

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?**



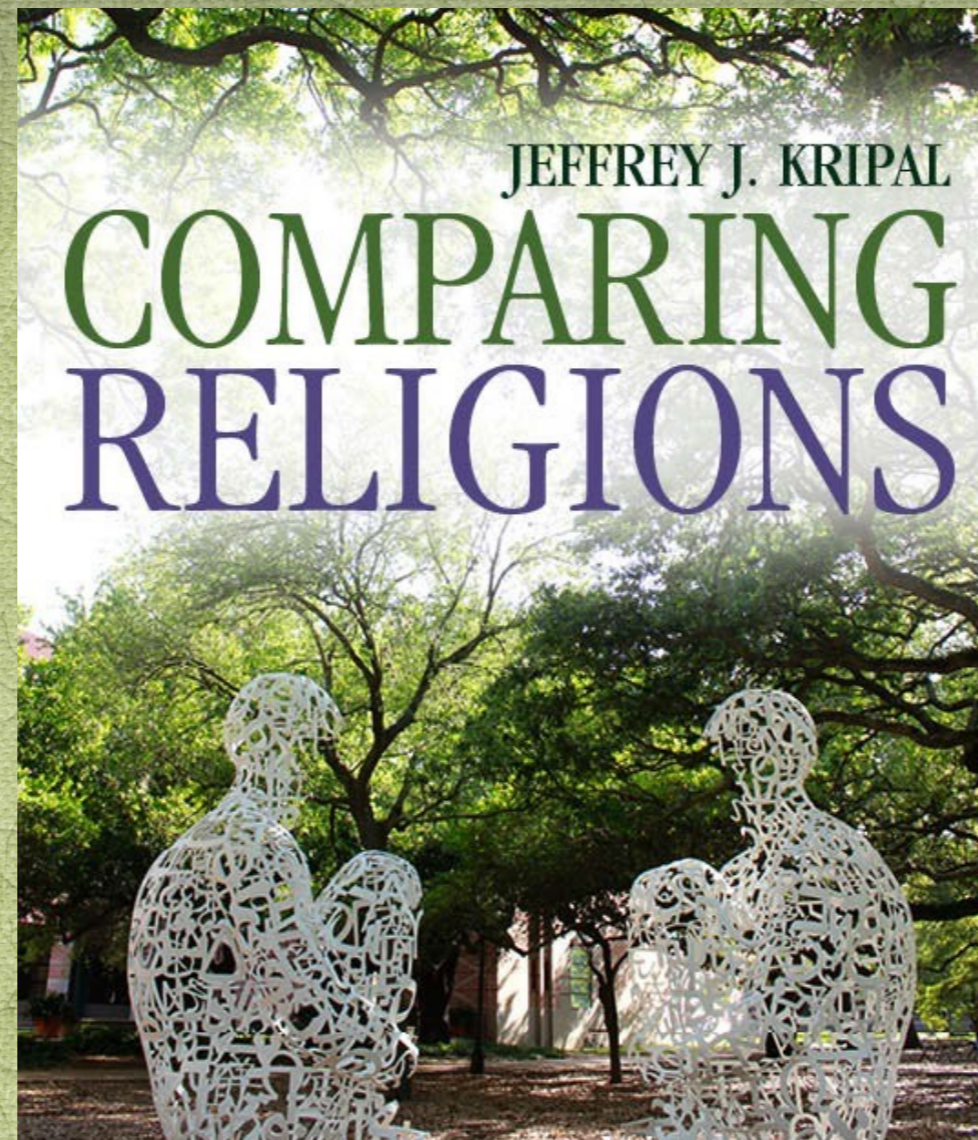
Covenant

- 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”
- 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: Chapter 12: “*Reflexive* Re-readings: Looking at the Looker”

(See “Chapter Outlines”: “Browse by Resources” at wiley.com/go/kripal)



Chapter 12:
“Reflexive Re-readings”
Looking at the Looker

Goethe

“The god to whom man proves
devout,
That is his own soul inside out.”

[Romantic Reversal]



1749-1832

A close-up photograph of a hand with a vibrant galaxy pattern. The colors transition from deep purple and blue at the fingertips to bright pink and red towards the palm. The background is a dark, starry space with soft bokeh light spots.

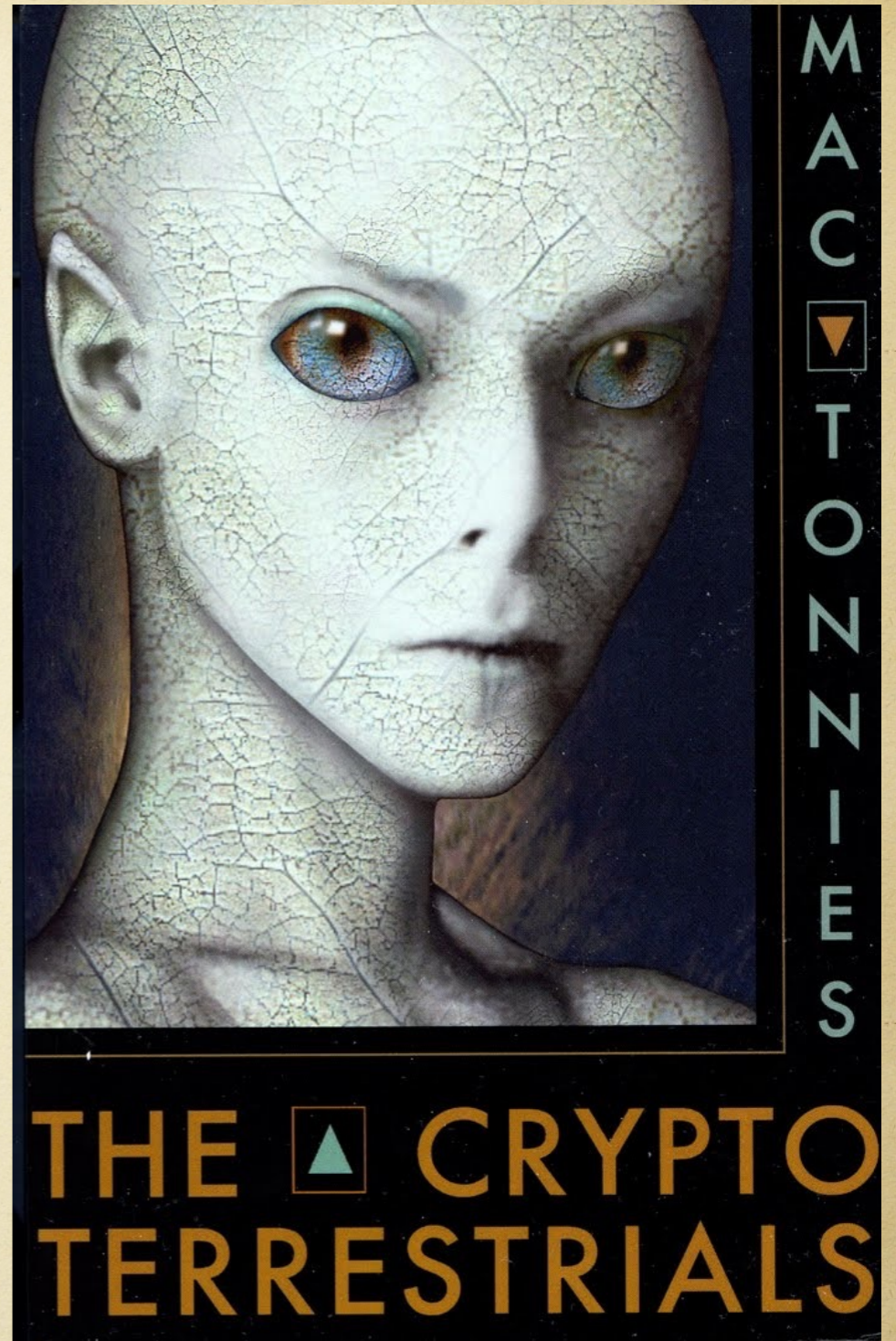
**We are not human beings
having a spiritual experience.**

**We are spiritual beings
having a human experience.**

“Instead of looking at the screen,
what I want to do is to turn around
and look the other way....

I want to steal the key to the
projectionist’s booth, and then,
when everybody has gone home, I
want to break in.”

[c.f. Plato’s cave]



- “We know so little about the true nature of time and, by extension, about what we so easily call ‘history.’ [STORY: p. 366]
- Do humans sometimes *transcend* linear time?
- (Was this mother *seeing into the future*?)
- Or was perhaps her *future self*, *reaching backward*?)



Jeffrey Kripal

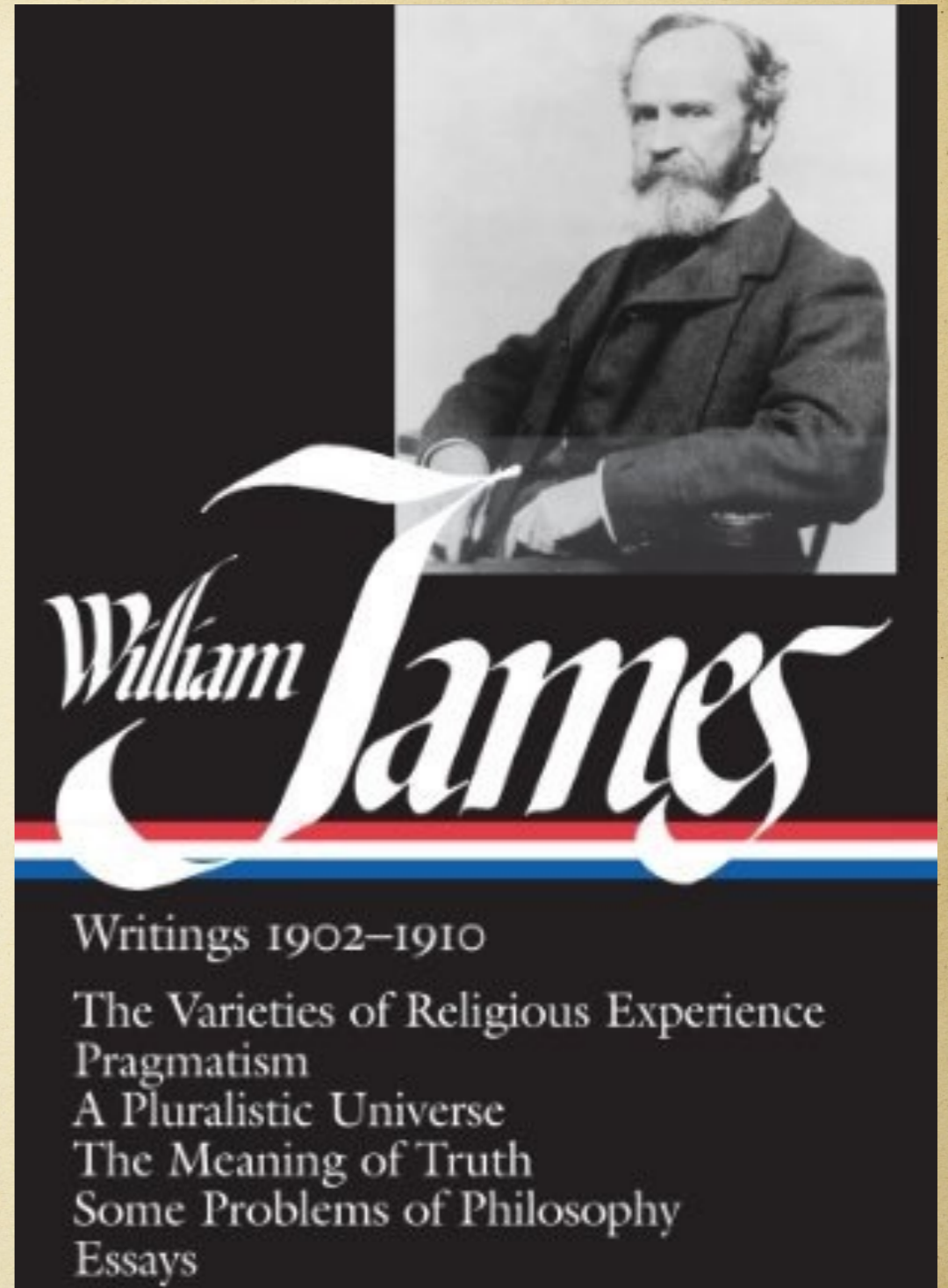
- By acting on the precognitive vision (preventing the child from a full visit to the zoo), the mother actually “*helped cause*” the *foreseen event to happen* (since the child wanted to return).
- OR: did the vision from the future cause her to be more careful and cautious, *preventing a more serious event?*



Jeffrey Kripal

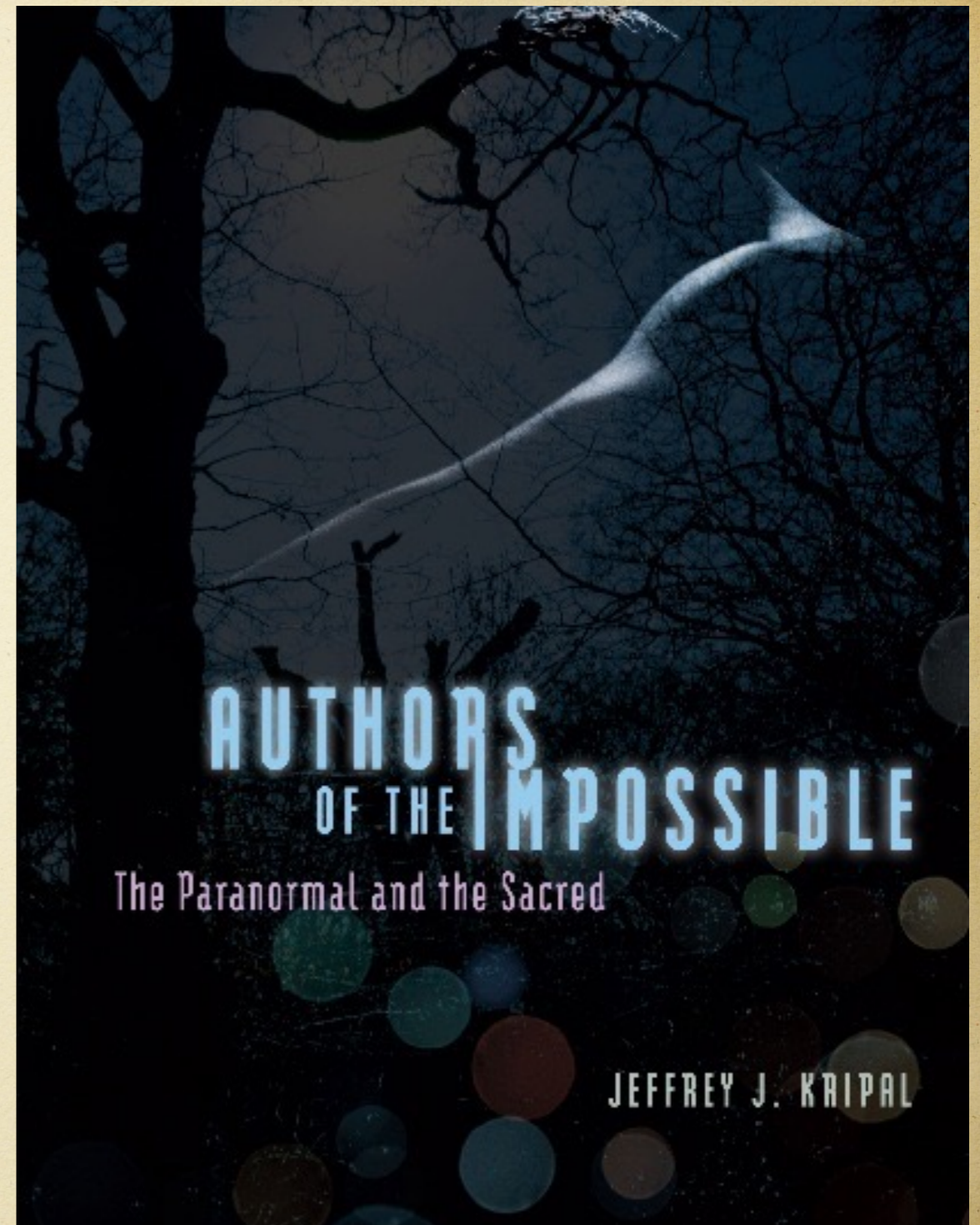
School of the More

- 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”
- vs. the Rational Re-readings of Materialists/Reductionists such as Richard Dawkins (“*There is no gap*”): unequivocal denial or the transcendent or ultimate truth claims.



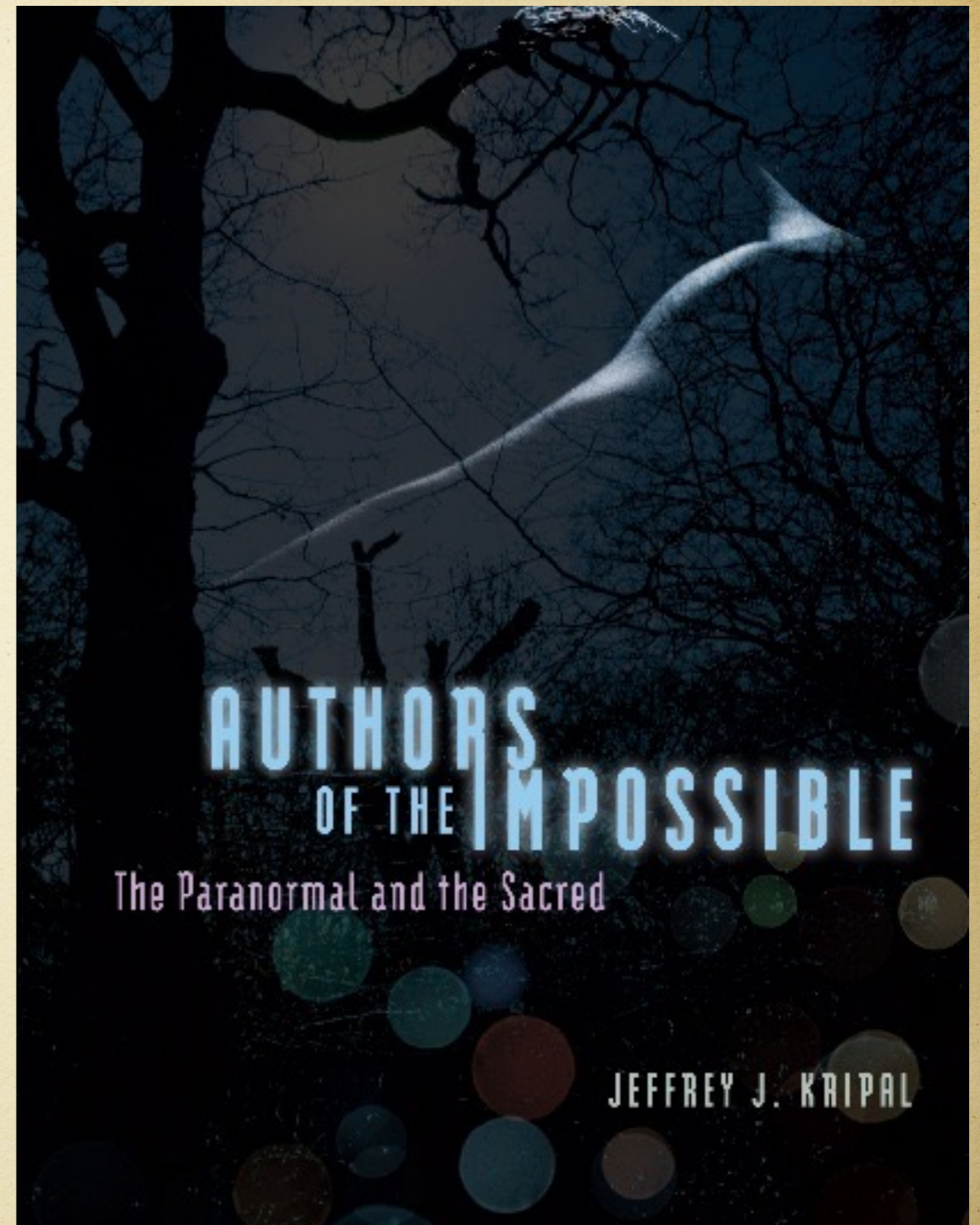
History of Religions

- “Humanity’s millennia-long encounter and struggle with the
- anomalous,
- the powerful,
- the really, really weird stuff that does *not* fit in,
- that does *not* make sense.”



History of Religions

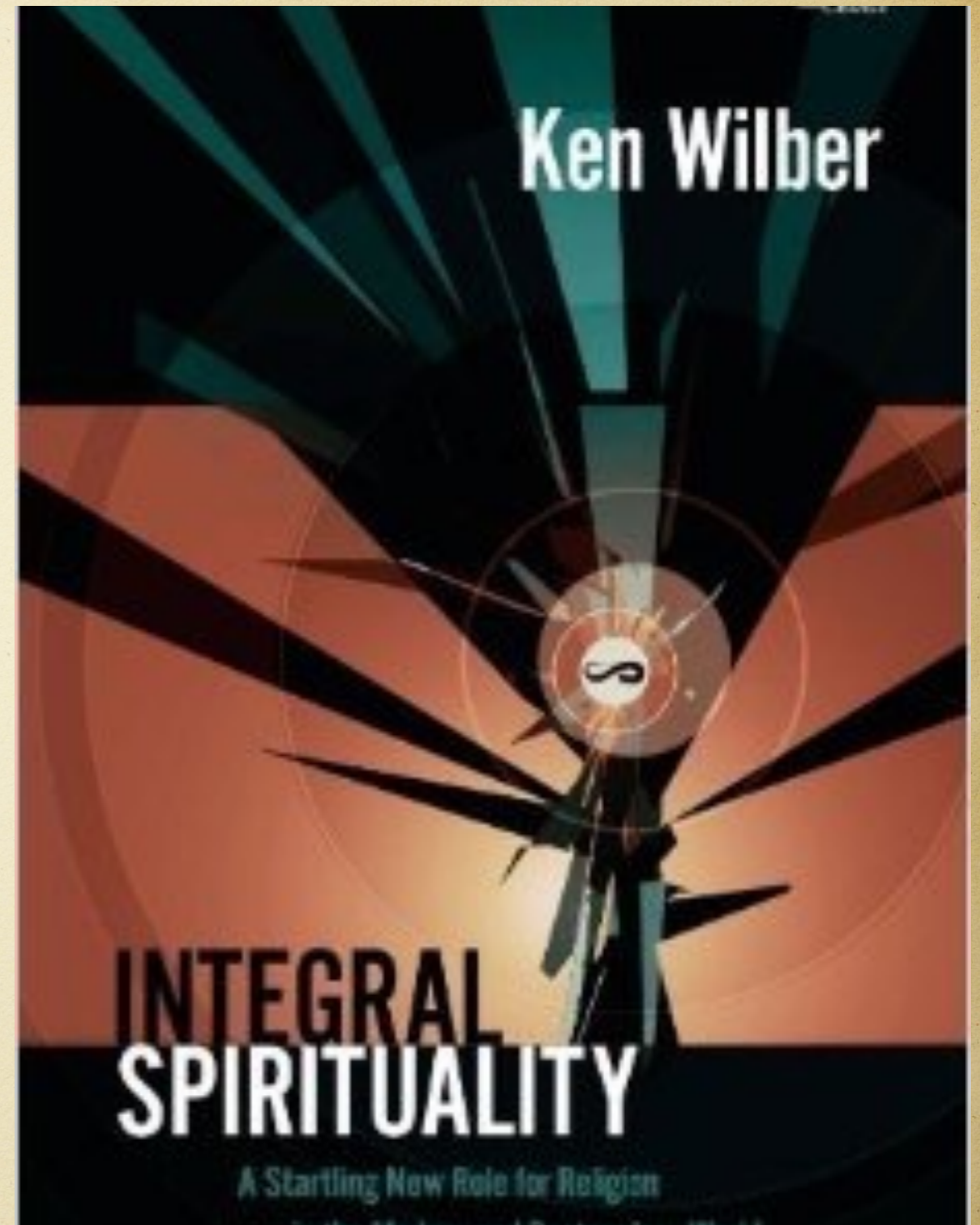
- Modern study of religions has mostly been a ping-pong movement between
- faithful re-readings & rational re-readings,
- “faith/fideism & reason/skepticism”
- Often seen as “zero-sum”, “either/or.”



Reflexive Re-reading

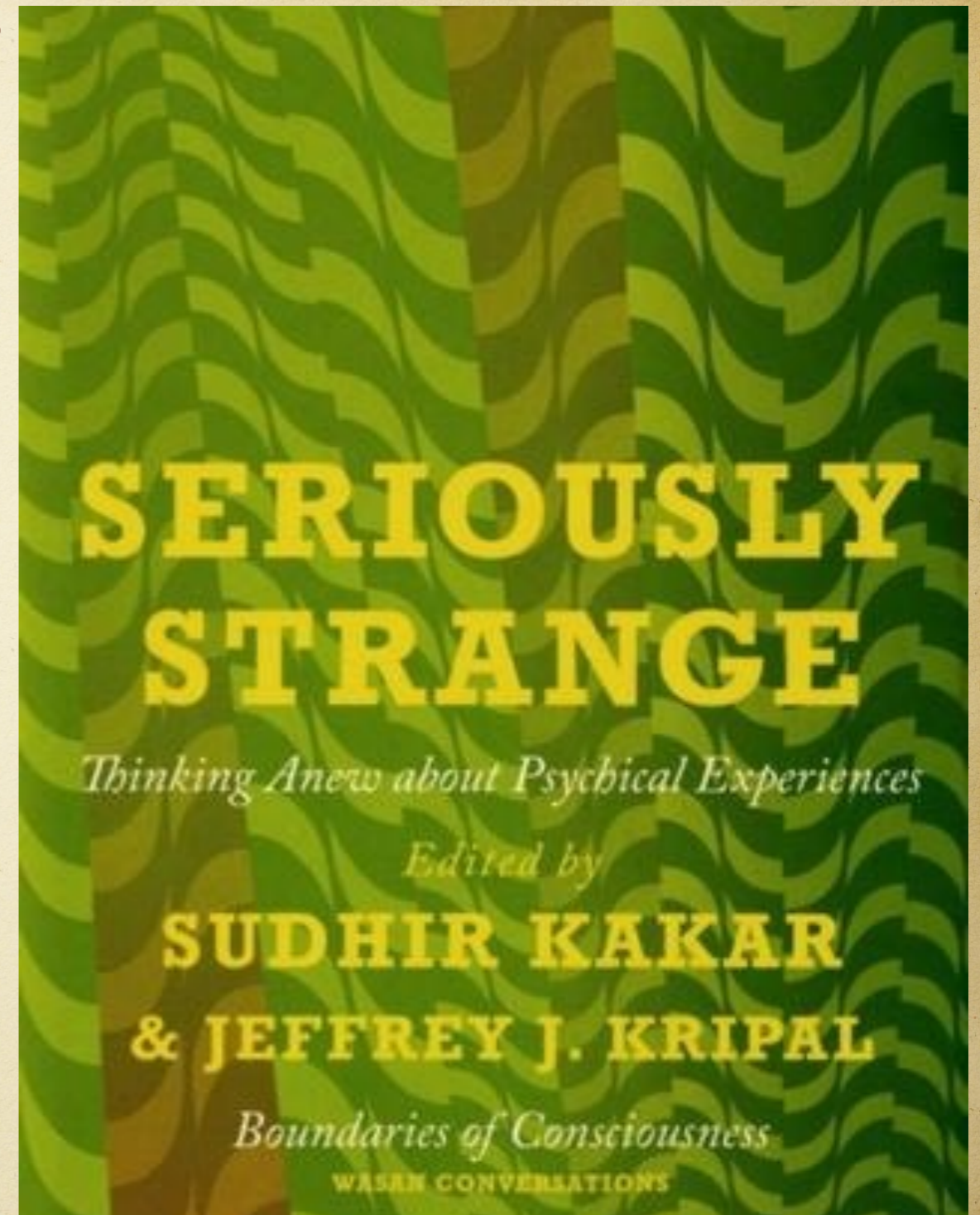
Combines:

- faithful & rational re-readings,
- *beyond both.*
- [Wilber: “transcend & include”]



Reflexive Re-reading

- Embrace the most robust rationalist re-readings (*Feuerbach/Marx/Nietzsche/Freud*) to “reduce” religious phenomena back to human nature and human history,
- Only to find that this nature and history *cannot* be fully explained by human reason —
- that something else (or more), often something truly fantastic, appears to be emerging.



Reflexive Re-reading

- Faithful re-readings (*exclusive/inclusive/pluralistic*): usually assume some sort of stable “object” as Common Source.
- Reflexive re-readings: religious truth *not* found/discovered, but a conscious presence continually shaped and re-imagined by itself.
- Paradoxically “constructed” in sense of painter/paint/painting (*or reader/text/interpretation*) all different aspects of the same creative process.



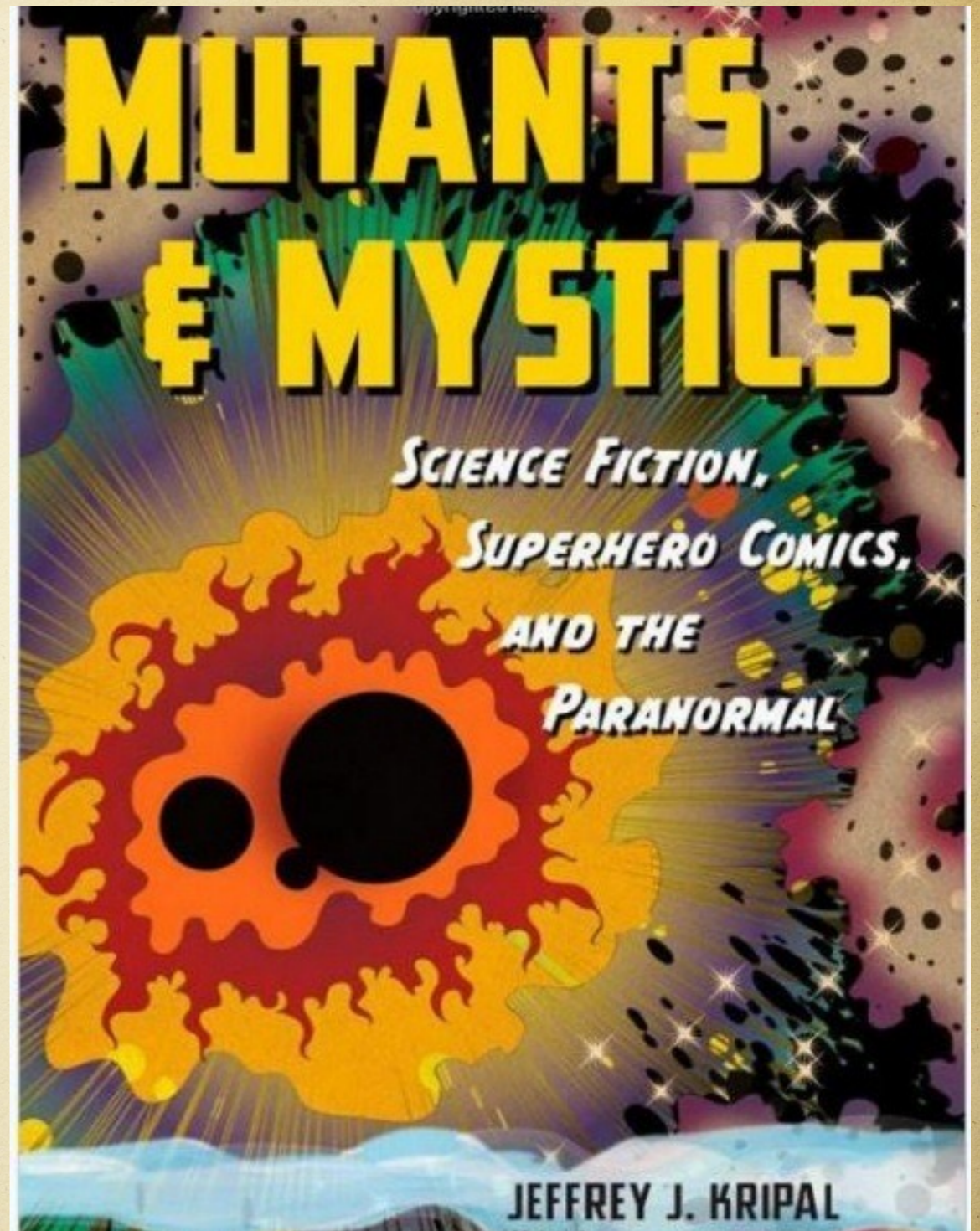
GNOSTIC REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY OF RELIGION

The Serpent's Gift

JEFFREY J. KRIPAL

Reflexive Re-reading

- The “angry ghost” of poltergeist events
- *becomes* the “ghost of anger” of parapsychology —
- still human indeed, *but* violating reason’s rules about how the world works.



“Human as Superhuman”



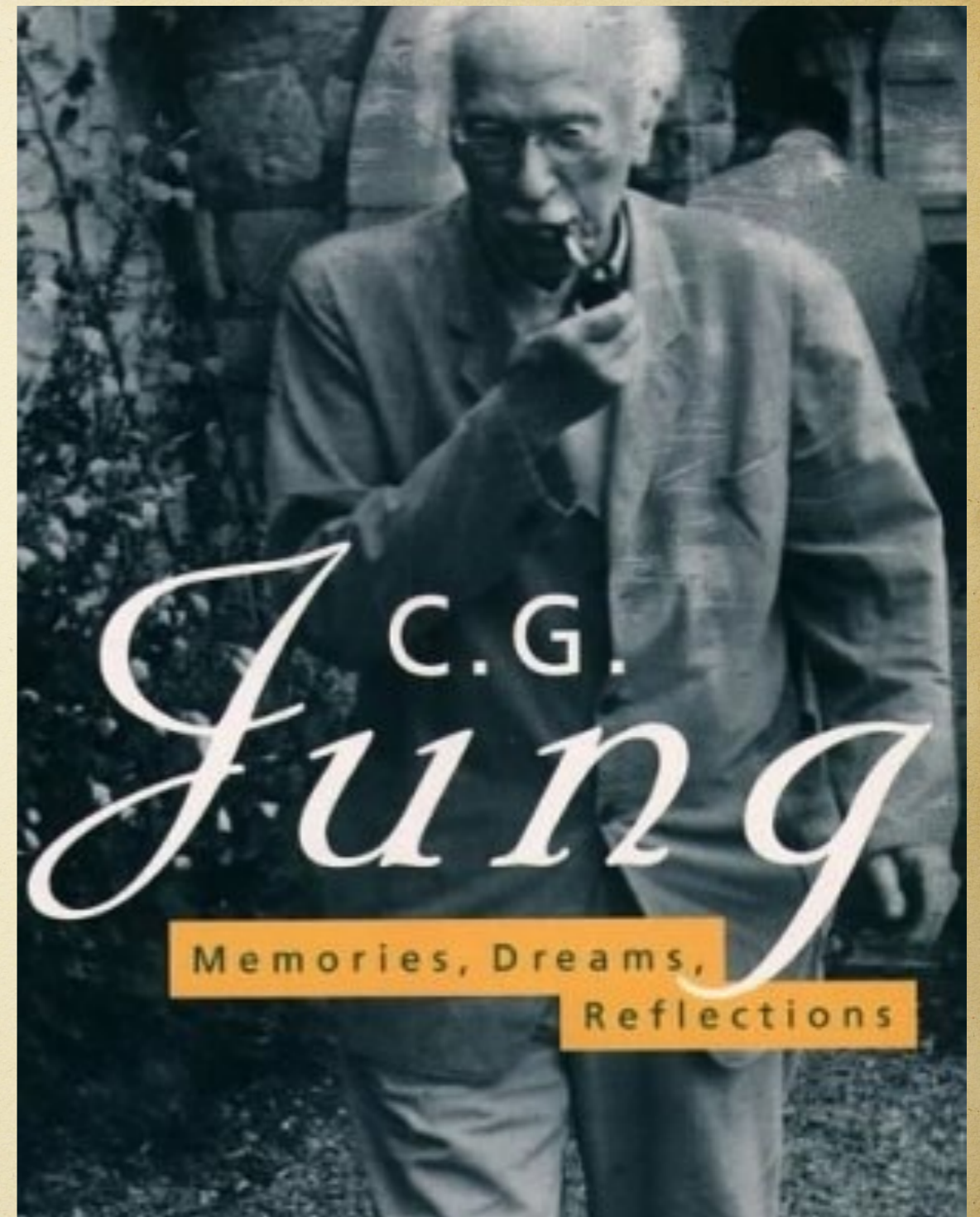
Process-Relational Theo-poetics

- “I am trying to open thinking and practice to the *event* that is playing itself out under the name of God.”
- “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.*”



Psychological Turn

- Freud (1856-1939): Religion should be read *reductively* re-read
- Jung: Something “more” was leftover after *rational* re-readings.
- Religious phenomena are projective psychological phenomena from a deep/vast layer/dimension of the psyche that is religious in nature.
- [*Synchronicities/Dreams*]



1875-1955

Psychological Turn

- **Conscious Mind** (“ego”): tip of an iceberg

- **Personal Unconscious**: most of that iceberg lying *under the surface* of awareness

- **Collective Unconscious**: sea of universal mind/being

- out of which the individual psyche, that is, the person “freezes” into hard form and comes into existence,

- at least for a time, before it is melted back into the ocean of mind.



Psychological Turn

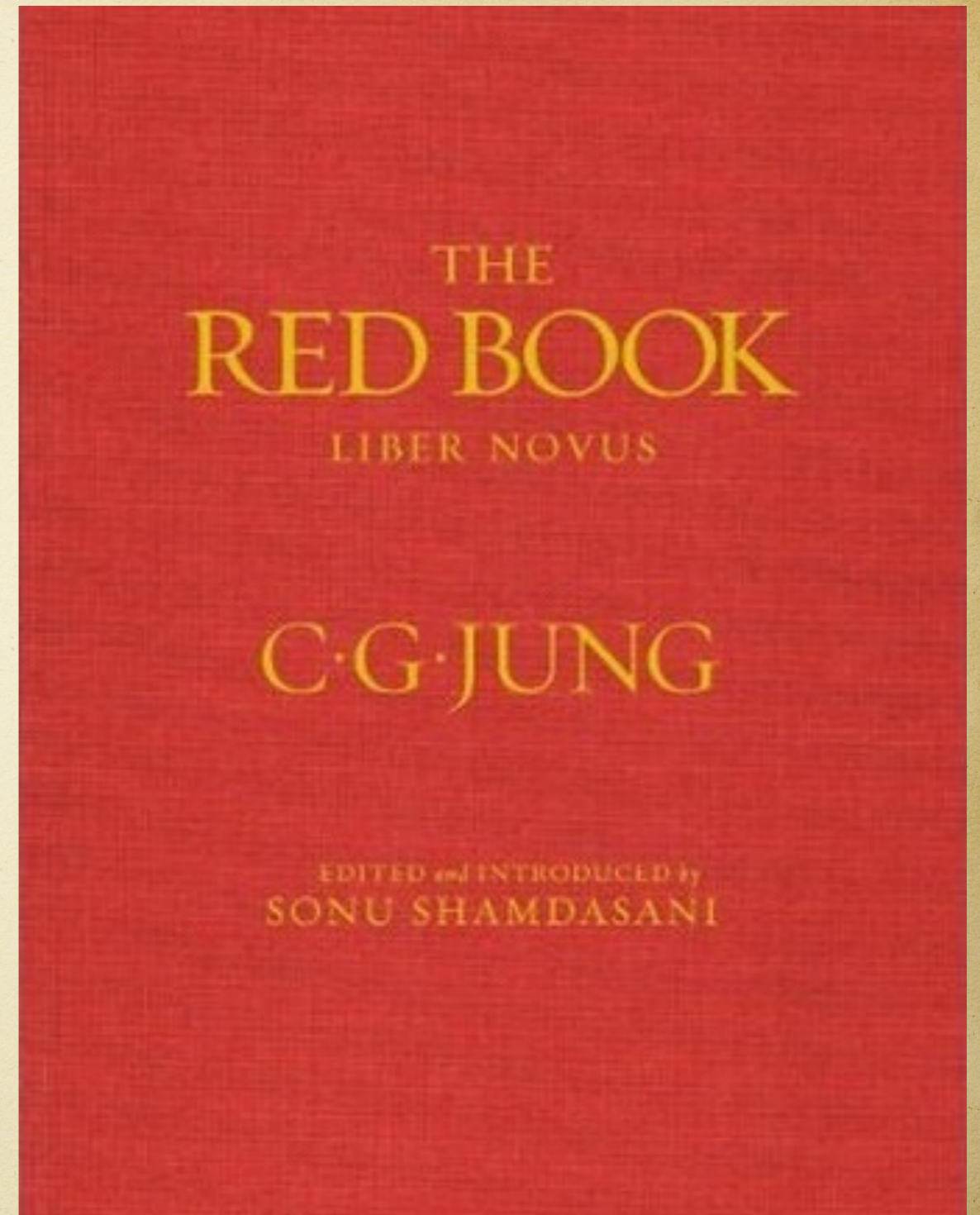
- Jung is “reducing” religious myths and symbols to the psyche.
- But to a psyche that opens out onto dimensions that are essentially religious, if not cosmic.
- Took rational re-readings very seriously, but aware of the ways that materialism was thwarting human expression, shutting humans off from the paradoxical richness of existence.
- For Jung, reality was *not* contained by reason and the human senses.



Jung's "Red Book"

Psychological Turn

- NYTimes on Jung's "Red Book":
[nytimes.com/2009/09/20/
magazine/20jung-t.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/20/magazine/20jung-t.html)

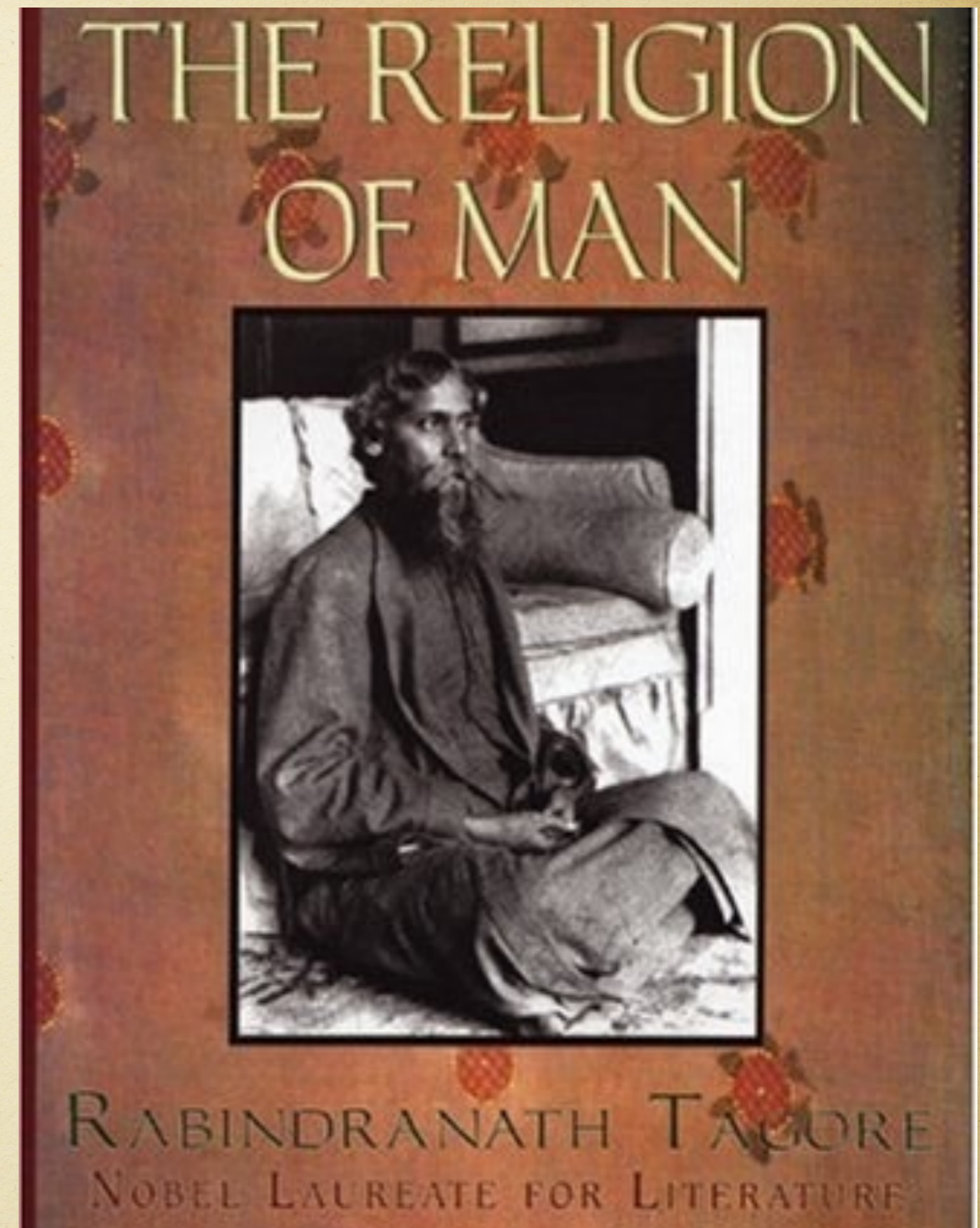


Jung's "Red Book"

Oxford Lectures

- Not the same as Huston Smith's *The Religions of Man* (1958).
- Criticized:
 - “irrational repressions,”
 - “accumulations of dead centuries,”
 - “blindly pious but not spiritual.”

1931

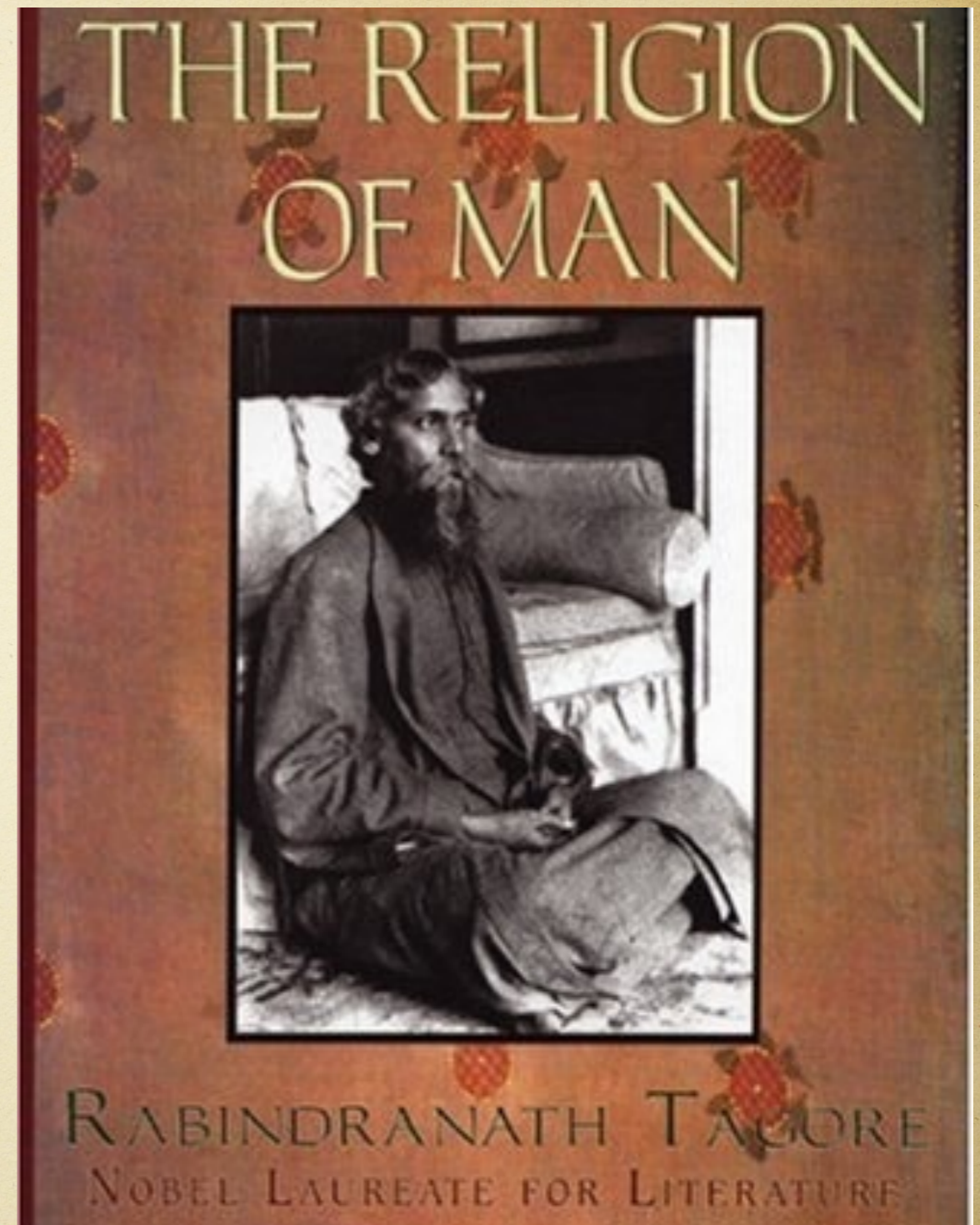


1861-1941

Oxford Lectures

- Worship of the human,
- of the heart of the human being,
- the divinity that dwells at the inner door of each and every human being:
- “the surplus of man.”
- “The God of humanity has arrived at the gates of the ruined temple of the tribe.”

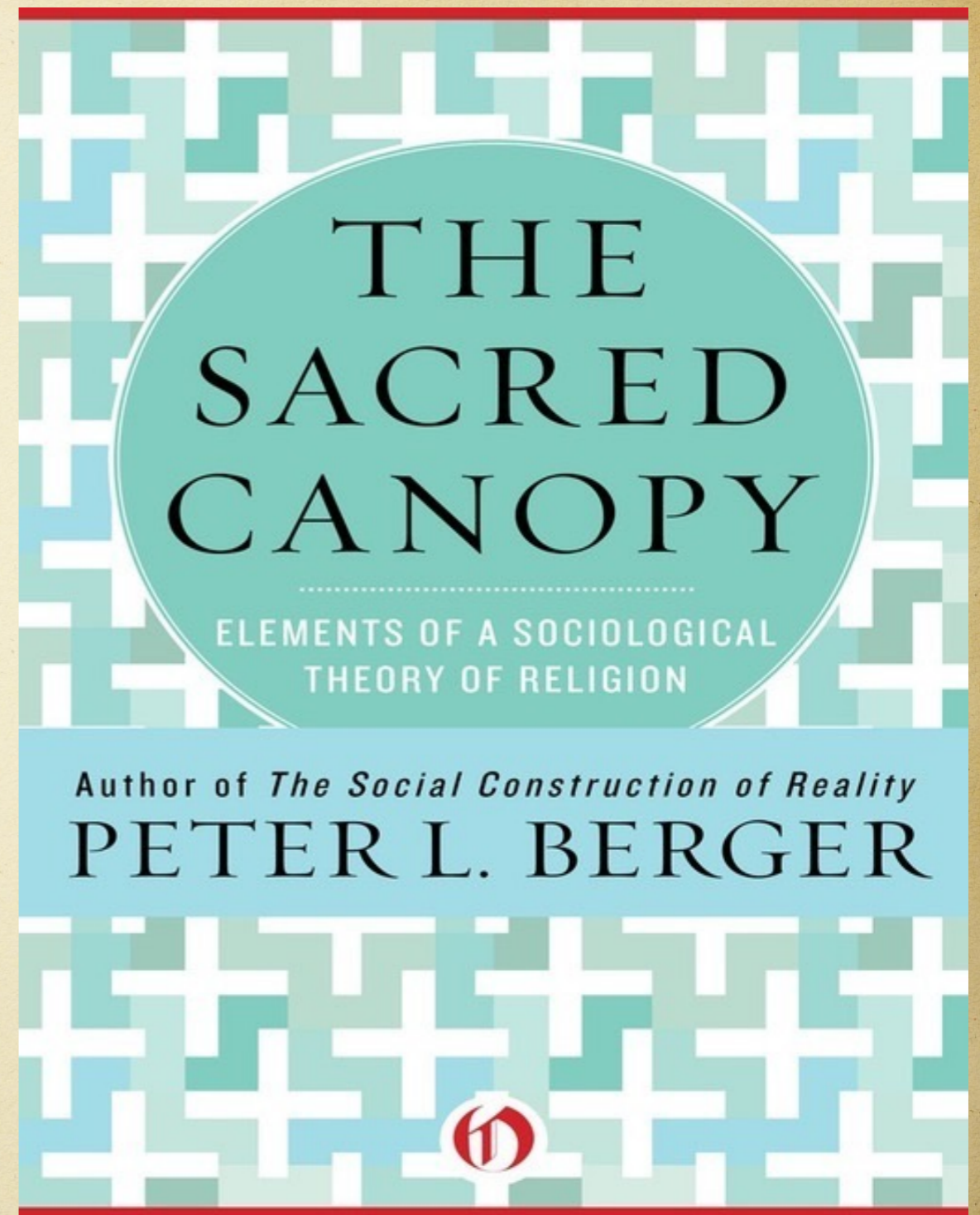
1931



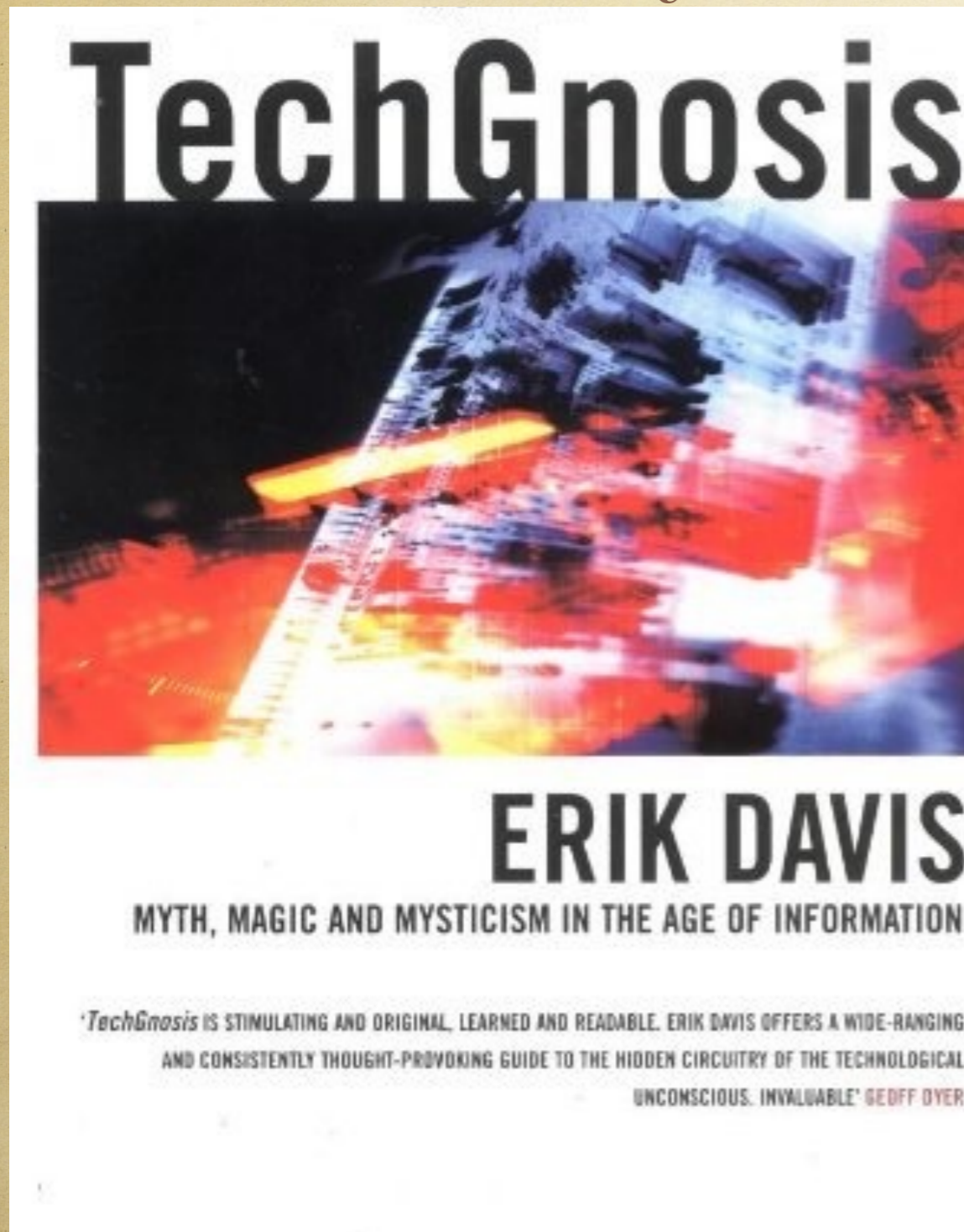
1861-1941

Sociology of Religion

- Following Plato, finds significance in the correspondence between mathematics (*abstract symbols called numbers that appear to exist only in the human mind*) turn out to reflect and predict, very precisely, the workings of the natural world (“out there”)
- “Humans project ultimate meanings into reality *because that reality is ultimately meaningful.*”



Reflexivity as Modern Mysticism

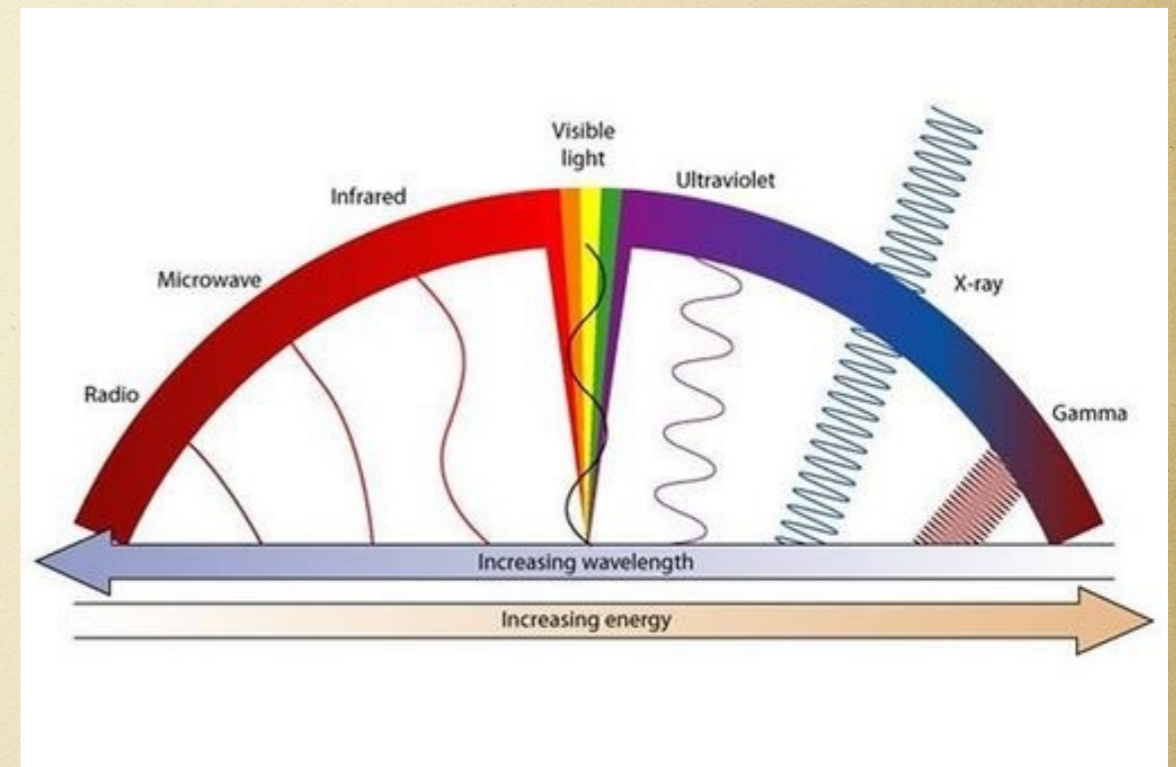


Erik Davis

STORY: pages 370-371

“What Is” vs. “What Appears”

- We do *not* perceive the world “as it is”
- We perceive the world as our evolved biology and its sensory system allow us (force us) to perceive it.
- Our perceptions are *neither* immediate *nor* innocent *nor* objective “photographs”
- Our eyes pick up about one ten-trillionth of the total light spectrum.

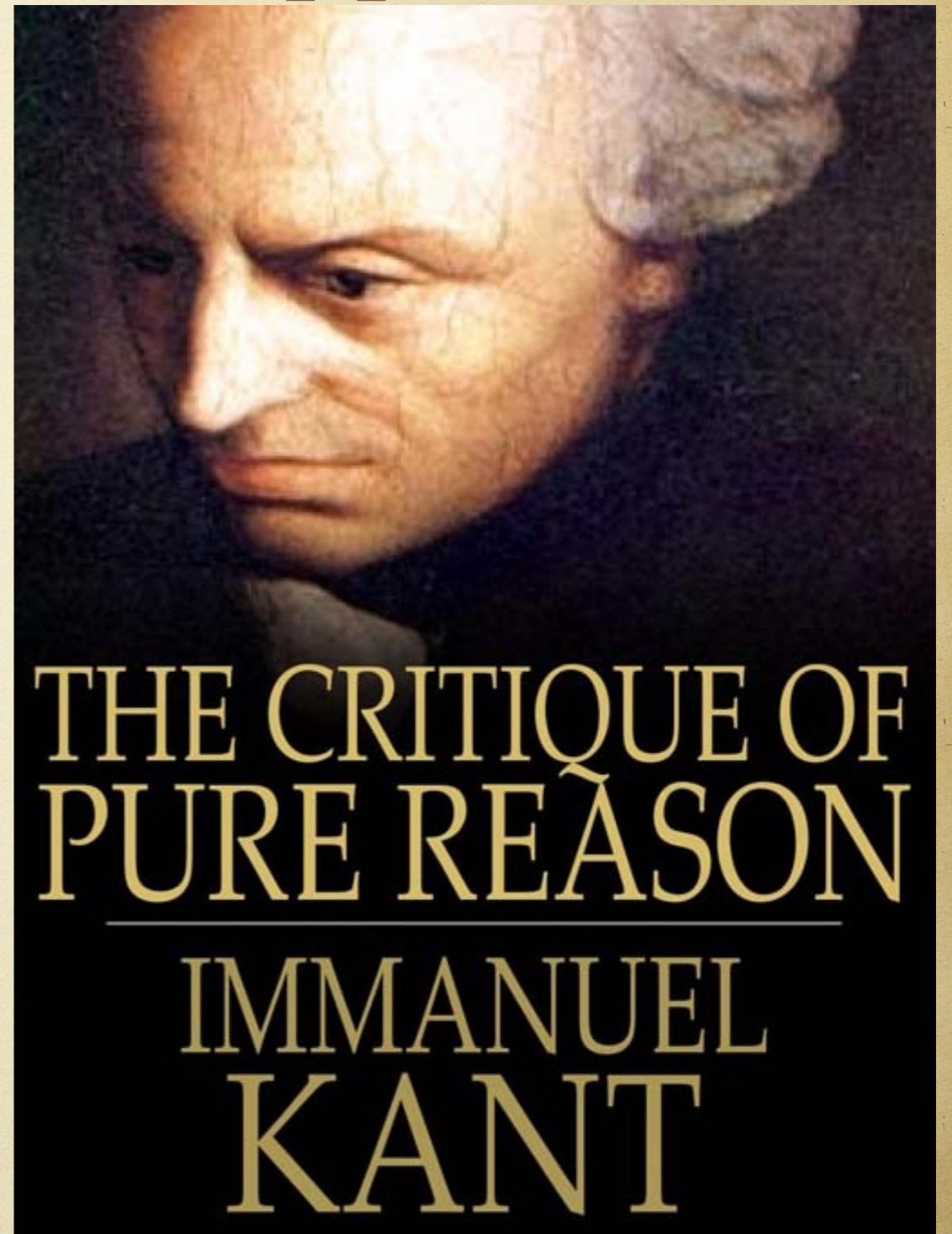


“What Is” vs. “What Appears”

- **Phenomenon** (Greek: *phainomenon*, “that which appears/is visible” to humans)
- **Noumenon** (Greek: *nooumenon*, “that which is thought”) - Kant’s “thing-in-itself”

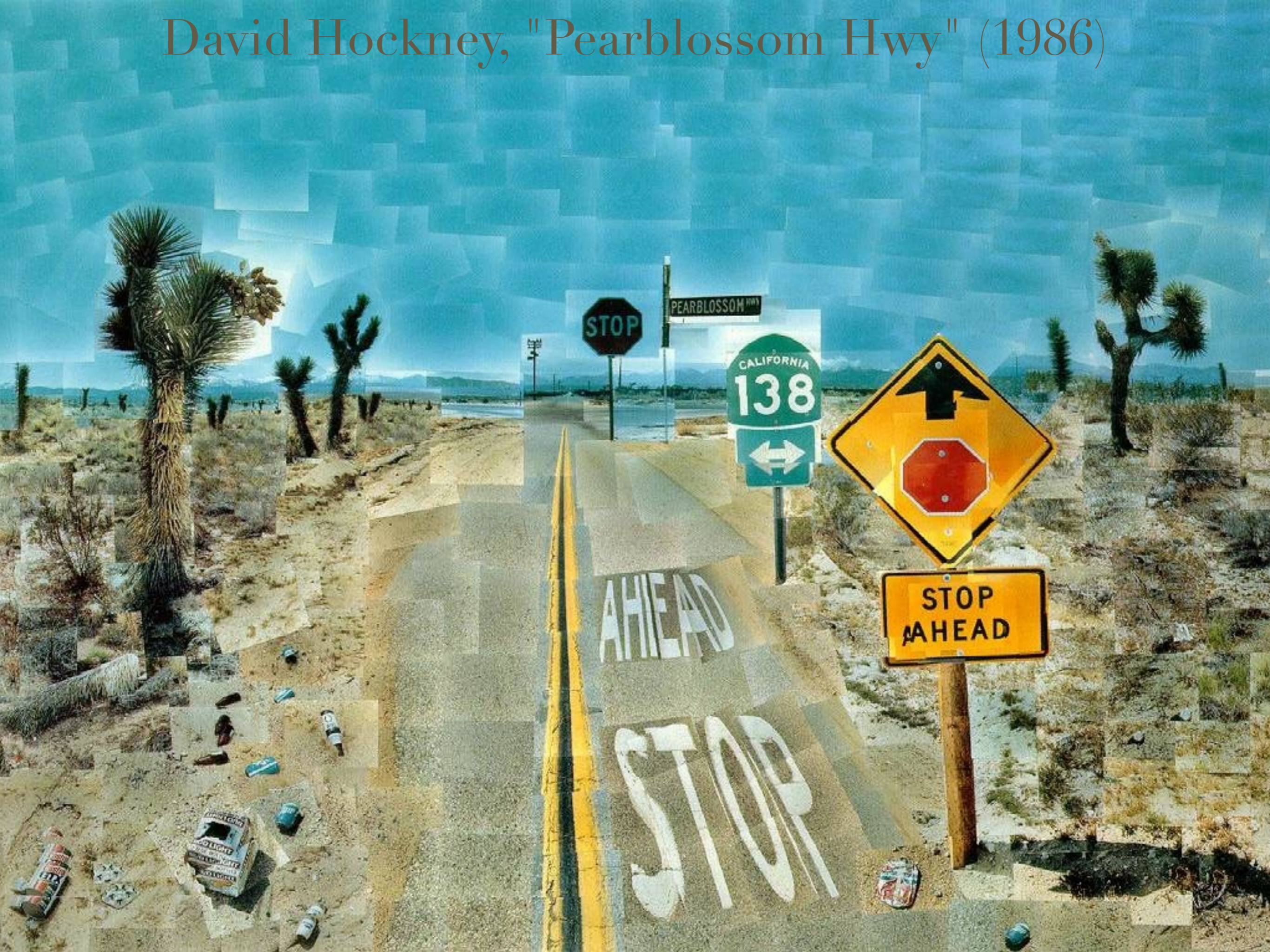
Kant:

- *Never* really know nominal reality, and we certainly cannot think it.
- *Only* perceive/experience the world through “hard-wired” categories of thinking and perception (space, time, causality) that Kant called *a priori*.



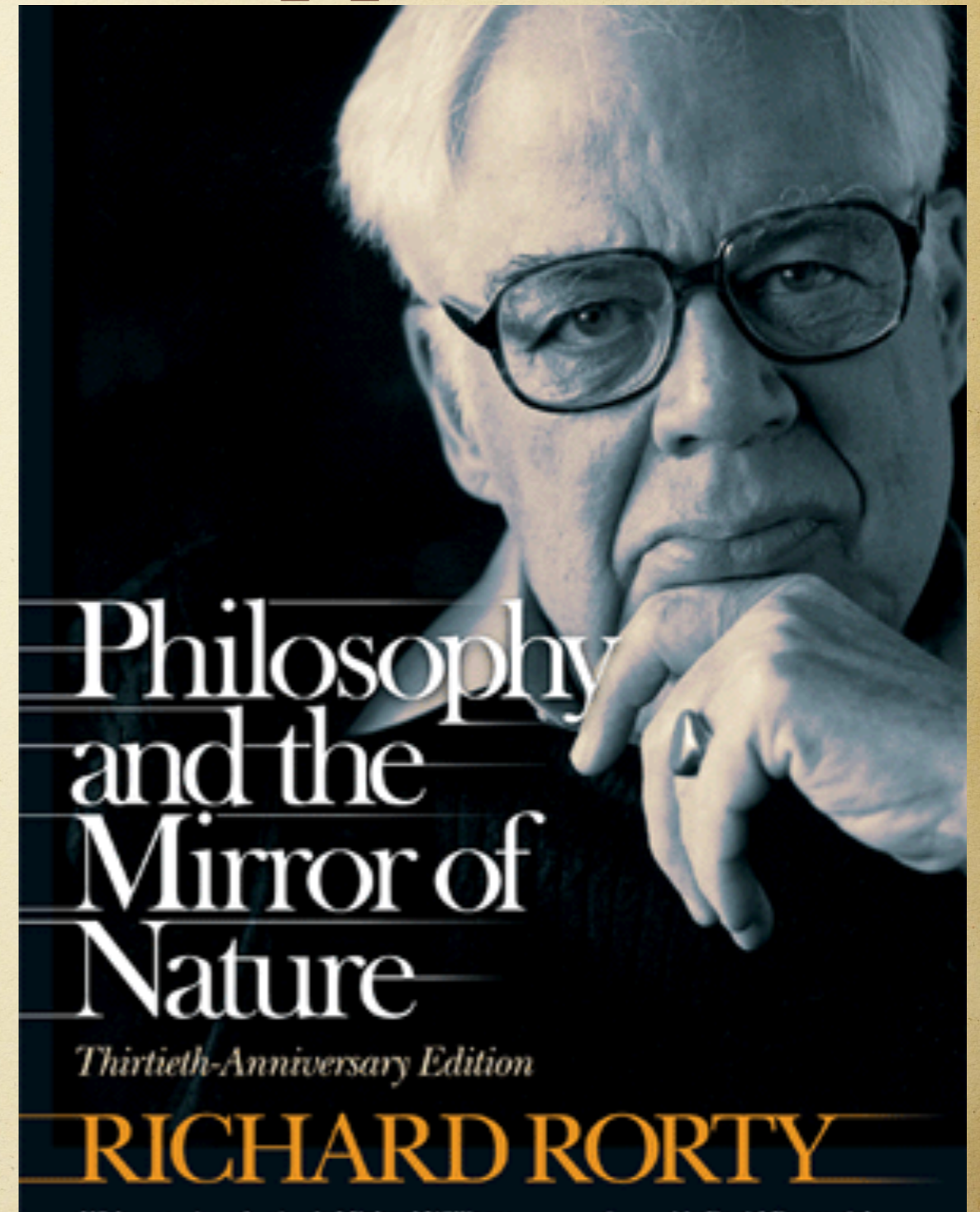
(*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781)

David Hockney, "Pearblossom Hwy" (1986)



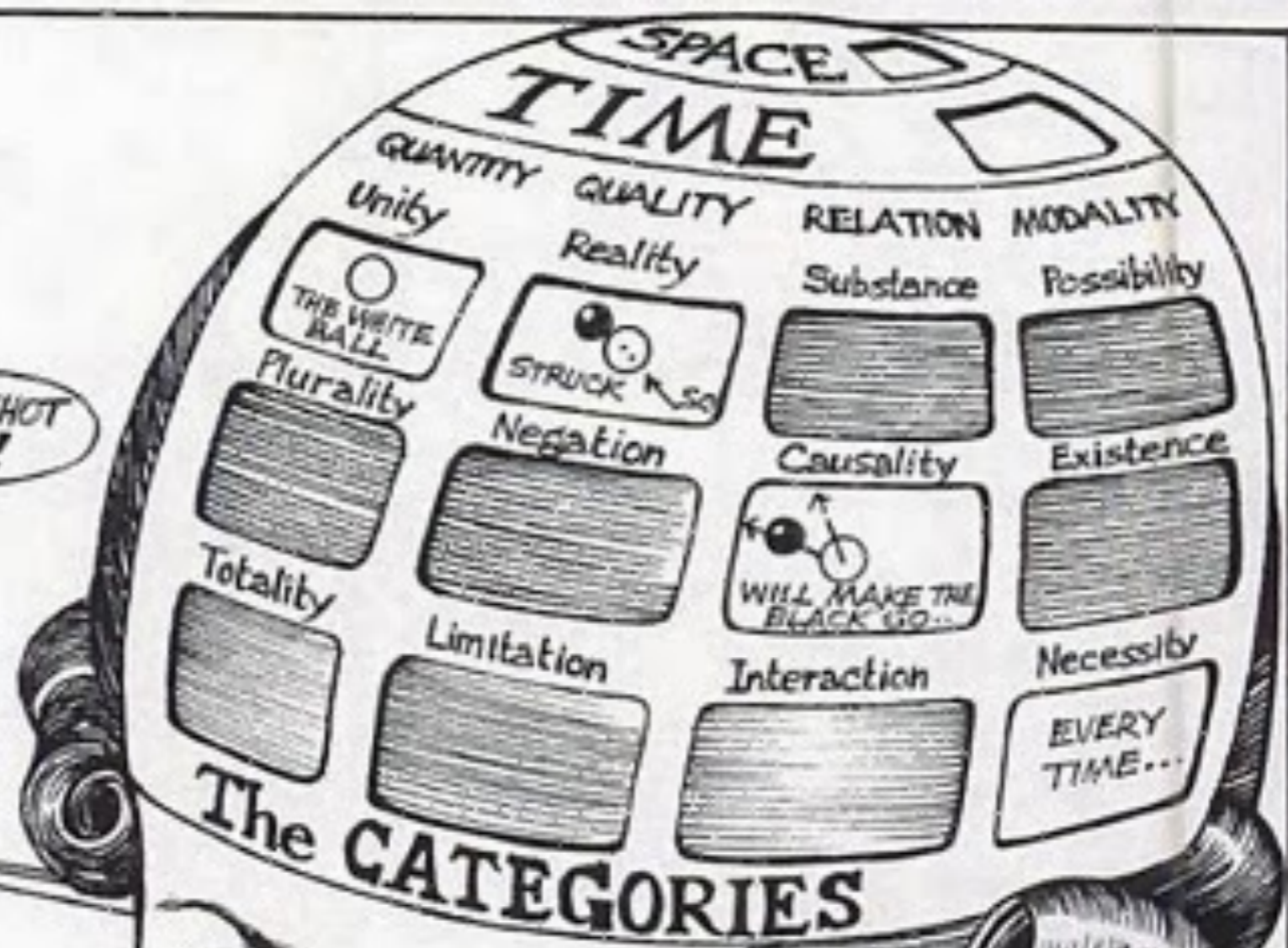
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- **Phenomenology of Religion:** “brackets” (sets aside) truth claims of the religions being studied
- to instead describe, as accurately as it can, “what appears” to a person undergoing a particular religious experience.



1979

KANT'S Thinking Cap



The CATEGORIES

I'M THINKING...

HOW MUCH LONGER ARE YOU GOING TO REPEAT WHATEVER I SAY?

HOW MUCH LONGER ARE YOU GOING TO REPEAT WHATEVER I SAY?



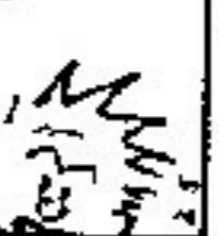
OK THEN, JUST KEEP AT IT, MR. ANNOYING HUMAN ECHO.

OK THEN, JUST KEEP AT IT, MR. ANNOYING HUMAN ECHO.



"WE CAN A PRIORI AND PRIOR TO ALL GIVEN OBJECTS HAVE A KNOWLEDGE OF THOSE CONDITIONS ON WHICH ALONE EXPERIENCE OF THEM IS POSSIBLE, BUT NEVER OF THE LAWS TO WHICH THINGS MAY IN THEMSELVES BE SUBJECT WITHOUT REFERENCE TO POSSIBLE EXPERIENCE."

WE CAN AN PEORIA AND...UM... SLOW DOWN WHAT? HOLD ON.



© 1994 Watterson/Capt. by Universal Press Syndicate



CHEATER.

WATSON

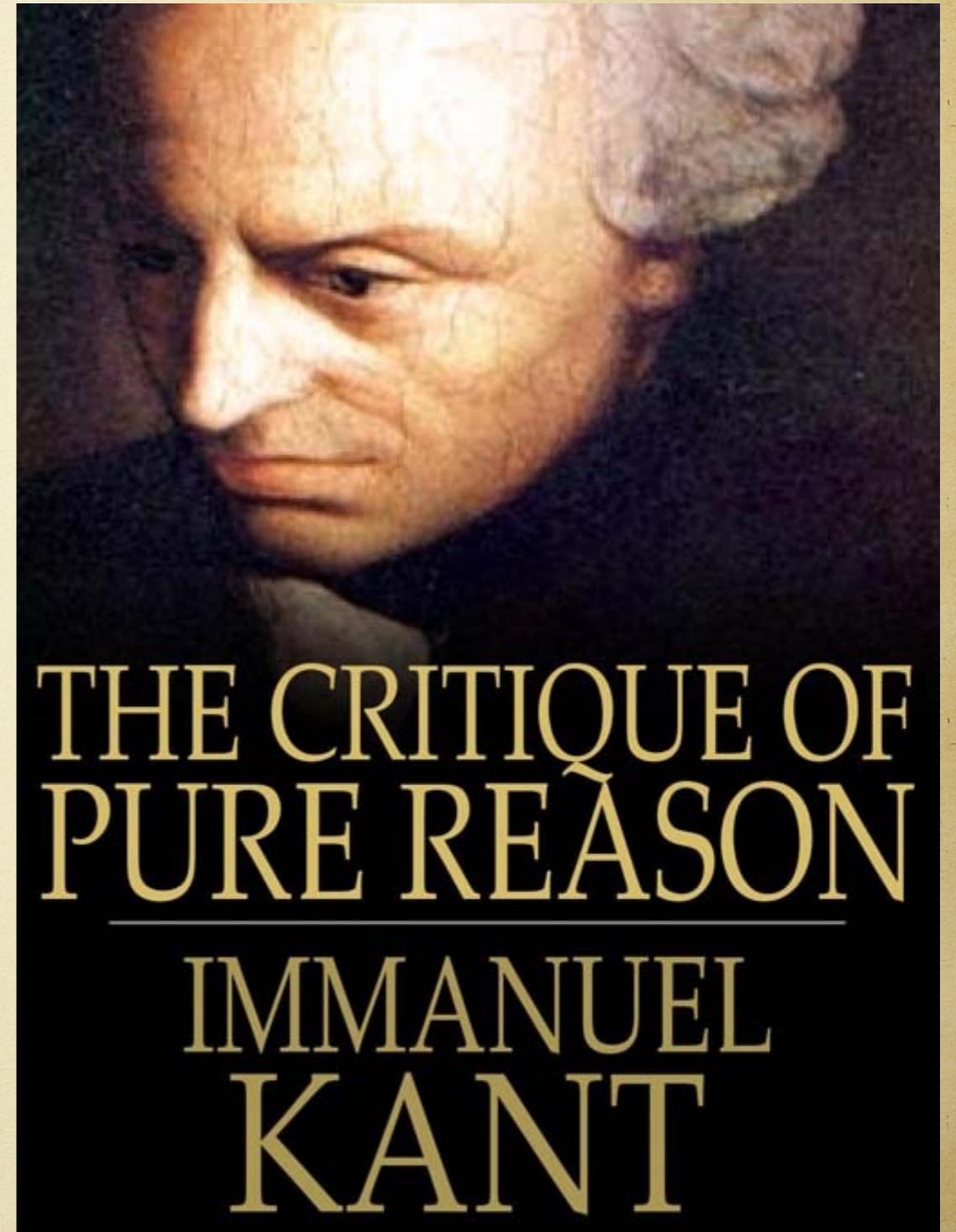


**SURE, I'D DATE
YOU...**

**IN THE NOUMENAL
WORLD!**

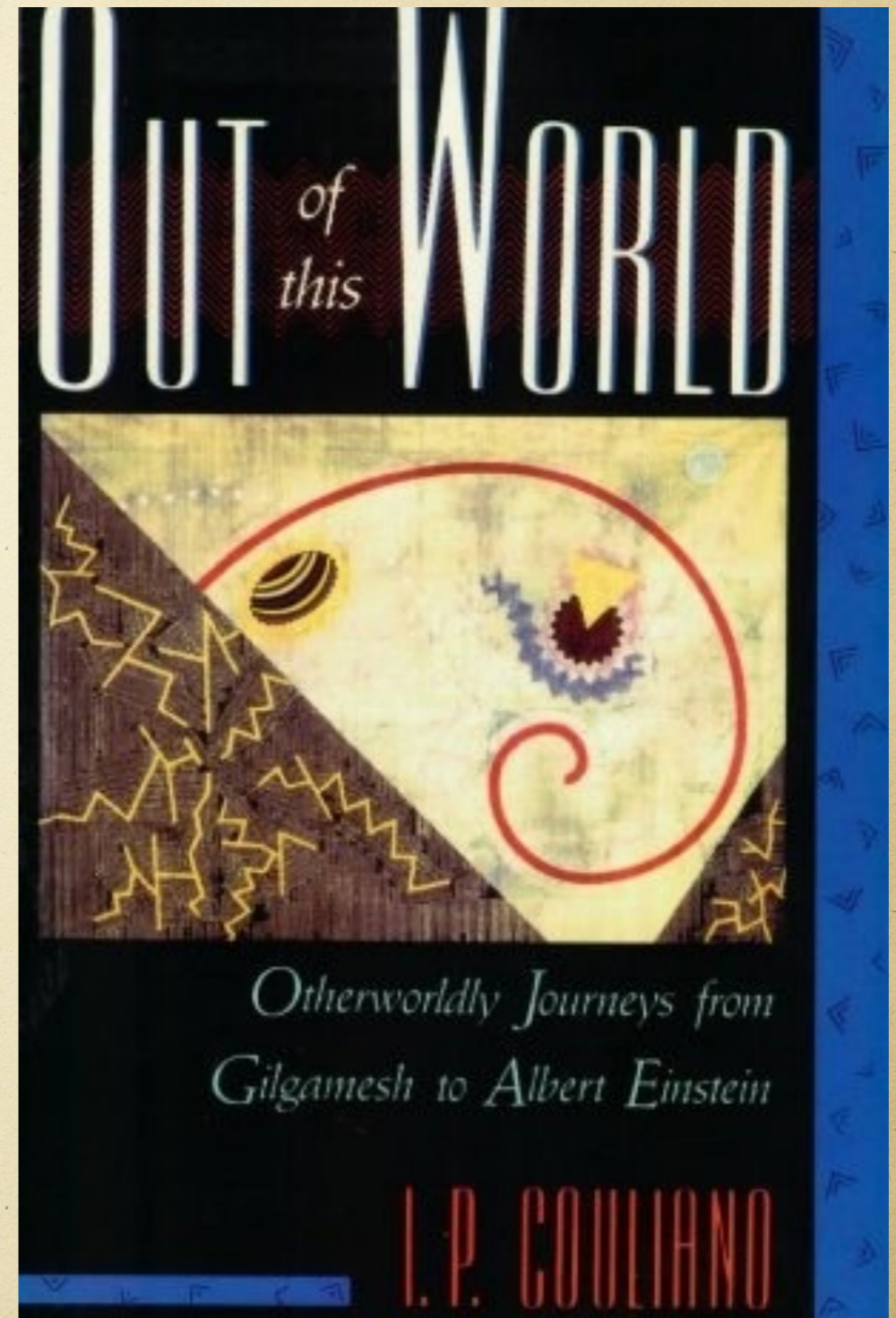
Reflexively *Re*-reading “Miracle”

- STORY: page 372
- “Do loved ones bid farewell from beyond the grave?” By John Blake, CNN (September 23, 2011): cnn.com/2011/09/23/living/crisis-apparitions



Toolkit of the 4th-Dimension

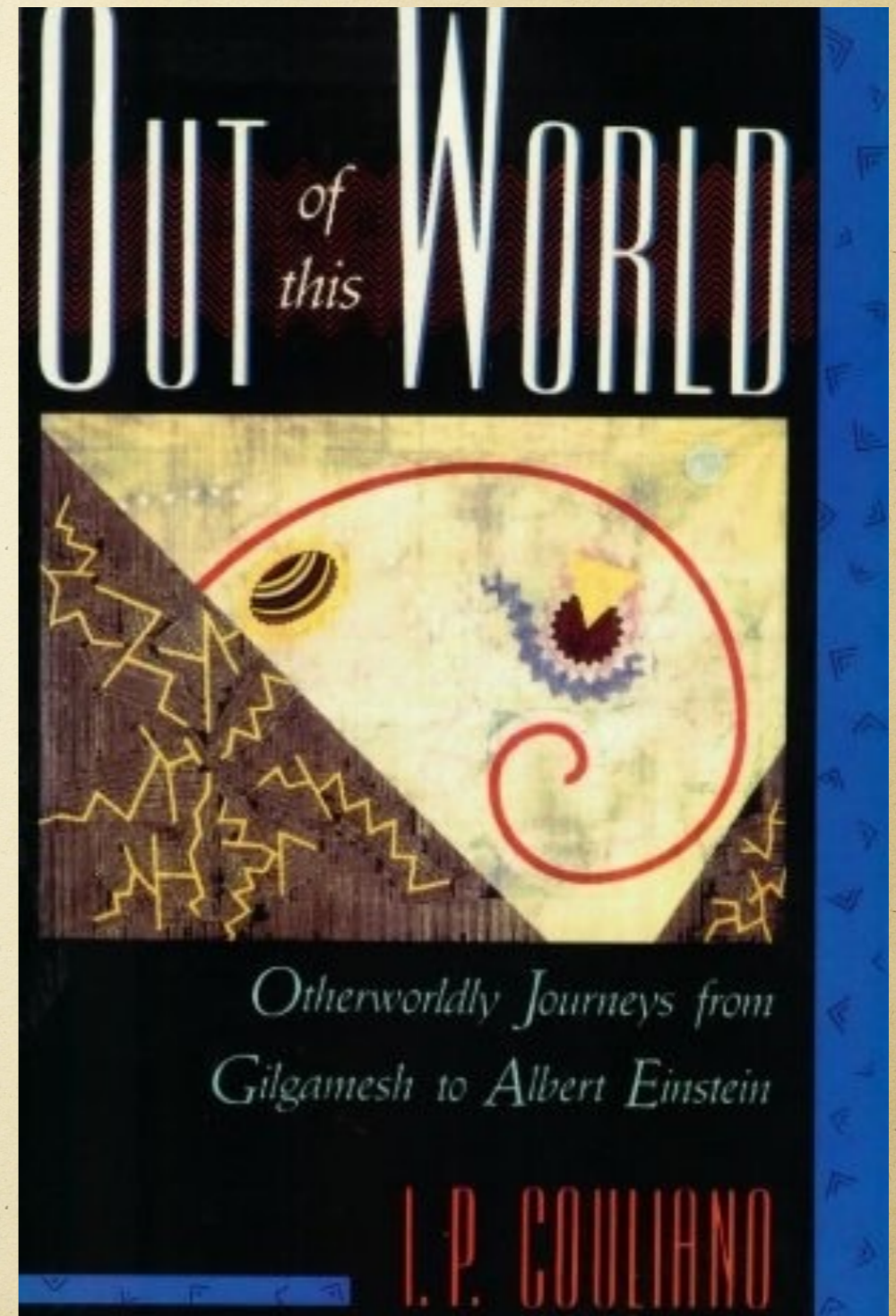
- Historian of religions at University of Chicago (worked with Mircea Eliade)
- Following Einstein 1905 theory of relativity (*space-time*), Couliano speculates that most “miraculous” experiences reported in ecstatic states and otherworldly journeys could be a function of “mind space” that exists in four spatial dimensions and relates to our 3D nature *much as* our 3D nature might related to a being restricted to a 2D world — just like Edward Abbot’s *Flatland* (1883).



(1950–1991)

Toolkit of the 4th-Dimension

- Not “supernatural”
- “Physics and mathematics are responsible to a large extent for the return of interest in mystical ways of knowledge...not limited to three dimensions.”
- J. B. S. Haldane (scientist): “The universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose.”



(1950–1991)

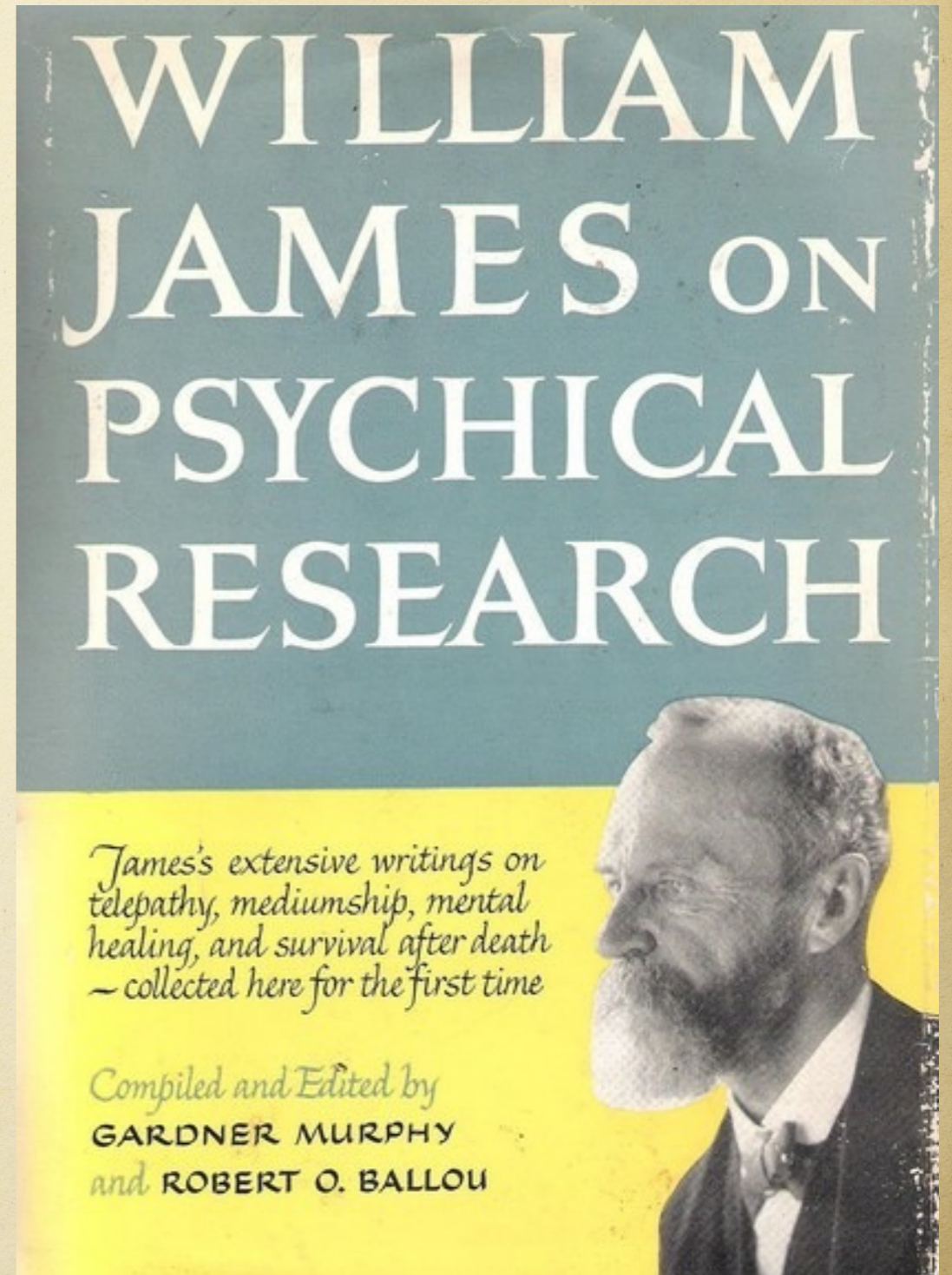
Myers-James Filter Thesis

- Frederic Myers, James' close friend and colleague
- Subliminal self: *sub-* (“below”) + *limen* (“threshold/liminal space”)
- Vast region of human personality that exists and works *subliminally*,
- and may be responsible for periodic extraordinary capabilities — through an *occasionally leaky/permeable margin*
- Also the source of creativity



Myers-James Filter Thesis

- “We with our lives are like islands in the sea...
- there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir.
- Our ‘normal’ consciousness is circumscribed for adaptation to our external earthly environment,
- but the fence is weak in spots, and fitful influences from beyond leak in, showing the otherwise unverifiable common connection”

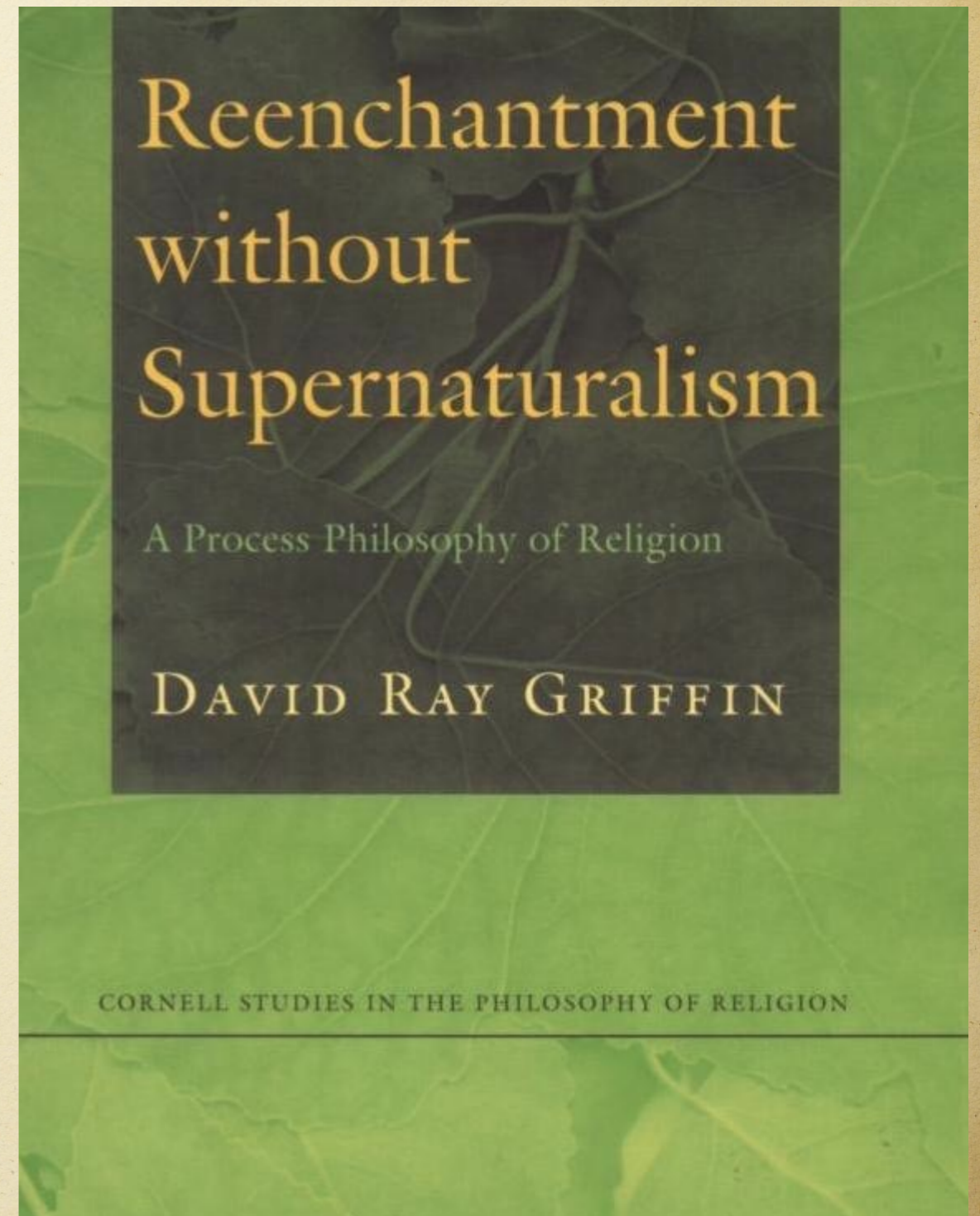


(1909)

Myers-James Filter Thesis

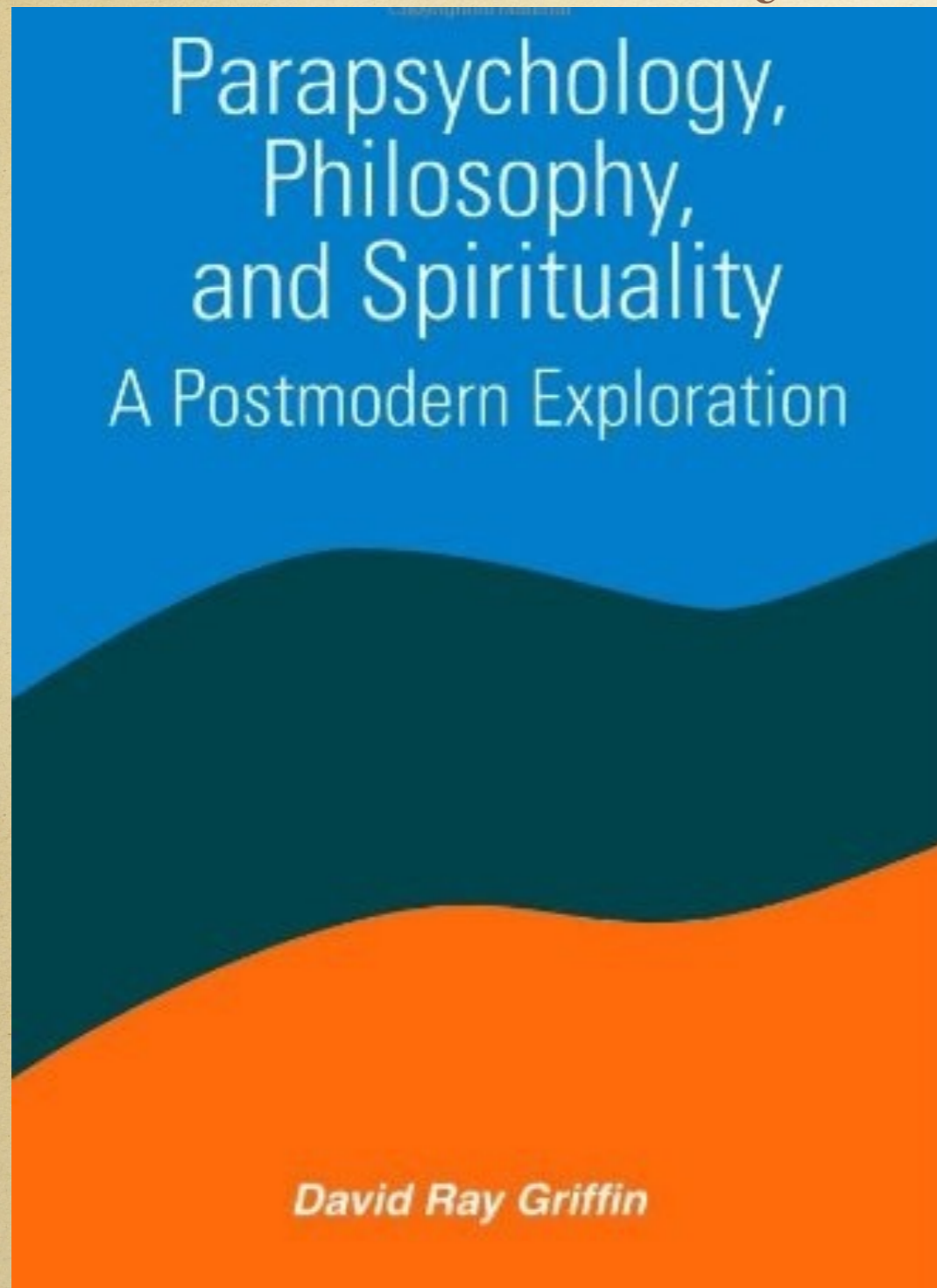
Panpsychism

- people “individuate” out of a psychophysical sea
- *(not unlike floating icebergs freezing into shape then melting back into endless waves of ocean).*

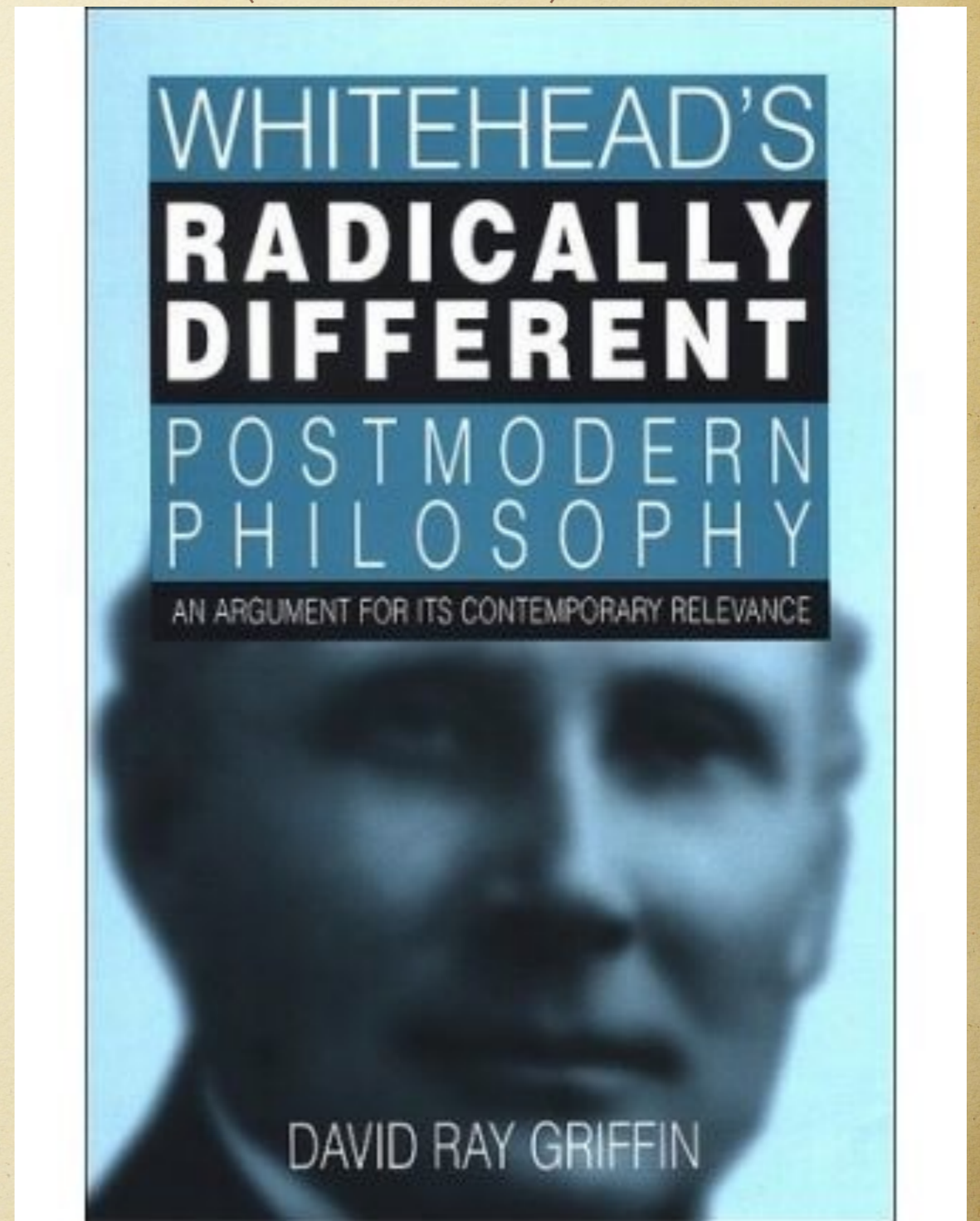


2000

David Ray Griffin (1939-)



SUNY, 1997

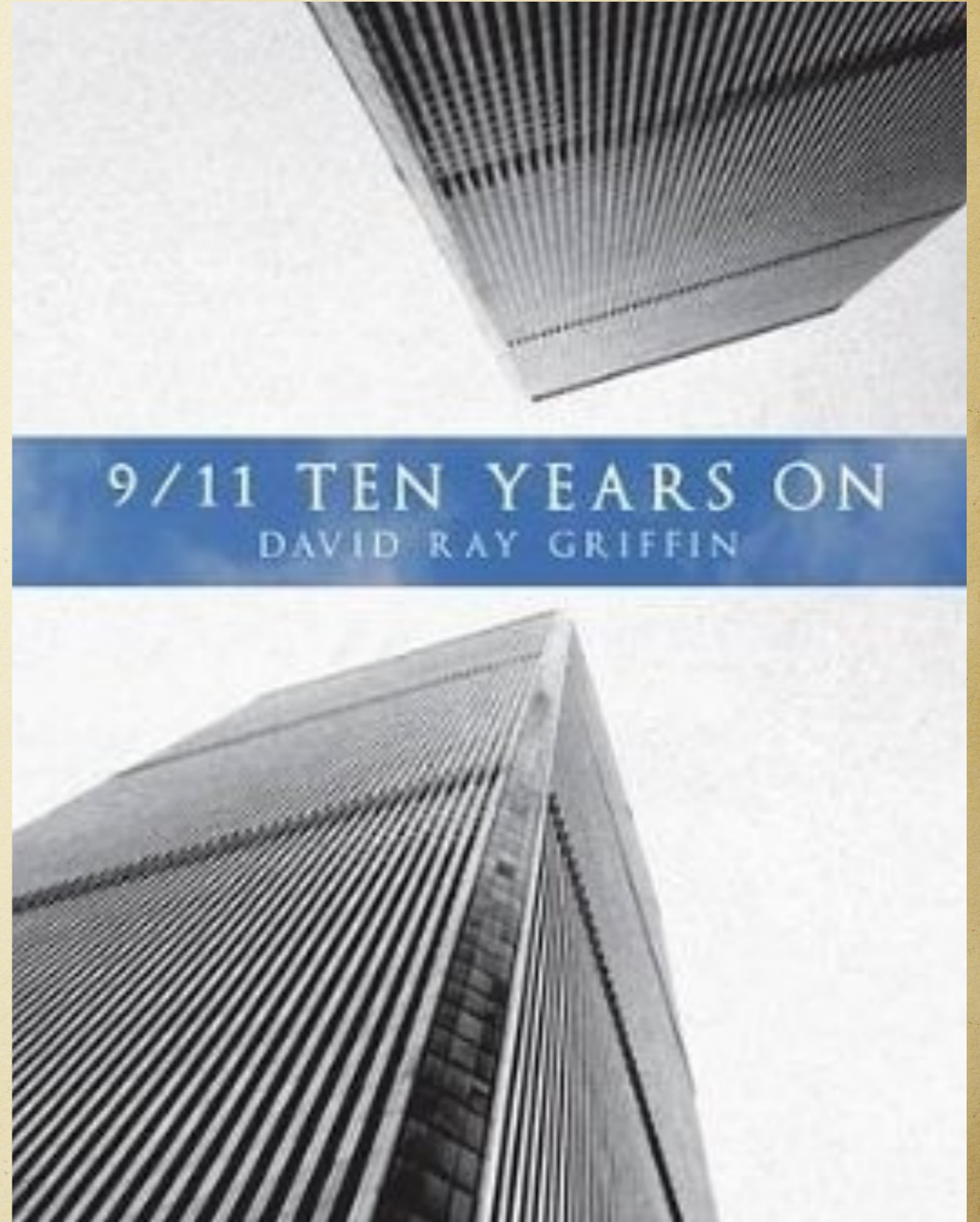


SUNY, 2007

Off the deep end...



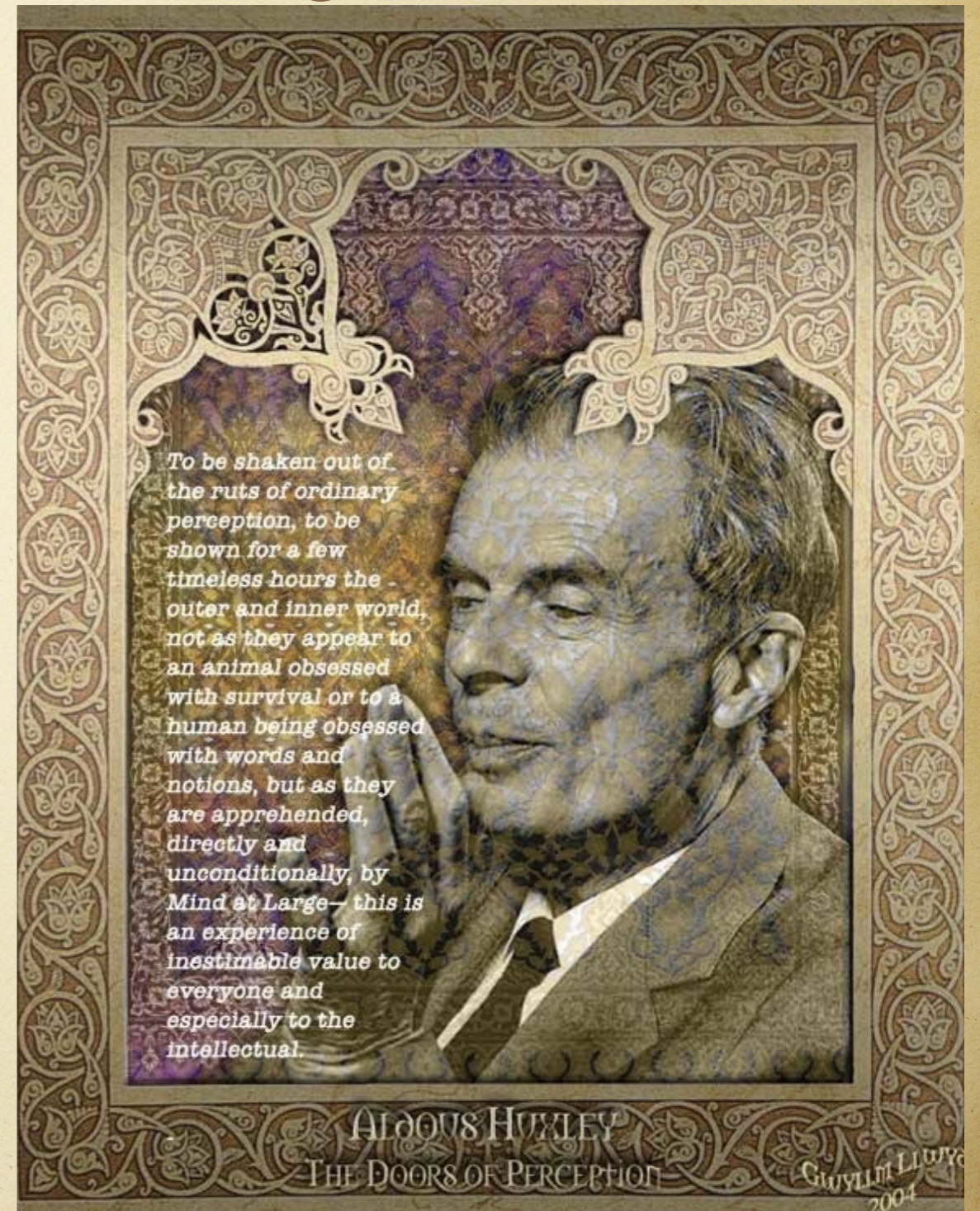
1939-



2011

The Mind at Large

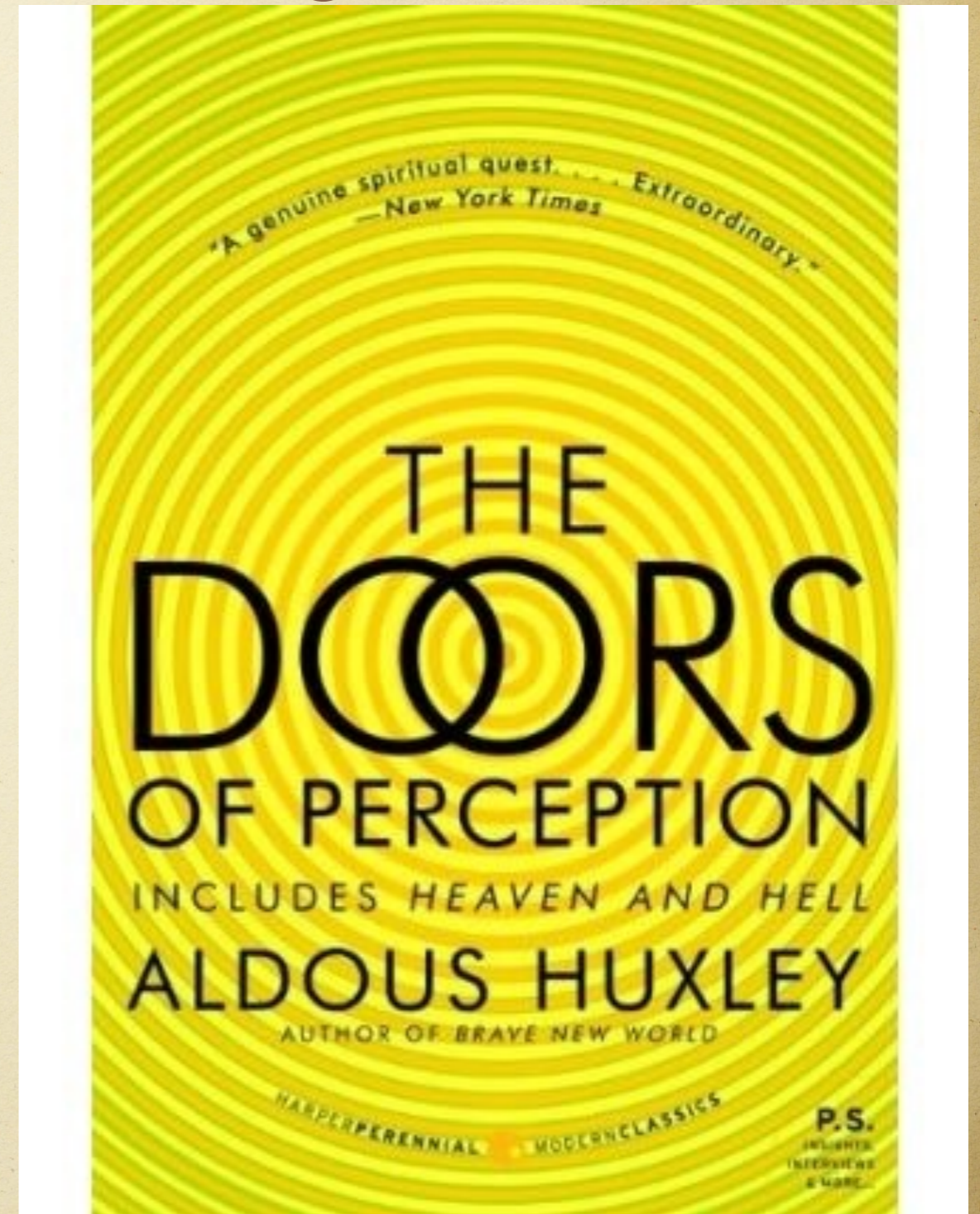
- Huxley draws on Asian religion and western poetic and philosophic sources to describe what he experienced during an eight-hour “trip” on 4/10th of a gram of mescaline.
- Less biochemical cause. More like a *trigger* or *door*.
- Supervised by British psychiatrist, who coined in their correspondence, the term psychedelic (“*mind-revealing*”)



1954

The Mind at Large

- Mind-at-Large, equivalent to “Brahman” or “Buddha Nature”
- William Blake: “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is: infinite” —*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
- In this model, mind is *not* the brain. The mind is filtered through the brain with all its mind-boggling evolutionary/neurological/cultural/linguistic/emotional/political/historical complexities.

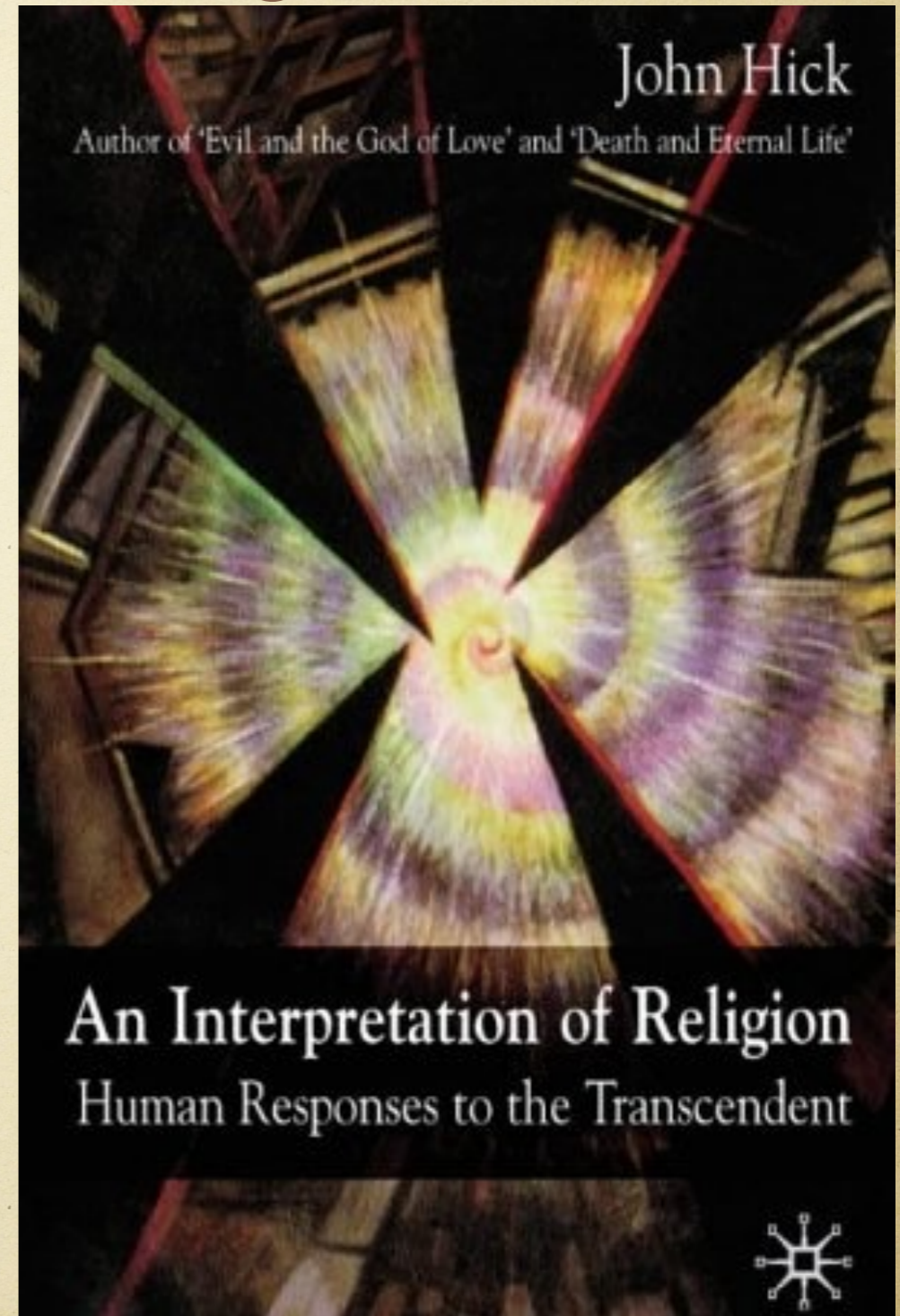


1954

The Mind at Large

We are:

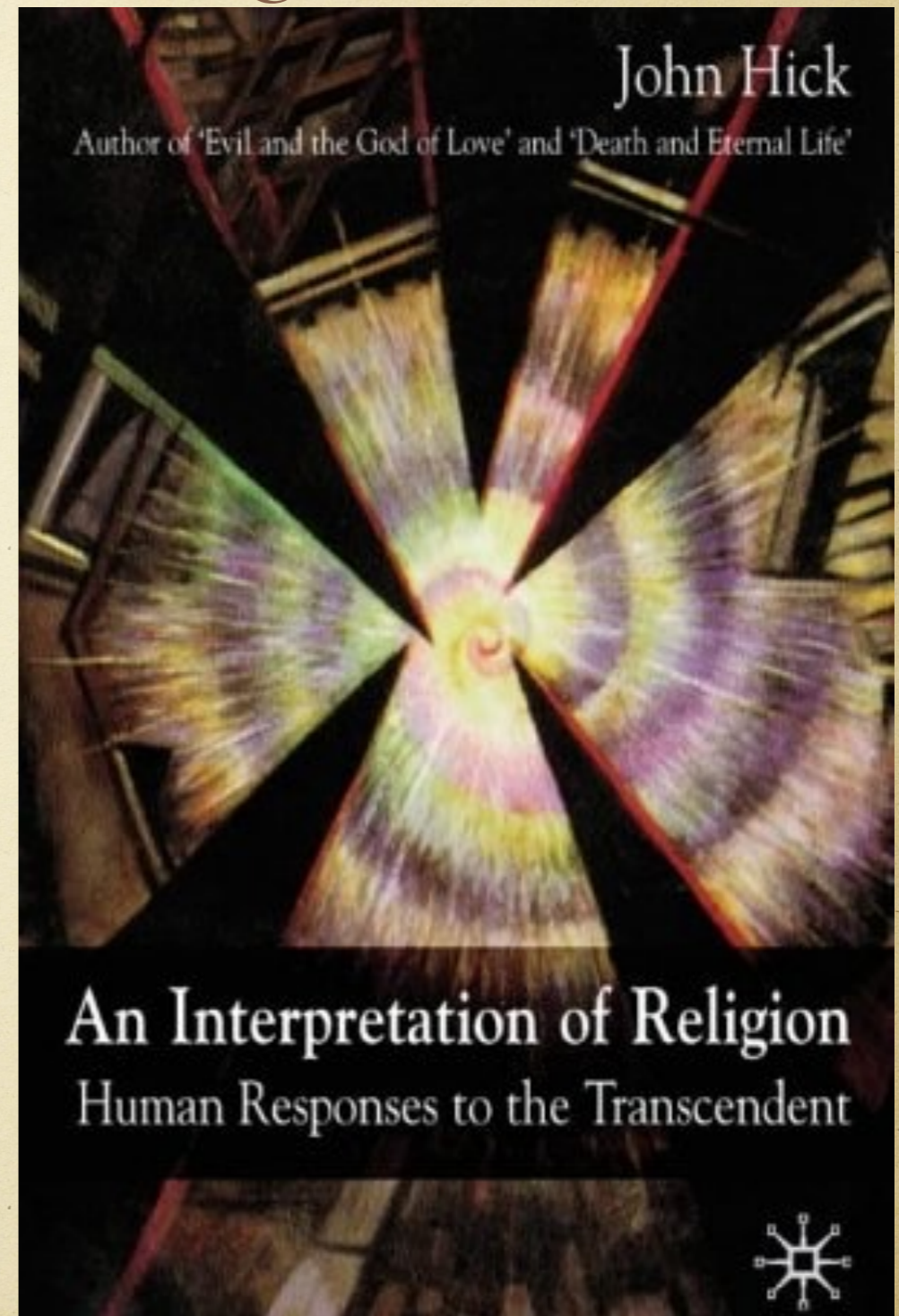
- local context and construction,
- a kind of cosmic consciousness that is universal/irreducible.
- Radical difference & radical sameness
- [“Comparative Acts”]



2004

The Mind at Large

- Because the brain's main function is to limit/select incoming information, there is always distortion;
- yet something is indeed coming through.
- That is why religions are at once fallible & fantastic, at once false & true.

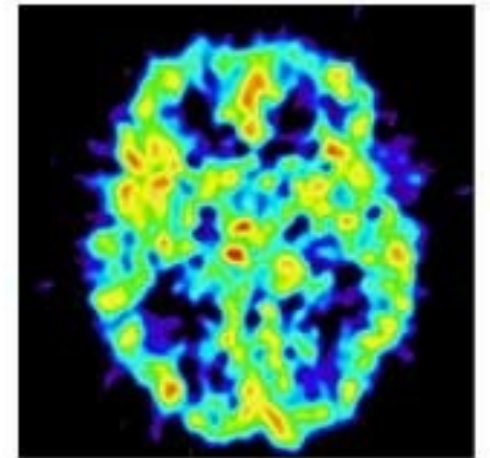


2004

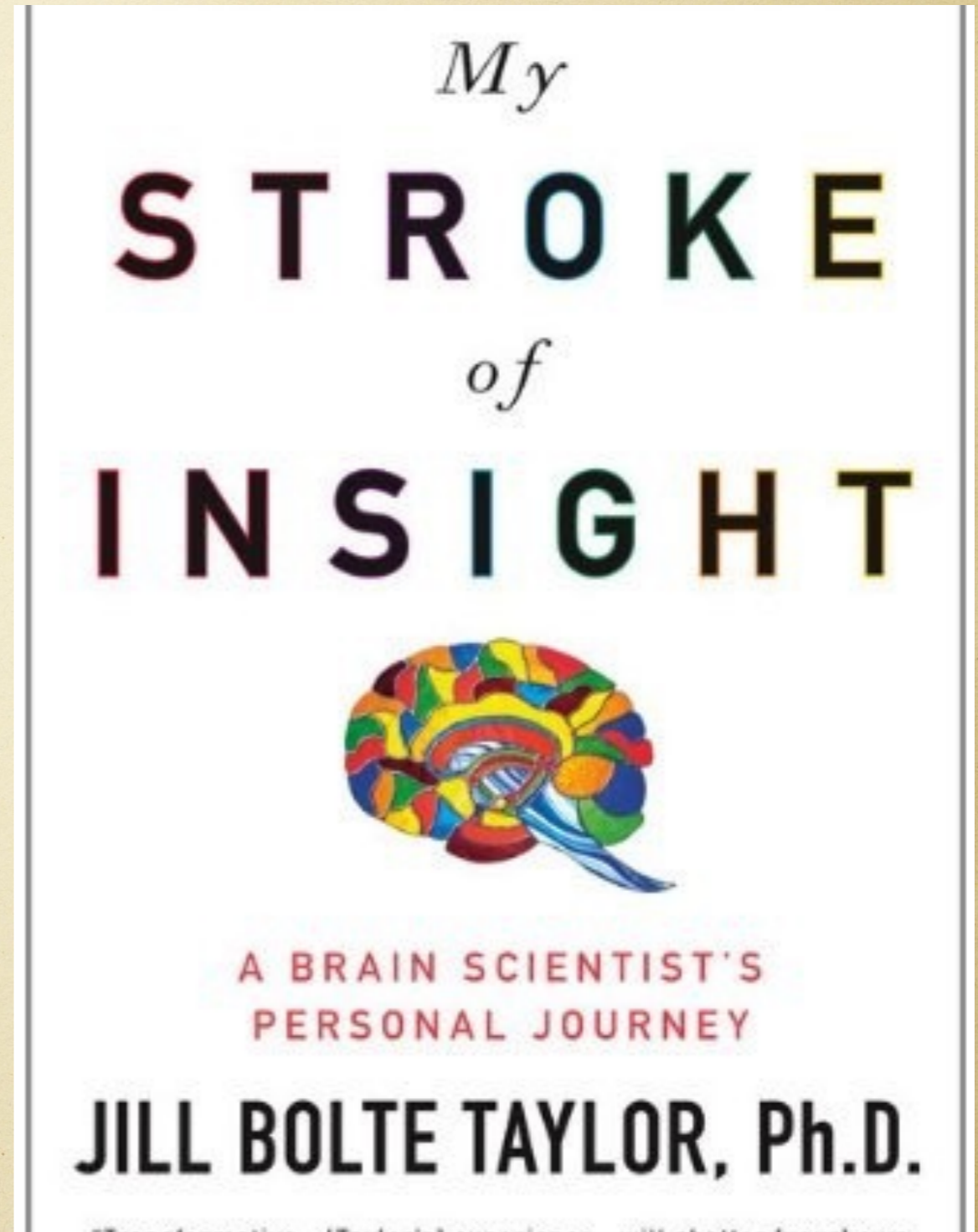
Modern Neuroscience

Mind

- purely local, material process
- that blips out when the brain blips out.



[ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_s_powerful_stroke_of_insight](https://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_s_powerful_stroke_of_insight)



Reflexivity of Using Brain: Looking at the Looker

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Left brain

I am the left brain.

I am a scientist. A mathematician.

I love the familiar. I categorize. I am accurate. Linear.

Analytical. Strategic. I am practical.

Always in control. A master of words and language.

Realistic. I calculate equations and play with numbers.

I am order. I am logic.

I know exactly who I am.

Right brain

I am the right brain.

I am creativity. A free spirit. I am passion.

Yearning. Sensuality. I am the sound of roaring laughter.

I am taste. The feeling of sand beneath bare feet.

I am movement. Vivid colors.

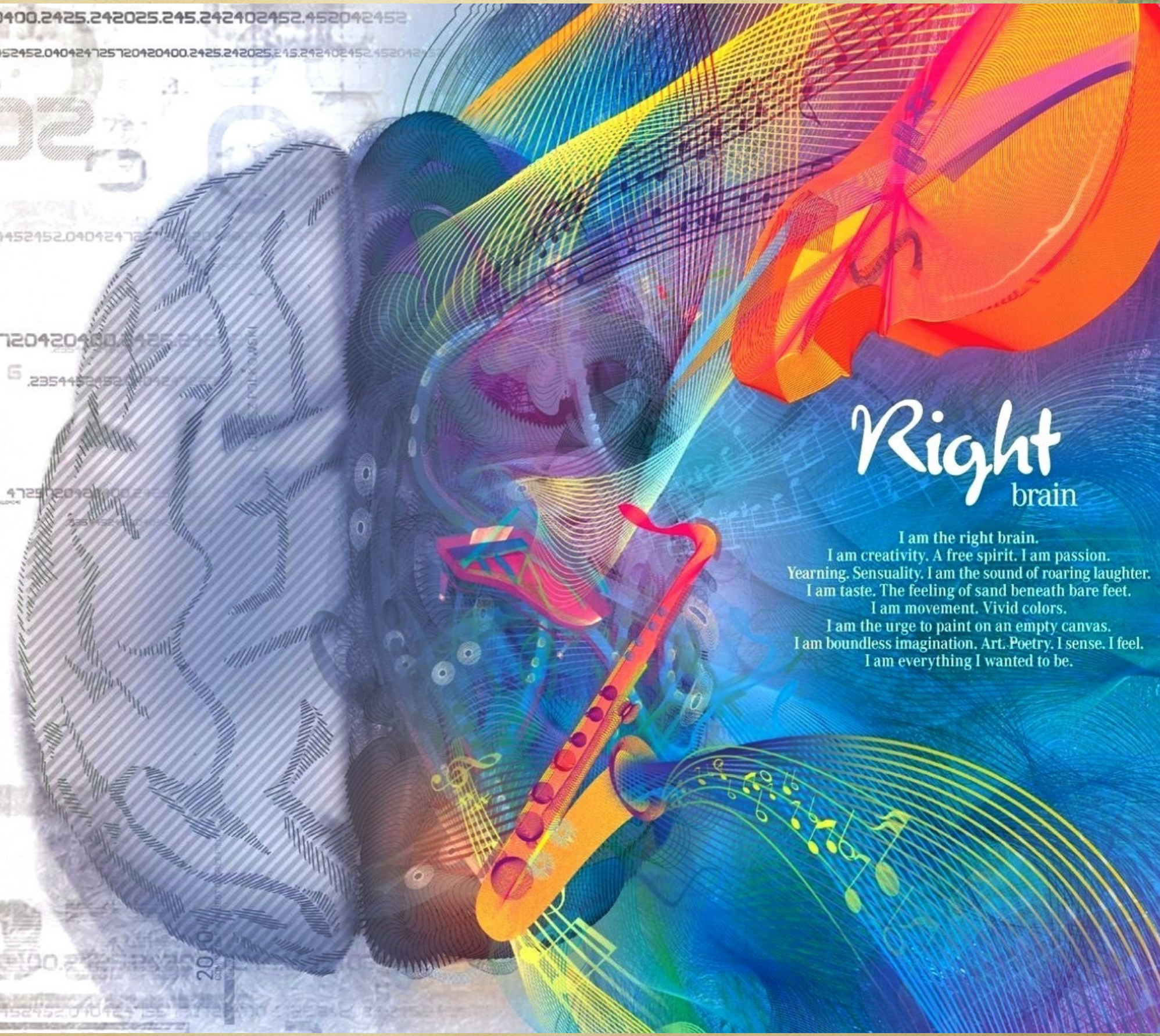
I am the urge to paint on an empty canvas.

I am boundless imagination. Art. Poetry. I sense. I feel.

I am everything I wanted to be.

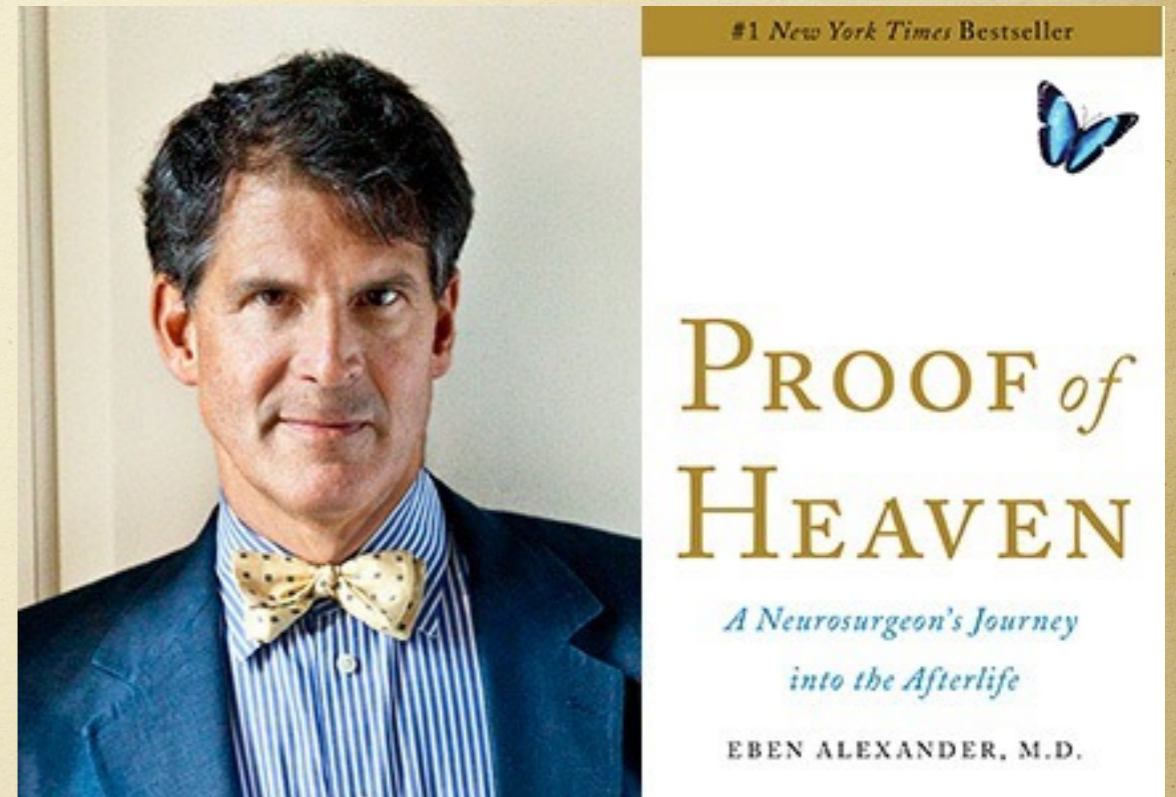
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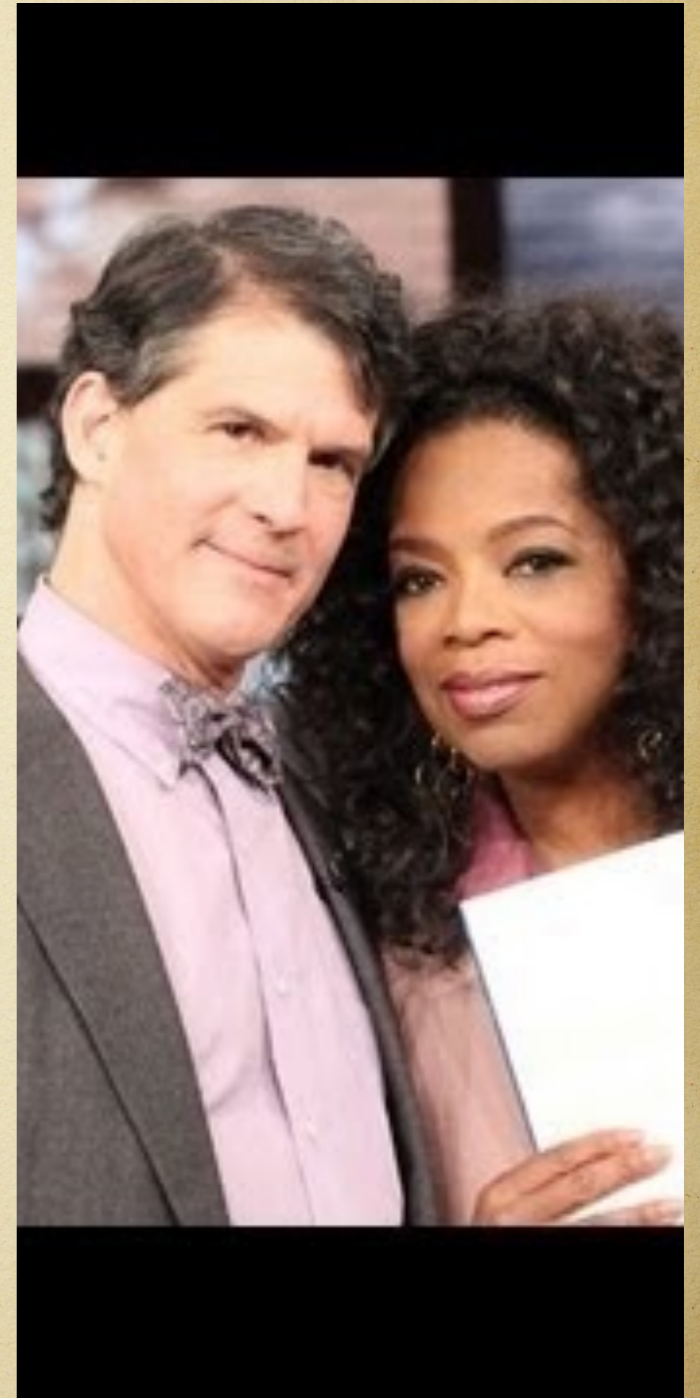
Eben Alexander's Cosmic Coma

- 15 years on faculty of Harvard Medical School
- Age 54: deep coma for a week with e-coli meningitis:
- “world of consciousness that existed completely free of the limitations of my physical bairn”
- Kripal: modern mystical experience *within* an evolutionary framework.



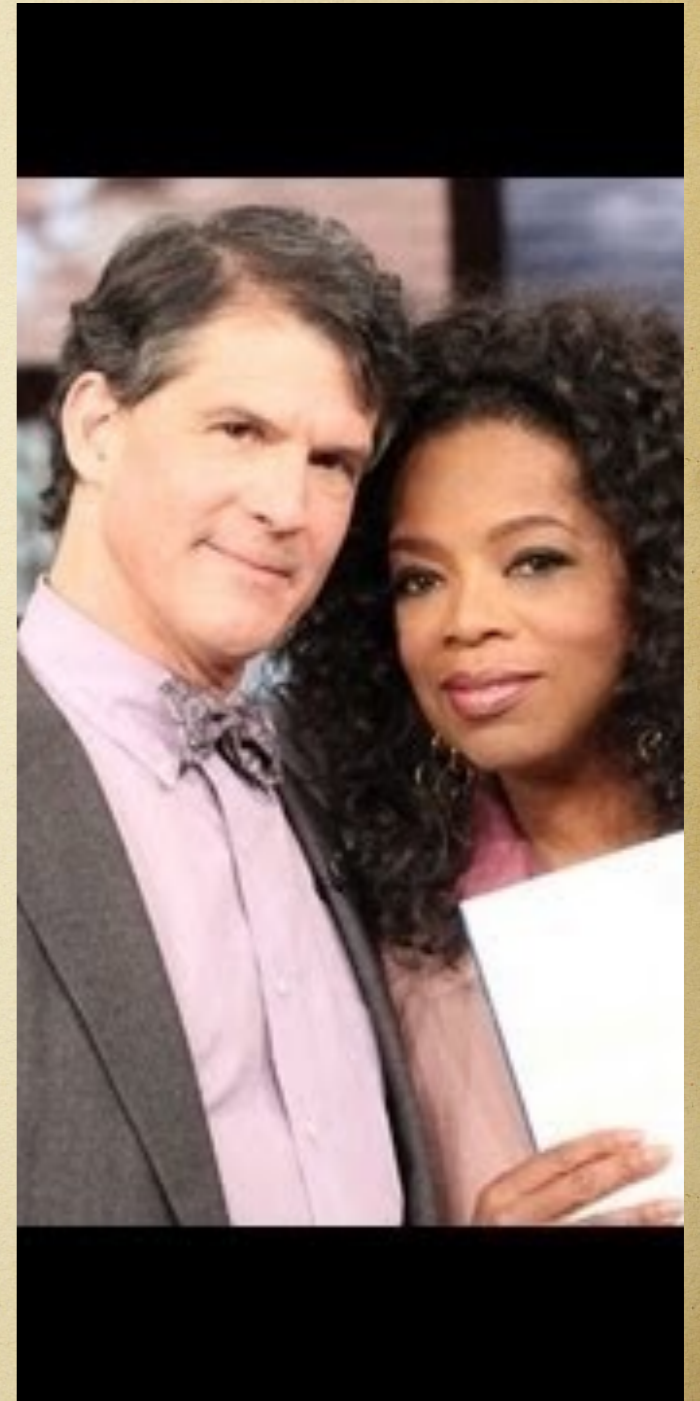
Alexander's "What it was like":

- *“being a chimpanzee,*
- *becoming human for a single day to experience all the wonders of human knowledge,*
- *then returning to one's chimp friends and trying to tell them what it was like knowing several different Romance languages, the calculus, and the immense scale of the universe.”*

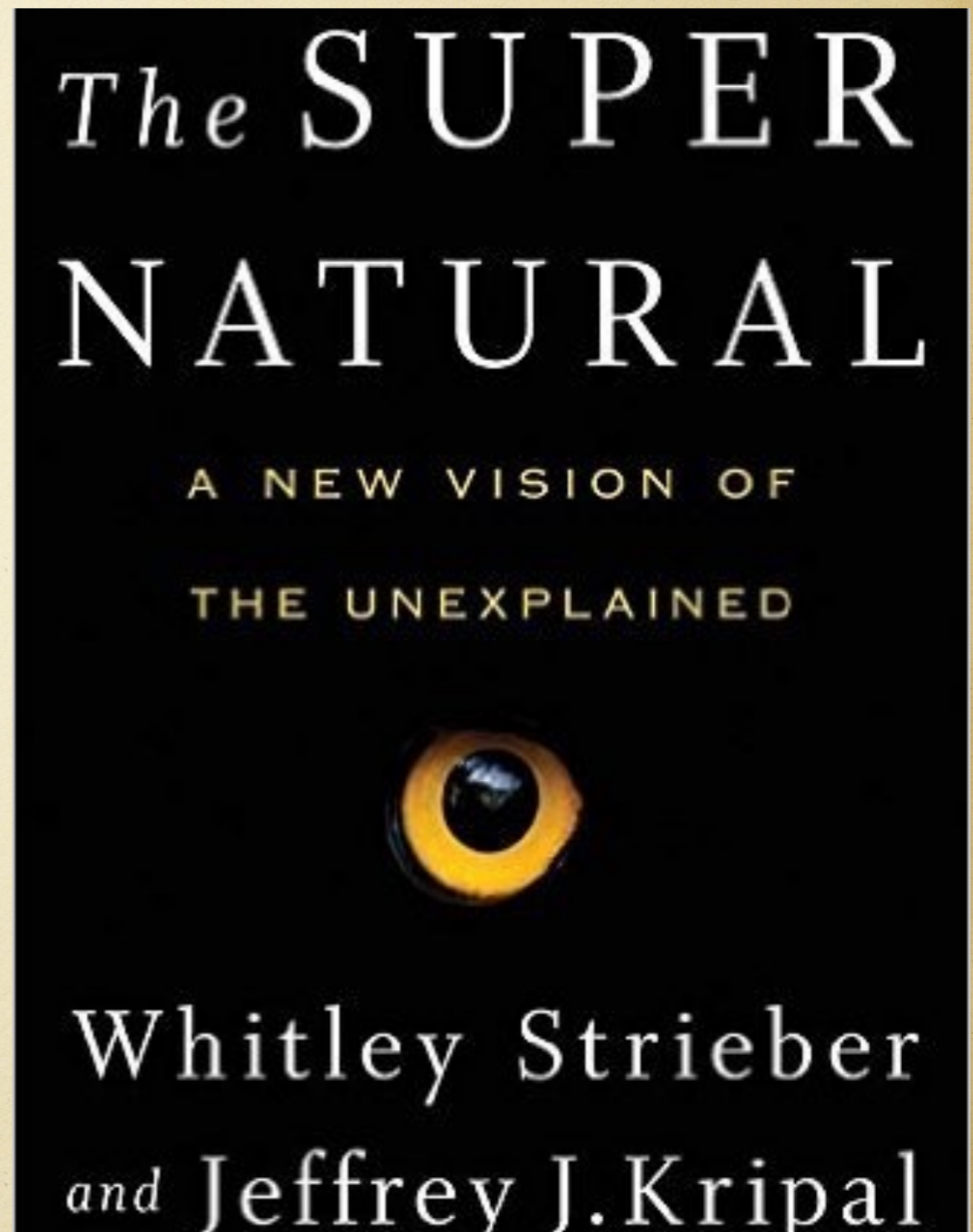


Kripal's Reading:

- “Alexander appears to identify the stories told in the stained glass window with the light itself,
- His critics can't recognize that there may be real light coming through the window of his brain.”

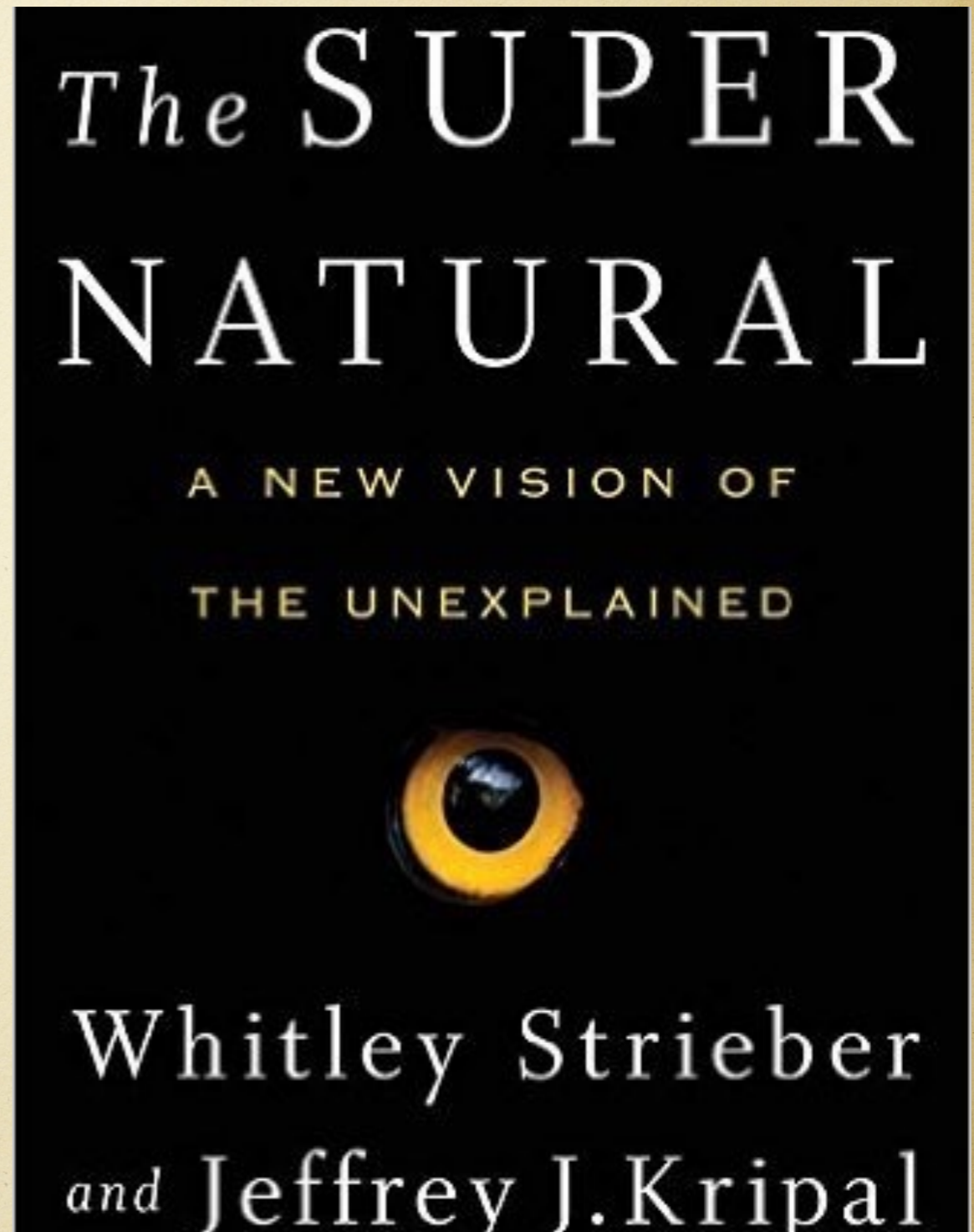


- **COMPARE:** Data is just data. It means nothing until it is classified and compared toward some end. *(Recognize your choices and your role in the selective process.)*
- **MAKE A CUT:** Make a distinction between what has appeared and what is—and recognize that, as an embodied ego, you have no reliable access to the latter: *you yourself are a biological medium or neurological filter.*



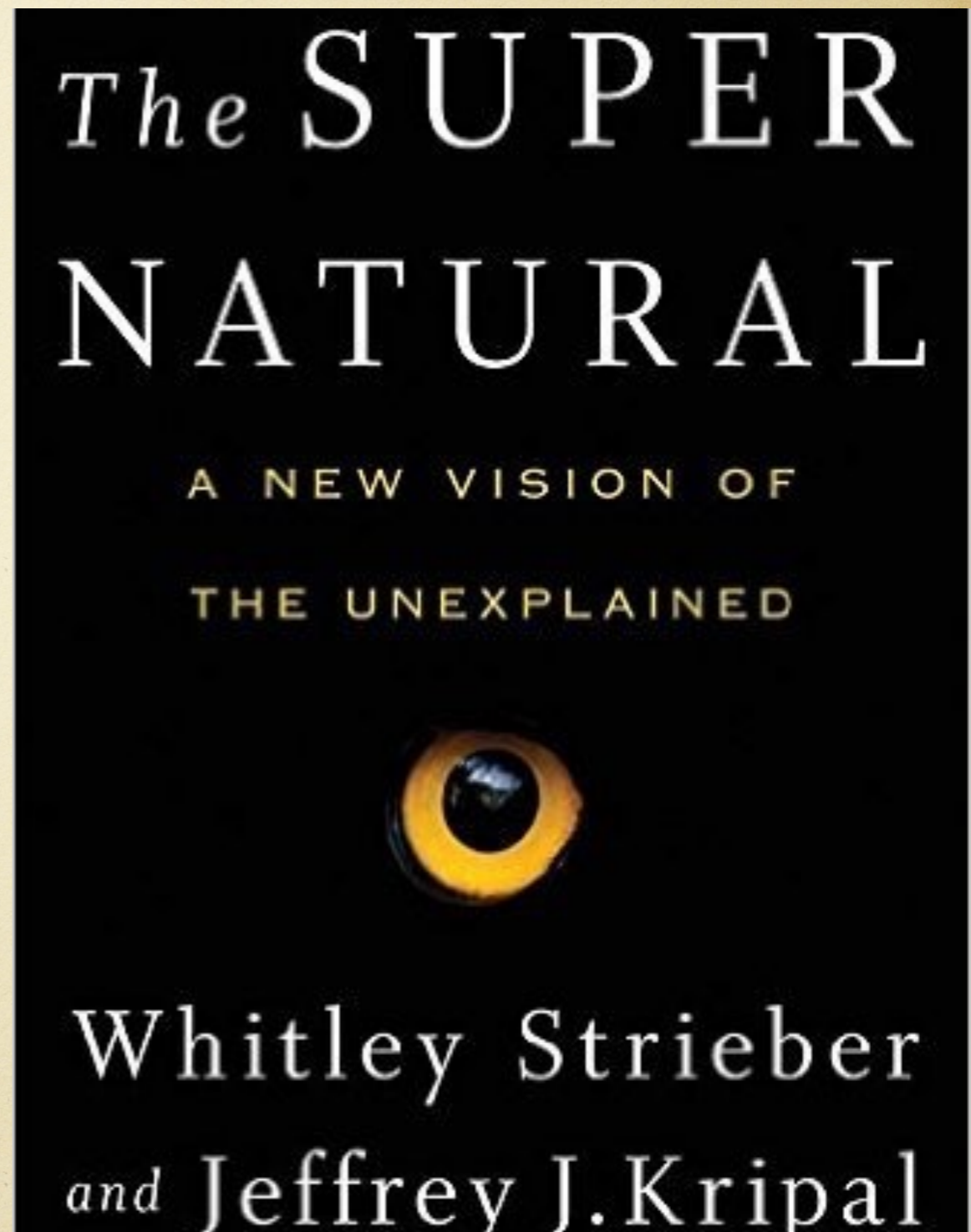
2016

- **HISTORICALLY CONTEXTUALIZE:** Place the events that you are trying to understand both in the general history of religions (larger global patterns) and in their own more immediate historical, social, and political contexts.
- **INTERPRET AND DOUBLY IMAGINE:** Consider the possibility that some of these encounters may be mediated expressions of another form of mind (maybe ours) making contact with the human ego.

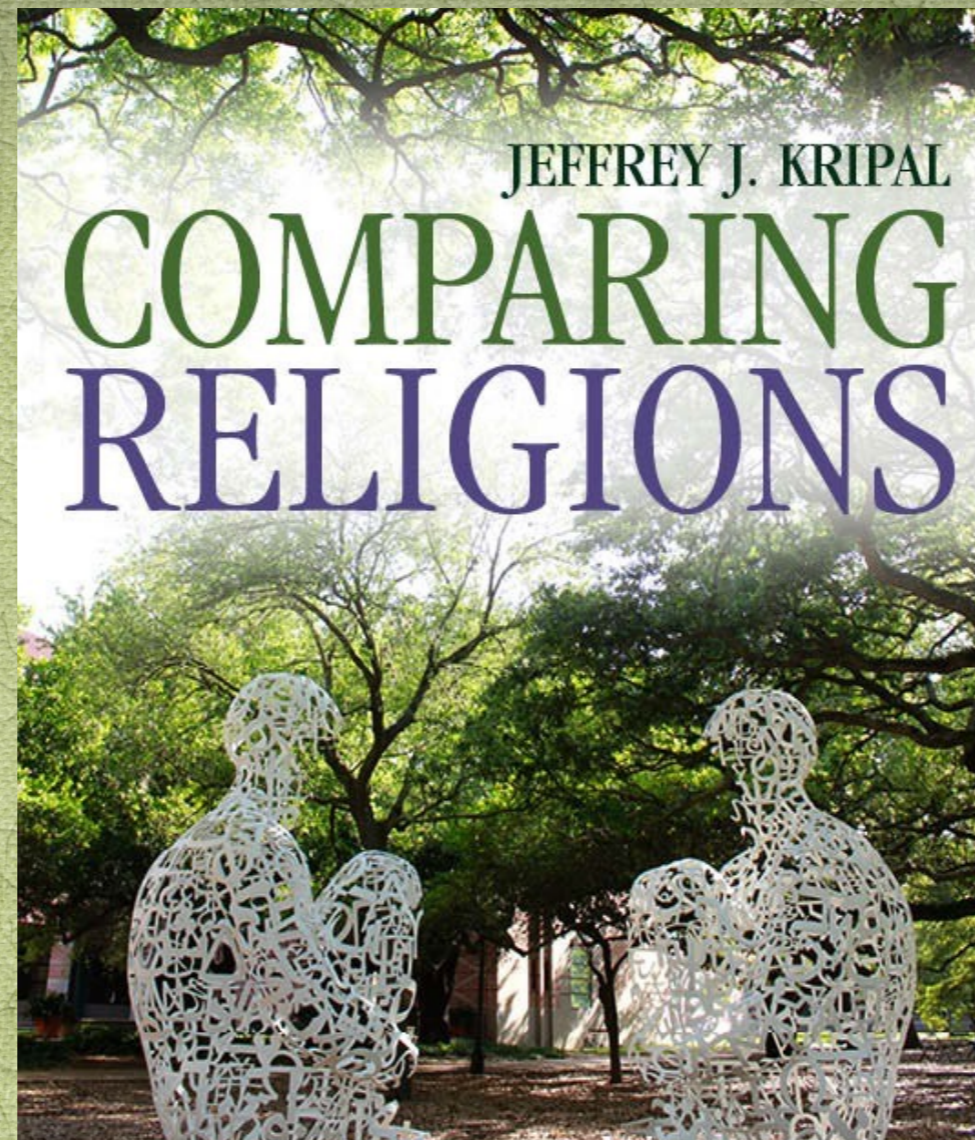


2016

- **SAY AWAY:** Learn to live with paradox and to sit with the question.
- **SAY AGAIN:** Look to unexplained events—weird “coincidences,” striking dreams, drop-your-jaw moments.
- What we can change is the filter, the medium, that is: *us*.



2016



Epilogue from Houston

Ending from Where You Are



E A R T H R I S E

Suddenly, from behind the rim of the moon, in long, slow-motion moments of immense majesty, there emerges a sparkling blue and white jewel, a light, delicate sky-blue sphere laced with slowly swirling veils of white, rising gradually like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery. It takes more than a moment to fully realize this is Earth . . . home.

- Astronaut Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14

You develop an instant global consciousness,
a people orientation, an intense
dissatisfaction with the state of the world,
and a compulsion to do something about it.

From out there on the moon,
international politics look so petty.

You want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck
and drag him a quarter of a million miles out and say,
'Look at that, you son of a bitch'.

-Astronaut,
Edgar D. Mitchell



“Political borders and nation-states — *much like religions* — are imaginary lines drawn on maps to mark the temporary results of the ongoing debates, compromises, and violences of human history.

No such borders, and no such religions, can be seen from space.

It’s all one blue planet floating in the seeming infinity of space-time.”

“This course has been about launching ourselves beyond local borders and temporal boundaries”

Earthrise

How Man First Saw
the Earth



Robert Poole

2010, Yale UP

Kripal

“The future will depend partly, maybe largely, on whether we and our children can step back and out of our own ethnic, religious, and cultural identities and learn to live in a world that is *irreducibly plural & irreducibly the same*.

Our futures will almost certainly depend on whether this we Earthlings can embody such a *cosmic* perspective in our personal, social, political, professional, and religious lives.”



Hubble Deep Field

Touchstones

Pluralism

Pragmatism

Progressivism

(vs. exclusivism, 2nd-hand, status quo)

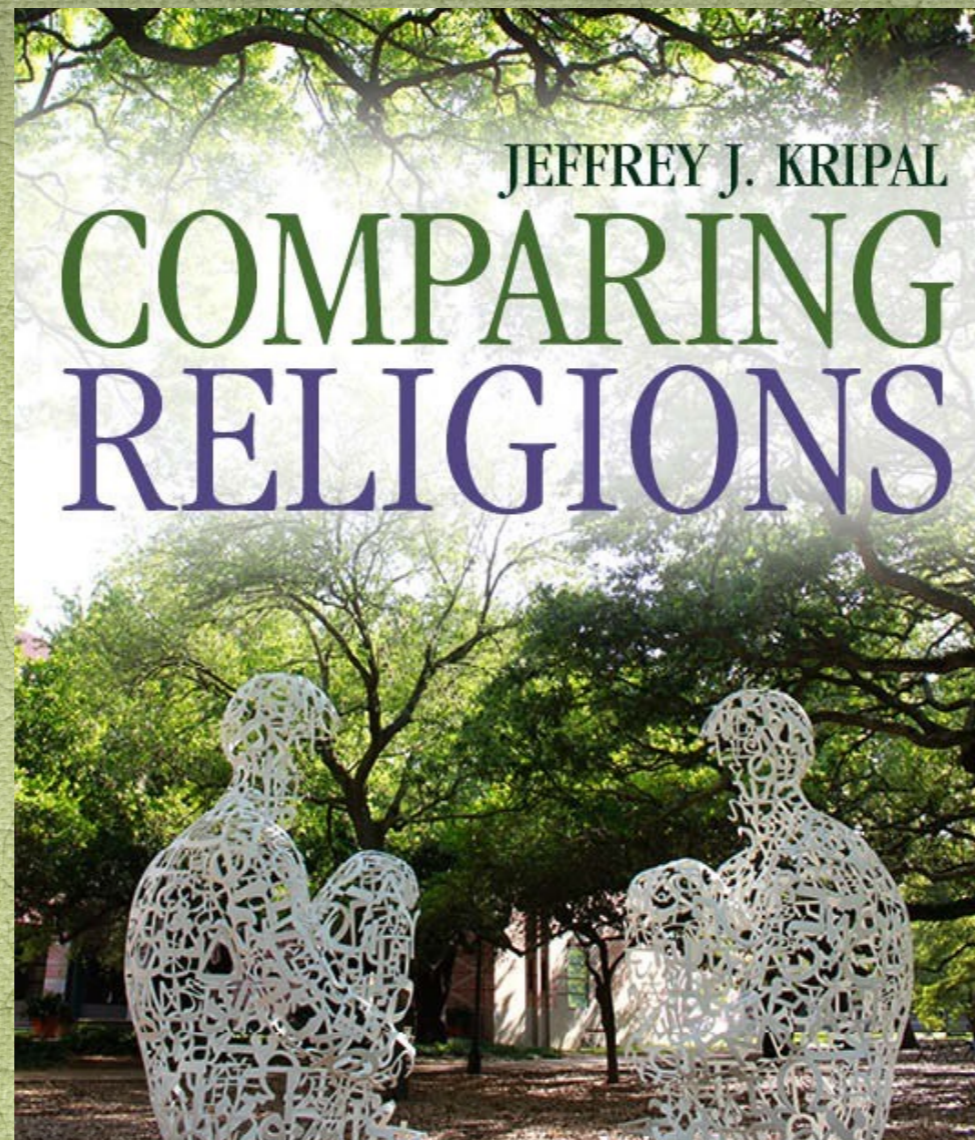
Conveyer Belts

Egocentric —> Ethnocentric —>

Geocentric —> **Cosmo-centric**



Hubble Deep Field



What has resonated most
with you about this course?

How do you now see/approach religion differently?

Evaluations