread their wings like their parents did

Blessed be the dog that runs in her sleep

To chase some wild and elusive thing

Holy is the familiar room

And quiet moments in the afternoon

And folding sheets like folding hands

To pray as only laundry can

I'm letting go of all my fear
Like autumn leaves made of earth and air
For the summer came and the summer went
As holy as a day is spent

Holy is the place I stand
To give whatever small good I can
And the empty page, and the open book
Redemption everywhere I look

Unknowingly we slow our pace
In the *shade of unexpected grace*
And with grateful smiles and sad lament
As holy as a day is spent

And morning light sings 'providence'
As holy as a day is spent

Annie Dillard

- “How we spend our days is of course
- how we spend our lives.”



ANNIE DILLARD

“Interview with the Bobs”

[youtube.com/watch?v=8afqoDL3Qsk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8afqoDL3Qsk)

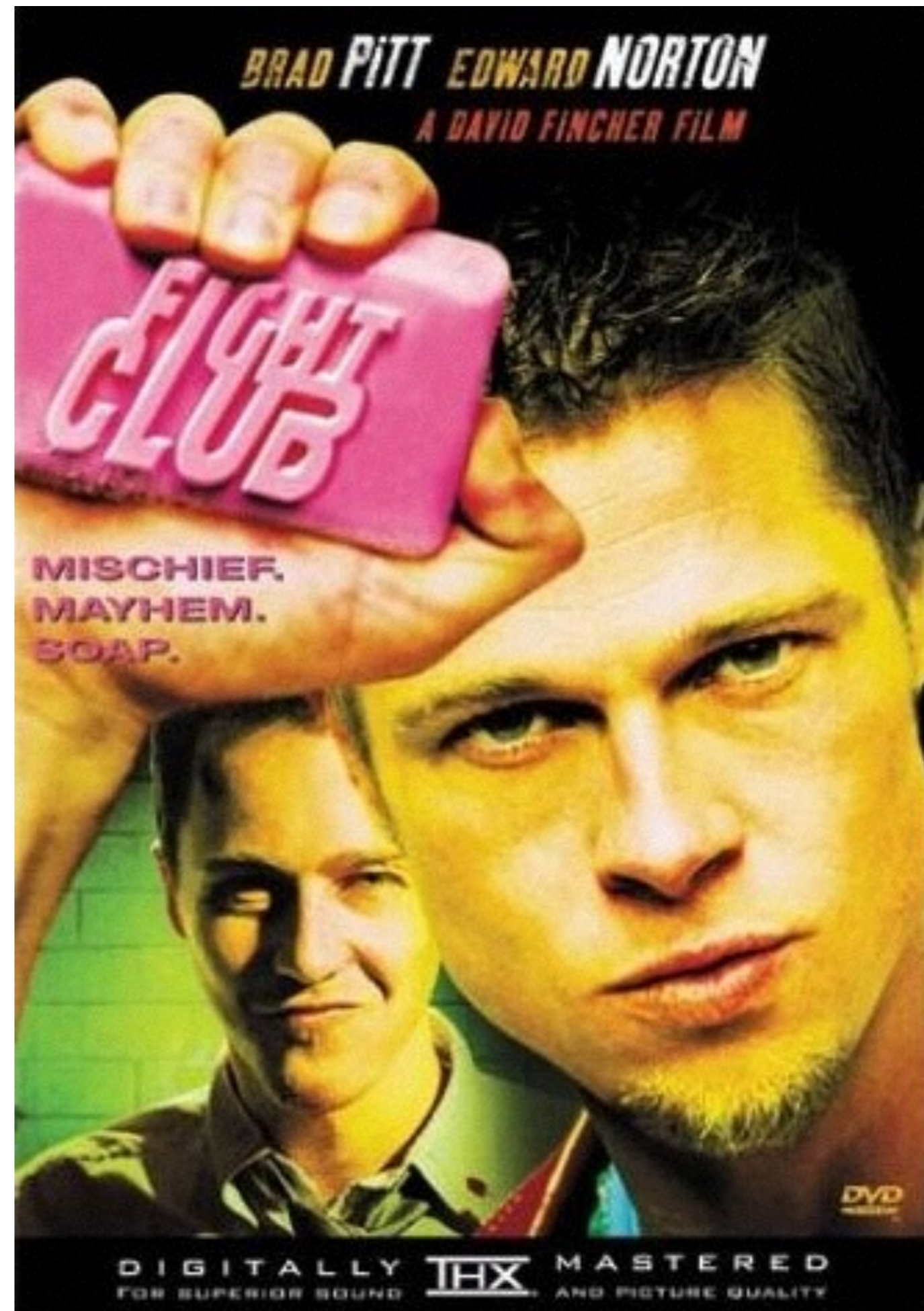
- “It’s not that I’m lazy.
- I just don’t care....
- My only real motivation is not to get hassled. That and losing my job.
- But that’ll only make you someone work just hard enough not to get fired.”



Consumer Capitalism... keeping up with the Joneses

- “Ikea Nesting Instinct”
- “What sort of dining set defines me as a person?”

[criticalcommons.org/Members/
adiab/clips/FF_FincherFightClub-
possum.mp4/view](http://criticalcommons.org/Members/adiab/clips/FF_FincherFightClub-possum.mp4/view)



Wendell Berry

- "The great question that hovers over [us] is the question of **what people are for**.
- Is the **obsolescence** of human beings now our social goal?
- One would conclude so from our attitude toward work, especially the manual work necessary to the long-term preservation of the land,
- and from our rush toward mechanization, automation, and computerization.



(Marx's "alienated labor")

- In a country that puts an absolute premium on labor-saving measures, short workdays, and retirement,
- why should there be any surprise at permanence of unemployment and welfare dependency?
- Those are only different names for our national ambitions."

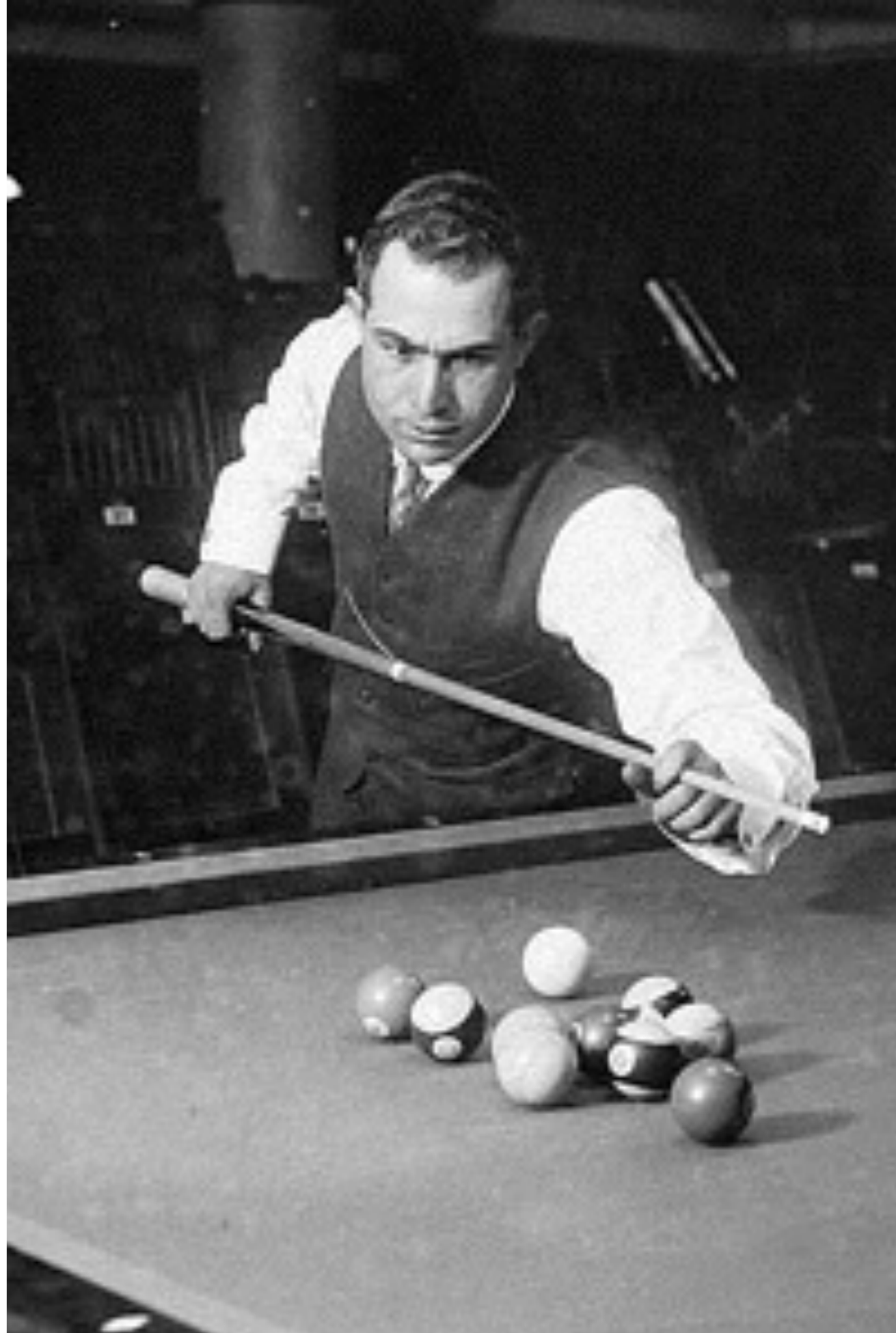
ESSAYS BY
WENDELL BERRY



**WHAT ARE
People FOR?**

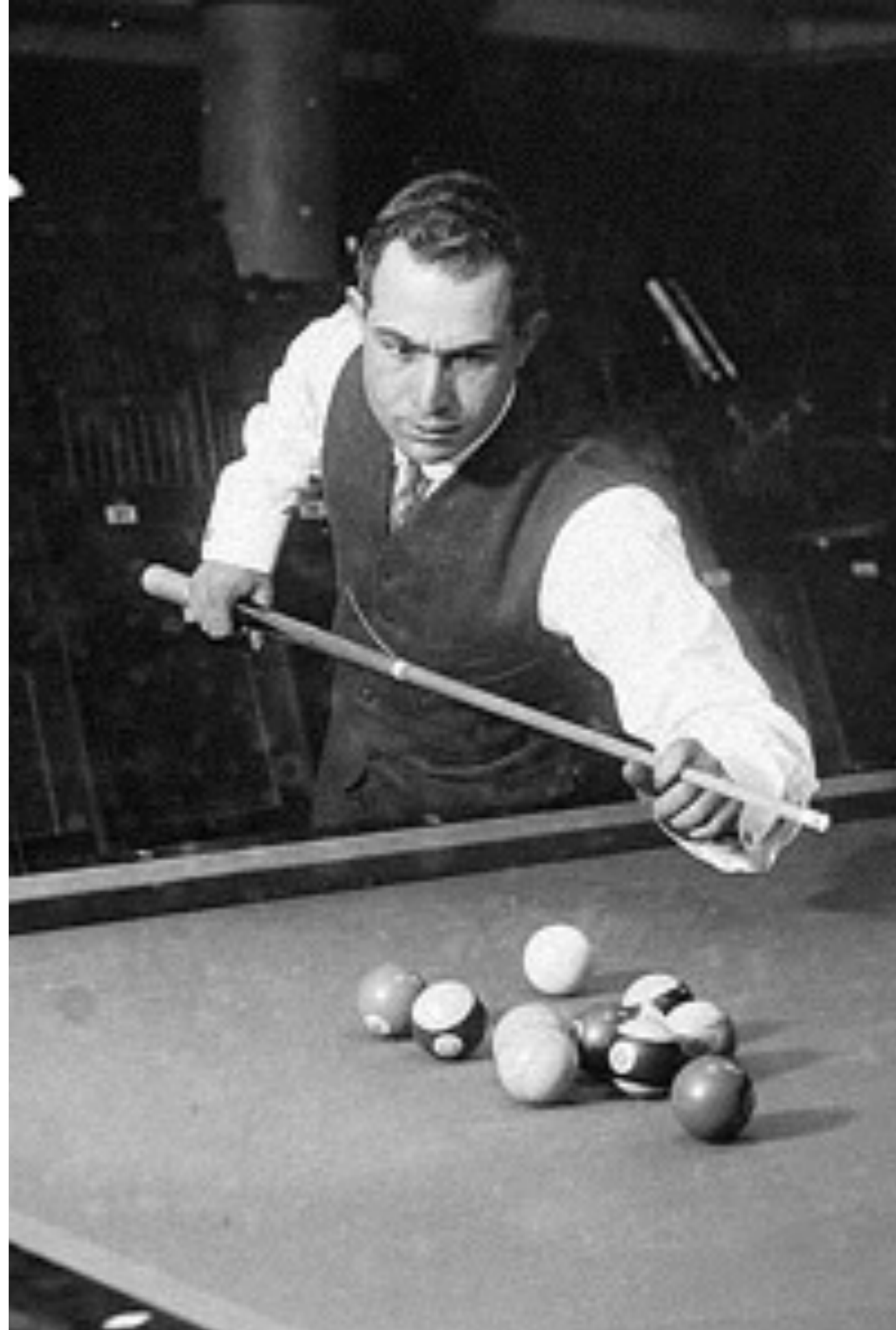
Norman Maclean's story about A. A. Michelson

- When I was a young teacher and still thought of myself as a billiards player, I had the pleasure of watching Albert Abraham Michelson play billiards nearly every noon.
- He was by then one of our national idols, having been the first American to win the Nobel Prize in science (for the measurement of the speed of light, among other things). To me, he took on added luster because he was the best amateur billiards player I had ever seen.
- One noon, while he was still shaking his head at himself for missing an easy shot after he had had a run of thirty-five or thirty-six, I said to him, "You are a fine billiards player, Mr. Michelson."
- He shook his head at himself and said, "No, I am getting old. I can still make the long three-cushion shots, but I'm losing my touch on the short ones."



Norman Maclean's story about A. A. Michelson

- He chalked up, but instead of taking the next shot, he finished what he had to say, “Billiards, though is a good game, but billiards is not as good a game as **chess.**”
- Still chalking his cue, he said, “Chess, though, is not as good a game as **painting.**”
- He made it final by saying, “But painting is not as good a game as **physics.**”
- Then he hung up his cue and went home to spend the afternoon **painting** under the large tree on his front lawn

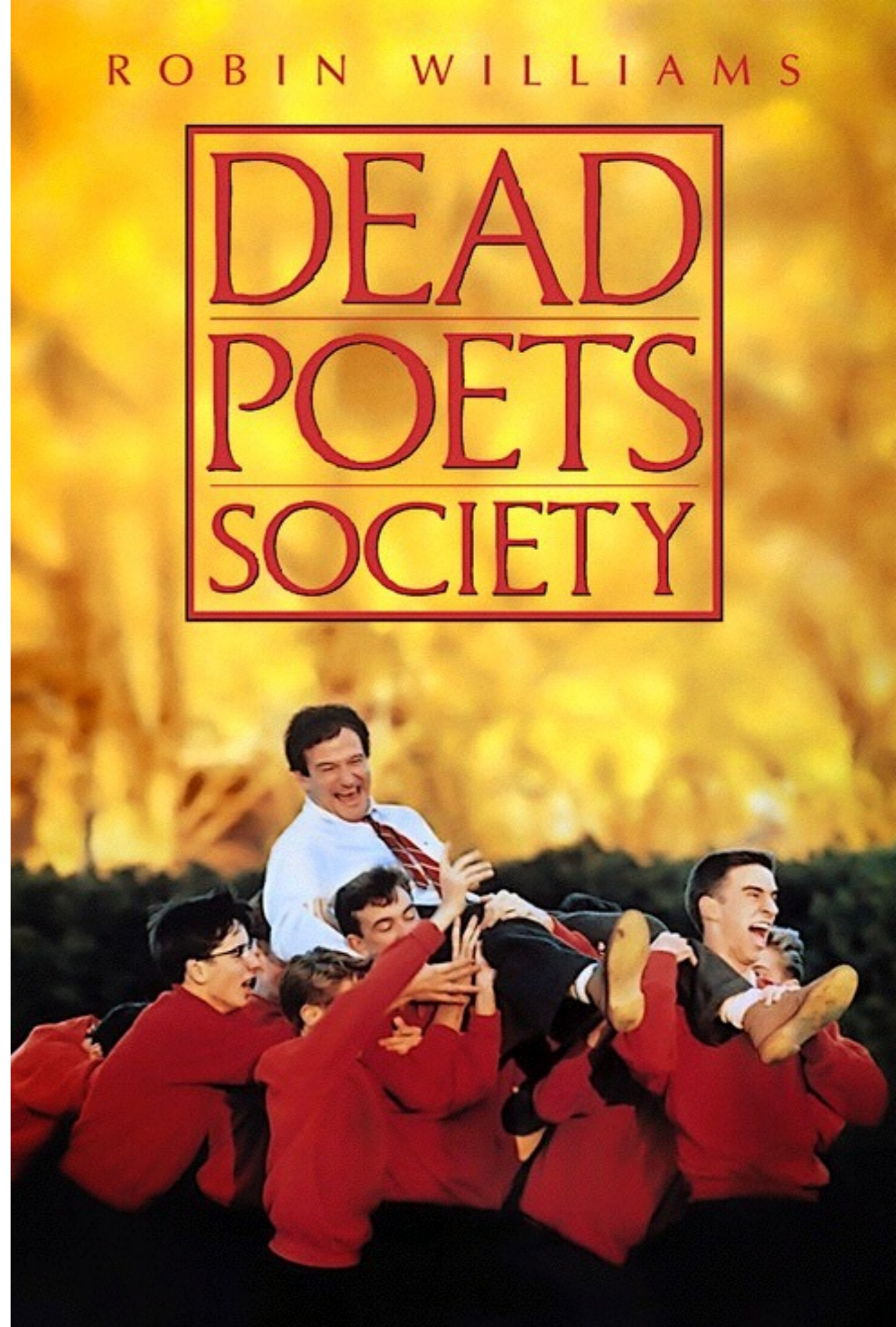


Calling and Vocation

- “Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. [You are called to] the place where **your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet**” (*Frederick Buechner*)
- “My object in living is to unite / My avocation and my vocation / As my two eyes make one in sight. / Only where **love and need are one**, / And **work is play for mortal stakes....**” (*Robert Frost, “Two Tramps in Mudtime”*)
- “Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then do that. **What the world needs is people that have come alive.**” (*Howard Thurman*)
- “Your vocation is **what keeps making more of you.**” (*Gail Godwin, Evensong*)
- Your calling is the “**intersection between pleasure and meaning**” (*Tal Ben Shahar*)

“Carpe Diem”

- “These boys faces are much like your own. Did they wait ‘til it was too late to make from their lives one iota of what they were capable of?”
- These boys are now fertilizing daffodils.
- They are whispering their legacy to you.
- Can you hear it?
- Seize the day...
- make your lives extraordinary.”



Credo: “This I Believe” (500 words)

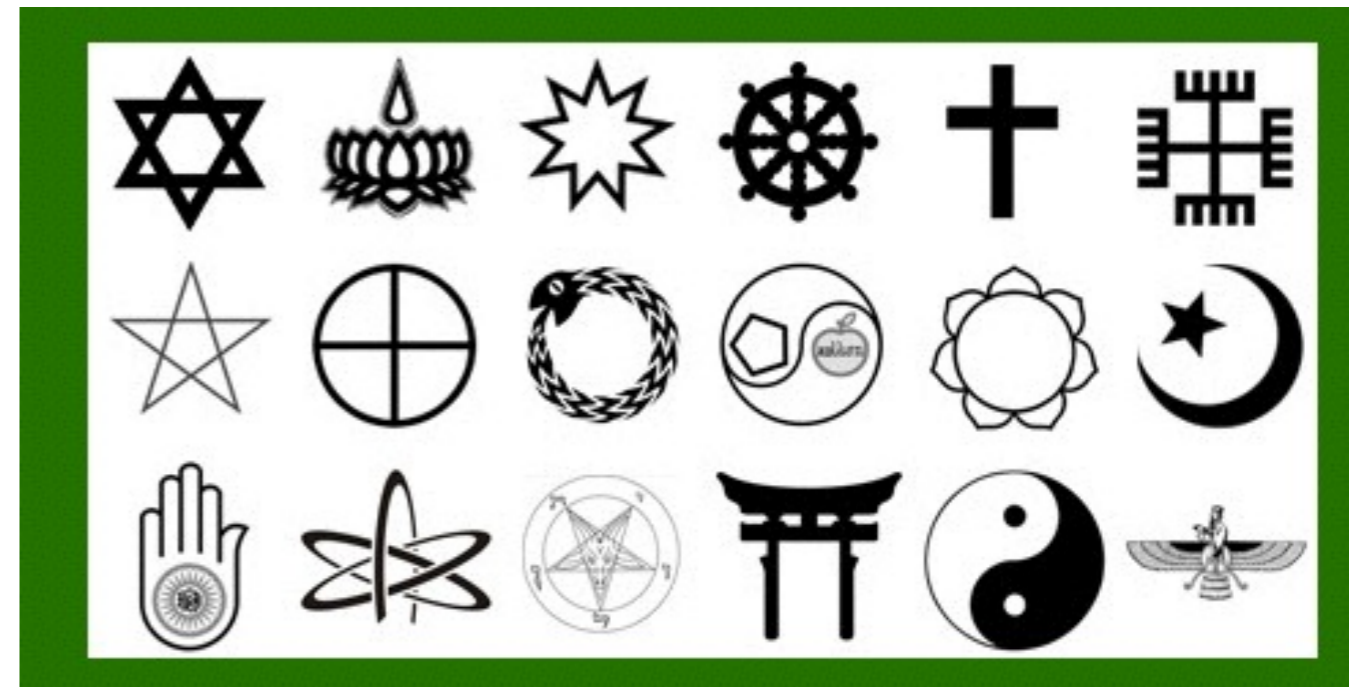
"Theology is *not* primarily texts but a kind of desire that employs *thought as a religious practice.*" -Wendy Farley

- What have you **clarified** for yourself about your spiritual journey? (*autobiography*)
- What do you know based on your **reason** and **experience**? (*liberal turn*)
- How would you describe God/Spirit/Sacred/(Ultimate)**Reality**? (*theology*)
- How does the theology you have built “**interfere**” with your life? (What *difference* does it make in the way you live? What are the *main obstacles* in living your convictions? What *concrete steps* might you take to bring your life into line with your theology? What will you do *differently* because of BYOT?)
On what are your **ethics** based?
- How would you describe **human nature** (*theological anthropology*)?
- How would you define/describe what is **religion/religious** for you?
- What is the **purpose** of (your) life — or of the universe? (*so what?*)
- What will happen in the end? (*eschatology*)
- What stories/quotes/comments/insights from this class have been particularly **meaningful/memorable** for you?

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