18 Worlds 2

This chapter is the second to describe themes in world views. The first part of this chapter continues from the previous chapter while the second part dwells on an important world view. As with the worlds in the previous chapter, assess the worlds in these ways: Can we think of this world as a teaching game? Can we think of this world otherwise? What does this world teach us? What kind of behavior does this world call for? Does this world call for us to act along the lines of Jesus' message mixed with practicality? Can we graduate (succeed spiritually) in this world? When we graduate, what do we graduate to? If we have to leave this world to graduate, what do leave this world for? Can we use the lessons of this world to live in this world?

PART 1: Continuation.

Ever-Interesting World.

I find the world continually interesting even if often exasperating. When I was young, there were no small computers. Every decade a scientific change opens new doors and asks new questions. Every hundred years, we get a new scientific revolution. Within the next few decades, we will have a good idea how the world started in the Big Bang and what will happen as the universe gets older. Every fifty years sees a major new artistic movement. Even though the new art says the same old things, the new art says them in different ways that are worth noticing. I cannot see all the movies that I want within my lifetime, let alone read all the novels or watch all the TV. People never tire asking which sports team will be number one this year, and I even like watching golf on TV. One lifetime is not enough to learn about one major form of life such as flowering plants or monkeys. One lifetime is not enough to learn one way of human life, such as being a farmer, programmer, Buddhist, Christian, Thai, or Oregonian. It is fun to know other people and other ways of life. There is no end to getting to know the world and various ways of life. I can imagine an end to it in the future when the world is populated by super smart beings, but I am not worried that I will get bored. Some lucky people seem to find the world an intrinsically fascinating place.

Boring World.

On the other hand, it doesn't matter which college teams wins the national championship in what sport. Maybe this batch of neighbors is temporarily quiet and clean but soon they will move out, only to be replaced by a batch that is loud and dirty. Loud and dirty is more common than clean and quiet. Movie stars look good for a few years but it doesn't last. Plots of new movies are the same as plots of old movies. Even if we understand what happened at the Big Bag, that knowledge won't change the basic character of life on Earth. Most people don't understand science, and most people can't assimilate new art after they are about twenty years old. Politics is the same old game, even if now we have bad democracy where once we had bad royalty. The real rulers in democracies, rich people, govern about as badly as old aristocrats used to do. Once you learn about a few animals or plants, you know about most of them. You can learn the basics of any way of human life, such as being a farmer or Christian, in a few weeks, and then new ways of life are only repetition-with-slight-variation rather than anything really new.

We do not need to "feel all ways of life from the inside" so as to understand all of them well enough. A Christian can learn about Islam, and vice versa, in a few weeks. After you get to know a few other ways of life, then a few more do not make much difference. After a while, deep down, all people and all ways of life are pretty much the same. Yes, you can make a TV show about "nothing" but even that gets boring after a while. It does not take a even a small portion of a single short lifetime to figure out that life is not mostly about anything intrinsically interesting but about fussing so as to produce a batch of new people, children and grandchildren, who go on to do more fussing to do the same thing.

Many ordinary people can be diverted by the never-ending superficial change of the world such as game shows on TV but that does not make the world intrinsically interesting or intrinsically good. That kind of entertainment is for idiots. Any person who might be interesting him-herself will see enough to know that the world is not interesting, and so being interesting defeats itself, and being interesting is more a burden than a reward.

This view is more than cranky pessimism. It is based on a survey of how things seem to be. This view is not necessarily the same as a fallen world, although a fallen world and a boring world could coincide.

The role of boredom behind ideas of the world is so important that I take it up again in another part of this chapter below.

Progress; Continually Better World.

Alternatively, the world is getting better. Three hundred years ago, people lived under aristocracies but now about half the world lives under democracies that work more-or-less. Three hundred years ago, most of the food was grown with animal power, and a farmer could only feed two or three people other than him-herself. Now one farmer feeds as many as a hundred other people, and the other people have time to work in science and art. In some places, for some times, the world does stink. But on the whole that is not true. If you are not in one of the bad places, try to see outside yourself.

Progress is an Illusion.

John Lennon "It's getting so much better all the time".

Every time we learn how to grow more food, people have more babies, and, in the end, everybody ends up about the same as they always were. The average level of life in the United States has not gotten better in the decades since 1970s, it has gotten worse. Even if, in some way, people are materially better off, they are not better off intellectually, artistically, or spiritually. People are just as ignorant, dull, stupid, and selfish as they ever were. To gain our little temporary bits of material well being, we have poisoned the world, drastically changed the climate, destroyed biodiversity, and turned vast areas of the world into a desert. People are not freer in general; they just think they are because the media says so. The mass of people do not decide elections and govern their own country now any more than they did four hundred years ago but we have to go through the pretense that they do.

A hundred years from now, when people are gestated in bottles and machines regulate most of the world, then we will see more clearly that we are not better off.

The World Could Have Been Better but We "Blew It".

This is my basic position, and I will not go through it again. This world, and, I think, most evolved worlds, are not intrinsically good or bad, or progressive or stagnant. It depends on what the dominant evolved intellectual-aesthetic-moral life form makes of them. We did not make the best of our world. We did not make it good enough in general. It still might be good enough, and interesting enough, for some groups of people, some individuals, and whatever results from the future interaction of humans and machines.

Good or Bad for Me.

"I cannot decide if, on the whole, the world is interesting or boring, getting better or worse, and is a good place or a bad place. I cannot decide if the world worthwhile or not. All I can do is evaluate it for me and my immediate circle."

In this case, the relevant question might be whether or not the world is an adventure, and whether it is adventure enough.

The Same Might be Good.

In some ways the world gets better, and in some ways it gets worse. It some ways it is interesting but even what is interesting now gets boring later. When the world is boring now, interesting things do seem to turn up, but then they get boring in their turn. I can't tell if, on the whole, to an objective observer, the world really is interesting or boring, good or bad. It seems as if, on the whole, the world might be about the same but that the world is different in different times and places. If so, that is good enough for me as long as I can get to the places that are interesting and getting better. A world that is not overall better off worse but that has a lot of variety in it is about the same as a world that is overall interesting and overall a good place.

In this case, the relevant question might be the same as above: Is the world an adventure? Is the world adventure enough?

Supra-Rational: Too Much to Understand Intellectually.

The world can be too hard to understand in two ways. First, it can be too hard to understand because it is too hard for humans to understand, that is, too hard for one particular evolved intellect to understand. If humans were smarter, the world might be easier to understand and evaluate.

If the world is too hard for humans to understand now, we cannot assess it as ultimately interesting or boring, good or bad, getting better or getting worse. All we can do is assess it according to our limited perspective. Maybe as humans evolve, our descendants will be able to better assess the world.

Second, the world might be too hard for any intellect to understand, as we know intellect. It might not be comprehensible to any finite intellect or to any infinite intellect. Another evolved intellect might see the world better than humans do but it still could not completely understand the world. The world might not

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be that way. This outcome does not mean the world was not created by a mind. This outcome means the mind is not merely intellectual. It is not clear what it means to be a mind that is more than intellectual, but it is not necessary that all minds be basically intellectual.

If the world does not make sense intellectually, then we can't assess it unless we use non-intellectual criteria. People do not agree on non-intellectual criteria, so we cannot assess the world. Not even Romanticism can correctly assess the world by non-intellectual criteria, although it fools people into thinking it can. This problem of a greater-than-intellectual world cannot be cured by evolution unless we evolve in a way that transcends intellect, and, in addition, that particular way allows us to assess the world correctly.

In either case, all we can do is deal with what we can make sense of.

Most major civilizations and their religions, especially Western civilization and Christianity, have assumed that we can understand the world well enough intellectually to assess it properly. That idea is basic to Classical Greek philosophy. That is how Christianity helped science to arise. Even when mysticism and "supra-rationalism" play a part in civilizations, as they do in Hinduism and Taoism, there is a very strong rationalist strain, and there is an assumption that mere humans can "get" the world well enough to assess it properly and to orient toward it properly.

Many Worlds without End.

Some people think this world is infinitely fascinating but even they don't begin to understand how deep the fascination goes. Some people think this world is boring but they are wrong because they have no idea of the playfulness of the many worlds. Whether the world is ultimately rational or supra-rational is irrelevant. There are many worlds without end. This universe has hundreds of billions of galaxies, with hundreds of millions of stars in each galaxy, and trillions of elementary particles in each star.   Besides this universe, there are more worlds (universes) than there are elementary particles in all of this universe. Each world is a significant interesting variation. The brightness of sunlight if you were standing an arm-length from the sun would be a tiny candle compared to the brightness of the many worlds. What makes sense here in this world does not make sense there in that world, and what makes sense there does not make sense here. It makes no sense at all to ask about the sense of it all. It makes no sense to ask if it is good or bad, or feels good or bad. It makes sense only to participate and to someday to get a glimpse of the many worlds as they cascade out beyond your limited glimpse.

Even if this is true, it misses the point. Good and bad do matter, in this world and in all worlds. What matters is what we do right here right now in this world or right there right then in any other world.

God is One, Whole, Undivided, Perfect, Complete, and Self-Sufficient.

As far as I know, all major religions and philosophies eventually come to the conclusion that God (Tao, Heaven, Dharma, the Spirit) is one, whole, undivided, perfect, complete, and self-sufficient even if they see the nature, personality, operation, or essence of God differently. I do not explain how they come to this conclusion because that is not important. The implications are important.

Why is there something instead of nothing? Why is the something imperfect or incomplete? As most children quickly figure out when they hear this idea of a complete God, if God is self-sufficient, they why did he make the world and people? If he needed us for some reason, then he is not self-sufficient etc. If he did not need us, and we are a lot of trouble, then why did he make us? If he is complete and perfect by himself, then how did he make us? If he is complete and perfect, and we are not one with him, we must be incomplete and imperfect, and therefore we must be the source of trouble.

The various answers to these questions define world views but I do not go through a list of possibilities. Some answers are given in the sections below.

A modern form of this dilemma replaces God with various things that are bigger than people but are still in the world: society, culture, the state, nature, the ecosystem, etc. The founder of modern sociology and anthropology, Emile Durkheim, in France, in the late 1800s, famously said that society is God. He meant that people get their ideas of God from the power of society over individuals and nature. Society seems to have power over nature because society dictates how people interact with nature. The modern political form of this idea is some kind of totalitarianism: socialism, fascism, Communism, theocracy, American Republican Mercantilism, all-inclusive PC communalism, and all-good nature. The collective counts; and people are understood only in terms of the collective. We come from the collective, and will return to the collective. Our problems begin where we diverge from the collective. We can solve our problems by merging back into the collective.

In the modern case, the origin of humans is not the same kind of issue.   Nobody needs to ask why society makes people at all. We need to ask why society makes the kind of people that it does. Then the same questions follow in the same form.

Religion and social science only make progress when they get away from these questions. We can get away from them by dwelling on them until we make peace with them or we can get away from them by ignoring them until we feel comfortable getting back to them.

Emanation and Descent.

The idea of emanation does not strictly require the idea of a perfect, complete, self-sufficient God, and does not strictly require the idea of descent, but the three ideas usually go together, and it is easier to work with them together, so that is how I use them here.

God made the world by extruding ("emanating") something from himself even if he just emanated himself from himself. The world is an emanation from God. The world emanated from God as a tree emanates from a seed, fruit emanates from a tree, a work of art emanates from an artist, a baby emanates from a woman, a car race emanates from a group of guys fooling around with engines, the wind emanates from air moving, etc. Usually there is no complete and strictly logical explanation of emanation, so the idea of emanation remains on the level of an image. But most people get the image well enough, and it makes enough sense to be satisfying.

Because God is perfect, whole, and complete, then nothing else can be perfect etc. If anything else were perfect etc., it would be God, and there is only one God, so anything else that is not God cannot also be

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perfect. It might be very good but it cannot be perfect. At least in relation to God, anything else has to be less than perfect. I do not explain all the ways in which things can be imperfect but three of the most important are that things other-than-God are not as good as God, not as real, and not as self-sufficient (in Buddhist terms, they suffer from dependent origination). Because the universe and all the created worlds are not God, they too are imperfect. Everything descends in perfection-goodness-realness-sufficiency as it emanates from God. It is like a pyramid. God is at the apex. Everything else emanates from God and descends as it emanates. Everything else is less than God. Something might seem perfect, good, real, whole, seamless, self-sufficient, etc. to us but it would not seem so in comparison to God. Society, culture, the state, nature, our particular religion, capitalism, etc. might seem that way to us but would not seem so in comparison to God.

The universe could be binary: God and everything not-God. That seems too simplistic. It seems more in accord with what we see that the universe exists in several levels of perfection, realness, goodness, unity, self-sufficiency, etc. There are at least three levels: (1) God, (2) below God but still mostly, and (3) this material world. In most versions of this idea, there are at least seven: God, great sub-God (like Jesus) who really does most of the creating, sub-sub-God (like archangels), spiritual (like other angels), humans, this natural world, and below this world. Most versions also divide this natural world into beautiful natural stuff and "ugly icky" natural stuff, and include demons, to make at least nine levels. The highest levels are spiritual, ideal, light, good, full, and enduring while the lower levels are material, confusing, dark, bad, empty, and transient. Sometimes the world is made of two halves (see "Dualism" below), reflected around humans in the middle.

God likely did not emanate all the universe with all the levels all at once. More likely, God emanated the first subordinate level (creator sub-God), and then the first level emanated a second level and most of the other levels. Sometimes one level can emanate another level, as when good beautiful nature evolved human beings. The creator sub-God level might be amazing but it is not God, so it could not emanate anything that is absolutely perfect. It could not even emanate anything as perfect as itself. With each emanation, things got less perfect, less spiritual, more material, and more screwed up. Not only did the world and other worlds emanate, they also descended.

By the time we get far away from God to this human world, we are pretty well mired in becoming rather than being, illusion, confusion, materiality, and loss of self. This world is not the worst world imaginable. This world still echoes the beautiful worlds above. It is still possible to ascend from this world. But this world is bad enough to be a danger to humans.

This view of the world explains many things, in particular the nature of composite beings such as humans, the existence of spiritual beings of much power, the existence of conflict, and the existence of evil.

In modern versions, society-culture, or nature, emanates the world, and each emanation is less perfect the farther away it is from society-culture or nature. For example, capitalism is a perfect system. The corporation is one of the creations of capitalism. The corporation is not in itself perfect but the system of interacting corporations is led to be more perfect. Society-culture makes rules. The rules make people into farmers, warriors, priests, scholars, rulers, craftspeople, artists, etc. None of those are perfect but they play a role in a system that is more perfect than any of them alone could be. We can say similar

things about the justice system, the university, the football program, the corporation and the people that work for the corporation, etc.

Demi-Urge. This section is describes an important variant in the myth of emanations. Because God is perfect and complete, he does not directly create the world. God creates a slightly lesser god who does make the world. This creator god is less than God but sill tremendously important, creative, and powerful. In Classical world views and philosophy, this creator god was called the "demi-urge". Aristotle gives the first clear account of the situation. Because this creator god is not quite God, the world that he creates is not quite perfect, but quite close.

To account for the subsequent falling of the rest of the world, sometimes the creator god "goes bad", like the Devil in Christian mythology. The creator god can "go bad" through pride, jealousy, vanity, or just because it chooses badness rather than evil.

Sometimes to account for the mixture of good and evil in this world, and for the strife in the world, God does not create only one creator god but two, the gods of light and darkness. They are supposed to create a unified lesser world, the world of angels and of human experience, (also "the unity of the two sides of the Force") but instead they quarrel, botch the creation of lesser worlds, and create both light parts and dark parts that don't mix well. Sometimes the whole thing gets resolved in the end, while sometimes not.

God creating the world has always been a problem in Christianity. You can see John the Evangelist trying hard to wrestle with the problem in his gospel. The New Testament makes clear that God created the world through Jesus (as "the Word"). That idea seems to suggest that Jesus is the lesser demi-urge, and that is how Gnosticism (see elsewhere) understood the situation. The gospel of John suggests that Jesus is less than God but official Christian doctrine insists that Jesus is fully God. In the Christian view, God is both God and the creator demi-urge semi-God. If Jesus is fully God, then it is not clear why Jesus created the world or how, or how evil comes into the picture. If God created the world through Jesus, then Jesus made Satan too, and that idea makes Christians nervous. Christians want to have their cake of Jesus as full God and eat their cake of Jesus as the demi-urge at the same time. This conflict is one root of the idea of the Trinity, and why the idea of the Trinity is so confusing and hard to understand.

To account for badness, the New Testament invokes an extremely powerful Satan. In that case, it appears as if Satan is the demi-urge, also took part in creating the world, and might be about equal to Jesus. Satan and Jesus might be the two co-equal demi-urges. Jesus and Satan might be twins. But official Christian doctrine insists Satan is not equal to Jesus, did not create, and is not the brother of Jesus. So Satan becomes an archangel at one level below Jesus. Satan becomes the false unnatural creator while Jesus is the genuine natural creator. Roughly equivalent to Satan in level but not in evil are the other archangels, in particular perhaps Michael. The other archangels are not at all creators but only instruments of the creativity of God and Jesus. Unlike Satan, they are willing to accept their lower status as mere instruments and do not try to be more than they are.

The idea that Jesus (or someone like him) is the higher truer real natural creator while Satan (or someone like him) is the lower false unreal (empty) unnatural creator arises repeatedly in Western civilization and probably is much older than Jesus. You can see a version in Romanticism and you can see a version of

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genuine versus poser in Existentialism. In modern nature worship, nature is the true good creator demi-urge while people and civilization are the bad lesser creator demi-urge.

Ascending.

God foresaw that the world would not be as he is. He foresaw that each level would get worse, and that a lot of pain would result. He foresaw that sentient-moral-aesthetic beings would arise who would come to think of him and yearn for him, and who would suffer from being trapped on lower levels. He would make sure we had a way back to him. The way back is ascendance. Ascendance is salvation.

Once a being achieves sentience, it can use sentience to work its way back through the levels to unite with God again. People can overcome their contradictions, connections with vices, bad ideas, and bad causes, their material needs, etc. to become better citizens and better people. Then they can become more religious. Then they can become more saintly. Then they can become more ascetic and given to intellectual pursuits such as philosophy, mathematics, and meditation. From there, they can ascend to levels that I am not competent to describe.

All religions, including Christianity, have versions of ascending although they might not call it that and they might insist that it be put in the context of other religious ideals such as grace and being judged by God on Judgment Day. The idea of ascending easily combines with the idea of devotion. In the Classical Mediterranean world, the leading philosophy of ascending was neo-Platonism, and its leading teacher was Plotinus. I do not describe it here. It greatly influenced Christianity. It also influenced the idea of progress on the scale of society.

People still have an idea of getting better, and still have an idea of getting better in stages. Not all of this can be considered a version of Ascending. When a Scout works through his-her levels and merit badges, we can't see it as exactly the same as neo-Platonic ascending. When a business person climbs the rungs to reach CEO, it is not the same, although the business person might feel as if it is even better. It is not always clear how much ideas of getting better conform to the religious ideal of Ascending.

Of course, people can descend as well. That idea is known well enough already.

Dualism Again.

Levels, powers, qualities, abilities, personalities, judgments, etc. quickly become confusing. Is the abstract world of mathematics really higher, better, and realer than the world of human love? Instead, it is easier, and certainly it is true in part, to order the world along lines of obvious contrast and conflict. Take the various possibilities, and arrange them in two lists with each item in one list opposed to an item in the other list. It is easier to divide the world in to good and evil, light and dark, high and low, man and woman, woman and man, spirit and material, material and spirit, natural and artificial, smart and stupid, genuine and false, naïve and cunning, real and illusion, being and becoming, right and powerful, striving and comfortable, weak and powerful, poor and wealthy, common and aristocratic, city and country, us and them, etc. Now that you have arranged your two lists, pick a side. Different societies-cultures-religions places have arranged the lists differently – in some societies the aristocrats are good while the

country pagan people are bad. Most societies-cultures-religions eventually simplify things down to a pair of such lists even when their leaders and wise people know better and say so.

 Which features are on what list tells a lot about a society-culture-religion, and sometimes it is useful to look at the lists to assess a religion.

One particular arrangement of lists has been common and influential for the last four thousand years, and still shapes how we see the world today: Good versus Evil, Light versus Dark, Spirit versus Material, Soul versus Body, True Order versus Artificial Order, State Order versus Chaos, Angels versus Devils, Saints versus Sinners, and Us versus Them. This is the world view of many groups today that are based on ethnic, gender, politics, economics, nation, and religion.

We probably couldn't get through the day without some dualistic simplifications: breakfast cereal that I like versus breakfast cereal that I don't like; my car versus my wife's car. There is a real difference between right and wrong.

Even so, assessing any situation entirely in terms of dualisms usually causes a lot of harm. The world really is not divided up neatly into "us versus them". American politics since the late 1960s has been a bloodbath of "us versus them". This simplistic war has eroded the country, eroded freedom, and eroded the standard of living for all Americans.

Most great religious leaders have used dualisms but warned against dwelling in them. When Jesus said "Go and sin no more" he recognized the distinction between sin and not-sin. But he also let sinners go if they would reform.

Despite the wisdom and caution of most religious leaders, the most important and powerful form of dualism, listed above, was clearly stated by one important religious leader, Mani, about 400 years before Jesus. Mani might have been born in Iraq but he lived most of his life in Persia (Iran) and he probably picked up his version of dualism there. In his lifetime, he was a religious star, and had many followers. He explained how the world originated from one God, but was hijacked by a Devil. A follower could find God again through Mani's teachings. Eventually the followers of good and light would have a final battle with the followers of bad and darkness. The followers of Mani are called "Manicheans", and the term has also come to mean anybody who believes in simple pervasive dualism with good and evil at the core. "Manichean Dualism" means an ideology with pervasive dualism and with good and evil at the core. The terms usually are meant disparagingly. Manichaeism influenced nearly all the religions of the Middle East for hundreds of years, and formal Manichaeism even got as far as China. Manichaeism was a powerful force shaping Christianity, and also a powerful force against which wise Christian leaders fought. Saint Augustine was a Manichean before he was a Christian; his Manichean beliefs shaped his Christian theology; and his Manichaean Christian theology strongly shaped Christianity from his day on to the present. His reading of Paul is almost purely Manichean. I find this sad.

Gnosticism.

Except perhaps for a few mystics, most people are not born knowing about God, Emanation, Descent, Ascent, Dualism, various spiritual beings, various spiritual powers, etc. Even in Star Wars, the Jedi and

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Sith are not born knowing about the Force but have to be trained. They have to be trained properly to get most use of the Force and not to be dangerous. We need knowledge. Knowledge is potentially powerful and sometimes can set us free.

The word "Gnosticism" comes from Greek, and comes from the same root as the English "know" and "knowledge". Literally, it means "know-icism" or "know-ism". The literal meaning has changed to become the title of a system of belief, so now the term is capitalized and it means "doctrine of (secret powerful) knowledge about how the world really is rather than what it appears to average people" or "religion based on (secret powerful) knowledge about how the world really is rather than what it appears to average people".

In theory, Gnosticism could refer to any knowledge about how the world really is, especially to knowledge that is not common, such as that the world is really a happy place or the world really is a boring place. In practice, Gnosticism always refers to knowledge about how God made the world, Emanation, Descent, Levels of the world, spiritual and material beings, Ascent, and Dualism. Compared to that knowledge, other kinds of knowledge are not very important or useful.

This kind of deep knowledge is not the same as simply knowing about things such as how to bake a cake or how to figure the area of a rectangle. This kind of knowledge has the intrinsic ability to give power and to set you free. If you know how God made the world etc, then life changes. Even if you do not ascend to high levels immediately, automatically you ascend a bit, and are more in control of your life because of your ascent. Even just knowing there is this kind of knowledge sets you on the path to further ascent. The knowledge is as much a life-changing skill as mere information. Learning to program a computer, learning law, or learning about medicine is not just assimilating facts but learning a skill that changes your life. Gnosis is the highest example of such knowledge as skill.

With skills that change your life, there is a body of facts but there is also transformation and initiation. Gnosticism had formal schools in the Classical world. Gnosticism as a formal school had ceremonies and life-changing rituals. Gnosticism has a feeling of being "in the know" as opposed to being a member of the ignorant herd, and, as with all groups that feel they are "in the know", has the secret rituals to go along.

The same ideas live on in the modern world, mostly as the suspicion that the world is not as it seems, we are at a disadvantage for not knowing how the world really is, some other people know how the world really is, they are at an advantage, and we would like to share their advantage by becoming one of the privileged people who know how the world really is. This attitude is the basis for cults but it is also the basis for many world religions. Christianity, Buddhism, some kinds of Hinduism, and some kinds of Taoism, started out with this attitude.

The same ideas are often expressed in cinema and TV, and often make for great stories. The movie trilogy "The Matrix" is essentially a Gnostic tale in which the hero ascends levels until he finally knows how both the human and machine worlds work, and is able to merge them so as to defeat the Devil. The scene in which Neo chooses the red pill or the blue pill is a key Gnostic ritual. Not all Gnostic stories are this good in quality or this good for us.

An implication of Gnosticism is that we need saving, Gnostic knowledge can save us, and knowledge alone can save. Nothing else can save us. Other spiritual qualities such as decency, following the Golden Rule, mercy, perseverance, etc. certainly are not bad but they are not key and they are not enough. Another implication is that those people who are not saved are damned, those people who are not "in the know" are damned, and the damned are the automatic enemies of the saved. It is easy to see how bad people might be the enemies of people who are "in the know" but it is also true that merely good people and merely decent people are enemies as well because they tempt us away from the path of true and saving knowledge.

God Intervenes in World History.

The material in this chapter is in addition to the question of divine intervention from earlier chapters. I skip any discussion of complexity, and growing complexity, in evolution.

In the simple form of this idea about world history, world history has a direction, and individual people would be well advised to go along with the direction of the world. About two hundred years ago, most commerce in the world began switching over to capitalism. Now, a business person had better think like a capitalist. About a hundred years ago, government began to switch over to representative democracy. Now most people need to think how to get along in large representative democracies. As long as we can identify the trend, we don't need to bring God into the business.

Yet people do want to bring God into the business. People like to think God foresaw the major trends and approves of them. People like to think God foresaw Christianity, Islam, or Hinduism, benevolent royalty in its time, traditional farming in its time, democracy, and capitalism. People like to think God nudges along the trends if they are not going fast enough or in the right way, sometimes by sending along a champion like Arthur to teach good government and Constantine to establish Christianity, and sometimes a prophet like the Buddha to preach the Dharma. If people can recognize the major trends in world history that God promotes, they want to go along with those trends. This view feeds Romanticism.

I believe God foresaw most of world history, and approves of some of it such as democracy. I don't think God intervenes much to help out.

Each major civilization-and-religion has its own version of God-and-world-history but the most relevant for the Western world is the idea that came from Judaism. I explain that version in a later chapter. We need to know it not only because it is at the heart of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam but because it has been so often abused, even to the detriment of the Jews.

Culmination of World History.

World history might have trends without necessarily having a culmination or a focal end point. Farming succeeded hunting-and-gathering. Aristocratic monarchy succeeded tribes and chiefdoms. Industrialism and capitalism succeeded farming. Democracy succeeded monarchy. Something else will succeed both capitalism and representative democracy. Something else will probably succeed biological humans as we know them now. I don't know where it will all end. It might not even end in five billion years when the Sun swells up and eats the Earth.

The idea that world history might not culminate, or that it might not culminate as wished, makes uneasy the people who see God as promoting a trend and who actively promote the trend themselves. If you are a capitalist, and you think God promotes capitalism, then you want capitalism to be the culmination of world history and the ultimate formal expression of God's will here on Earth. The same is true of every major religion. If your particular way of life is not the culmination of world history and of God's will, then you are not the receiver of the greatest possible grace of God.

Jews wished to see world history as culminating in them even though Israel fell and even though other ethnic groups seemed to find favor with God. Christians first, and Muslims later, inherited the idea from Jews. Christians still wish to see world history and the will of God as culminating in Jesus and the Church even though they know that superficial historical events have gone on long afterward. The idea of a Day of Judgment allows major religions, including Christianity and Islam, to remain the culmination of God's will and world history despite historical changes and new trends.

Even Romanticism was based on culmination even though Romanticism seemingly championed the ever-unfolding of the Spirit in new ways. The only reason that we could know about the previous unfolding of the Spirit was because finally the Spirit had revealed itself to a few great thinkers such as G.W.F. Hegel. If the Spirit reveals itself to particular great thinkers, that fact means the culmination of the self-revelation of the Spirit is close at hand, and the great thinkers are the highest expression of the will of God. Marx and Communism inherited this view of themselves and world history.

Even though I think God prefers some movements in history more than others, such as democracy in its time over aristocratic tyranny, I don't think there is an inevitable direction in world history, world history culminates in any particular movement or people, or that any particular institutions are the embodiment of God's will on Earth during the time of culmination.

It is easy, and mutually reinforcing, to combine Emanation, Descent, Levels, Beings, Peoples, Ascent, Dualism, and Culmination. The large modern nations do it in their visions of themselves. I leave it to the reader's imagination.

Order, Chaos, Emptiness, Naturalness, and Genuine Creativity.

The section is mostly about order and chaos. Emptiness gets a few words below. This section is needed because, in the last 200 years, first the West, and now the world, developed a guiding myth chaos and creativity. Romanticism easily hijacks the myth into error.

In the Middle East and Egypt at least 4000 years ago, people told myths of chaos versus order. People wanted order. They needed order imposed by somebody, including the state. People were trying to live by gardening on the shores of rivers and swamps, and feared the chaos that came of both floods and droughts. They wanted somebody who could tame the waters so that the waters came regularly in the right amounts. In the Middle East, they personified chaos as a dragon-like beast. The Israelites adopted the myth to their situation. In the Tanakh, they called the beast of chaos "Tiamat". God defeated the beast of chaos and imposed order on the world. As representatives of God, the priests and aristocrats of the state defeated the chaos of desert, floods, wars, and social injustice to give regularity and life. Chaos

was not always bad or evil, and it was not always opposed to order, but it was not order, it could undo order, and it was not subject to the control of ordinary people. It has to be tamed.

About the same time that capitalism became strong, about 250 years ago in the middle 1700s, the West, especially England, developed a different myth of chaos and order. Order is the enemy; especially the order imposed by the state is the enemy. State order is supposed to be for the benefit of all people but really it is for the benefit of the aristocrats. Inevitably state order leads to oppression and death. It is artificial order and artificial creation. In contrast, true natural creative order arises spontaneously out of seeming chaos, out of the action, interaction, exchange, creativity, mixing, bubbling, and creativity of the mass of common people. The apparent chaos of common people is not really chaos but is a kind of natural creative force that leads to natural organization. The rigid mindset of artificially ordered oppressors cannot understand, accept, or live with this natural creative chaotic force that leads to a better higher order. Natural chaos is really good. The imposed artificial order of the state does not really bring order but actually brings chaos to the minds and hearts of people and of nature. The imposed artificial order of the state is really the bad chaos that the people should fear.

This is the myth behind:

-The modern version of Robin Hood
-Popular movements and populism
-The evil Emperor versus the good Rebels of Star Wars
-Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely
-The Devil as Lord of the material world and of state power
-The fact that oppressive regimes make the trains run on time
-Rock and roll defeats oppression and bad music
-The free market is better than anything the state can devise
-Good new ideas come only from a group of guy-or-gals in their garages
-Mr. Smith Goes to Washington
-Black people in the United States are more creative than White people
-The workers are always right and the bosses are always wrong
-The capitalists are always right and the bureaucrats in Washington are always wrong
-The people are always right and the scientists are wrong when they disagree with the people

This myth is partly true. In a formal scientific version, it does help explain how capitalism and the free market can lead to order and to benefit out of apparent chaos. It helps drive a modern mathematical movement called "complexity theory". This myth puts some force into modern democratic movements. It helps overthrow tyrants such as in Libya and Syria.

This myth also serves as the medium by which rich people and officials of the state can lie so as to have their cake and eat it too. Rich people and state officials say they are "turning loose the free market, reducing taxes, reducing regulations, etc." while really they are imposing their own state order through their control of state institutions. All politicians, including Left Wing politicians, falsely claim to be "on the side of the people" so as to serve their own ends.

In fact, both chaos and state order can be both good and bad. Sometimes good new ideas come out of chaos and mixing. Sometimes the ideas cannot be implemented unless the state provides a framework within which people can act safely. Sometimes chaos is just hurtful. Sometimes we need state order to protect us from the lies of rich people, powerful people, demagogues, and even from the intrigues of state officials themselves. We should not romanticize the opposition of chaos and order. We should not let the myth fool us into thinking that the masses are always right while the intellectuals are always wrong. We should not let the myth fool us into thinking the natural dark-skinned races are always right in the long run while the rule-bound light-skinned races are always a wrong dead end – or vice versa. We should not identify our religion with the spontaneous order of nature and God while we think of other religions as an artificial order imposed on natural creativity.

I think great nations have had a powerful impetus to order as well as a powerful among their people to advance. Great nations always have an unsolved conflict between order and chaos. Too much of one is as bad as too much of the other. Just as art needs the resistance of a material, so order needs the resistance of chaos and chaos needs the resistance of order. Order and chaos are the materials out of which the other creates its own works. Just as peoples who seek security at the expense of freedom usually end up with neither, so peoples who seek creativity in chaos at the expense of order usually end up with another kind of dead order and with no creativity at all. To rely on the myth of chaos without also providing some order results, in the long run, in deadness and boredom.

Emptiness Again, and Contrast.

Because the order that arises out of chaos does not seem to arise out of any other order, it seems as if it arises out of emptiness. It seems as if Emptiness is not empty but is full of good potential. This way of thinking is a trap of thinking, a trap of the mind. It would not be much of a problem except it gets mixed up with other ideas of emptiness and creativity. In a bad form, it rationalizes the Devil (Lord of Darkness and Nothingness) but I find that use of the idea so silly that I simply dismiss it.

A positive thing only gets done because of something else that does not get done or gets left out. In two classic examples of this idea, a bucket is only useful because of the emptiness in the middle, and a wheel only is useful because of the hole in the through which the axle goes and around which the wheel turns. Every note in a melody is also an instance of a lot of other notes not played. Even a chord is only three or four notes out of a dozen possible notes. An airplane is useful for what it leaves behind as it is going to somewhere else. Emptiness and positive-ness go together to get things done.

That is fine as far as it goes but we have to be careful not to make too much of it, to romanticize it. The bucket would not be useful without the emptiness in the center but it would also not be useful without the walls to surround the water. The wheel is not useful without the rim that contacts the ground. The note that sounds is the note that sounds, it is not the absence of all the notes that do not sound. Sometimes we leave a place just be leaving it but even that is a positive escape. Usually we leave a place to get to another positive place.

Emptiness might allow space for some creativity but it is not creativity itself. What a potter takes away from a lump of clay allows the figure to emerge but the figure is not simply the absence of clay. Just because we don't always see where creativity comes from does not mean it comes from emptiness.

Emptiness is just emptiness, it is not another positive force in disguise. We like to think in terms of positive forces just as we like to personify the wind and the rain. When we see something come up, and we can't explain exactly where it comes from, it is consistent with our language and our imagination to say it came from emptiness; but that is only a way of thinking that we ought not to get trapped by.

Another way of thinking with emptiness is by thinking with contrasts instead of with positive assertions. Any note in a musical scale is only a note because of how it contrasts with other notes. Any color is not just a color but is a color also because of how it contrasts with other colors. As a matter of fact, our eyes see shapes not merely as positive things but in contrast to other shapes and to their backgrounds. When we see black, white, or shades of gray, we seem them not as stand-alone images but only in contrast to other specks of black, white, or shades of gray. When we see a person, we see it in contrast to trees and to other similar shapes such as dogs and street signs.

We need contrast but, as with emptiness, we should not let that need fool us into thinking that contrast is somehow a positive thing in itself that is more important than other positive things. We understand an elephant by knowing it is not a pig, deer, or tiger, but that does not mean we have completely understood the elephant when we know it is not a pig, deer, or tiger. If we know each of them only by contrasting it with the others then we don't know much at all. This is a mistake that philosophers and social scientists made in the decades after 1960. This mistake feeds moral relativity and other kinds of relativity.

Good and Evil as Substances.

In the movie "Barbarella", the town to which her spaceship falls was built over a lake filled with a dark seething liquid, which turned out to be the evil of the world. This evil sets the character for the residents of the town and sets the tone for life there. To gain freedom, Barbarella had to come to grips with the evil flowing underneath. In an episode of Star Trek TNG, an advanced race decided to leave all their evil behind and to cast out into the heavens as a new reborn race purified of evil. They collected all their evil into a sentient powerful black sludge, capable of self-action, which they left behind as a large pond on their old planet. The evil black sludge being is lonely and has a bad temper. Unfortunately, the crew of the Enterprise run into the evil black sludge being, and it does bad things to them. On a better note, we think of goodness as "water of the heart" or as "honey of the heart". We think of kind words as "sugar", and think of affection as "sugar".

Just as we personify the wind and the fire so also, in reverse, we think of abstractions as substances. We think of justice as like a person or like a steel hammer. In scary movies, evil can be transmitted like the "cooties" of childhood games. This way of thinking is not necessarily bad, and can be useful in thinking through a situation. If we need to think about implementing justice, it might help to think of it as a hammer that must be wielded properly. This way of thinking can cause problems when we can't get out of our image. Sometimes we need to let go of the old image to adopt a better image. Sometimes we need to get away from images for a while and to think in other ways. Unfortunately, people tend to get stuck in their images, and become vulnerable to bad ideas.

Dream World.

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The idea that this world is a dream is common enough so no specific example is needed. The idea itself is not very important, less important than a hidden message ("subtext") conveyed along with the idea. The hidden message really is what the idea of "world as dream" is usually all about; the idea of world as dream is usually only the carrier for the hidden message. The hidden message is that this world is more real and consistent than a fantasy but less real and important than we usually take it. How real and how important the world is depends on specific versions of the myth of the world as dream. When we think of this world as not really real and not most important, then we are free to take a different attitude toward this world. For some people, this means freedom from silly social convention so that they can be a better person. For other people, this means freedom for self-indulgence.

I think this world is not as real and important as the mind of God but it is still real and important. It is the only world we have, it has rules, we have to live in it, and we have to try to be good decent people while we do live in it. We have to try to make it better. We are stuck in it, and might as well make the best of it. We do not make the best of it by obsessing on wealth, power, idealized families, religious ideology, fame, success, or any particular aspect. If thinking of the world as dream helps us get over bad obsessions, then the idea serves a good purpose. We have to avoid allowing the myth to lead us to self-indulgence. It is fun to make the world more dreamy and less dreamy in our imaginations, and to see how that feels. Sooner or later we have to settle on a range of dreaminess that is compatible with our best principles, and to live there.

PART 2: Losing and Finding Forever.

The ideas here show up again in later chapters on Buddhism and Hinduism.

The Ugly Reality of Boredom.

People have children who have children who have children who have children and so on with no obvious point. People crave stories. People want to see their lives as stories. Not to see your own life as a story is to get caught in horrible boredom. Boredom is as much of a driving force hunger, fear, lust, power, and keeping ahead of the Joneses, and boredom probably has been a big driving force through much of our evolution since we developed enough imagination to succeed. Boredom drives the other forces except for hunger and sometimes fear. The ideas of the world as a game, the world as a dream, and that we live many lives are responses to boredom.

The idea that the world is boring is not the same as that the world is pointless although the two ideas do affect each other. You can be bored with a meaningful world and you can be amused by a meaningless pointless absurd world. This section is about boredom rather than meaning although it is helpful to use lack of meaning to get across the feeling of boredom.

First, you live an ordinary human life for a very long time. Think of three kinds of normal human lives. As an original forager 50,000 years ago, your whole life was gathering, hunting, having children, and dealing with the neighbors. You do this for 1000 years. People about 10,000 years ago also tended gardens. Imagine you tend a garden, find a mate, have children, and fuss with neighbors for 1000 years. Modern people go to work, find a mate, raise children, fuss with neighbors, watch movies, and watch TV. Imagine doing that for the next 1000 years. At first, the love affairs, children, baseball games, family dinners,

overdue bills, squabbles, brushes with the law, pregnancies, intoxications, etc. would be fun. We were adapted to enjoy this kind of life. Yet if you live a long time, this life must become boring. The modern version would be excruciating. Sometimes comedy skits make a joke of this by torturing spies by making them watch bad movies or bad TV rather than "water boarding" them. Ordinary life is not worthwhile. It is not evil, and it can be good sometimes, but it is not worthwhile. Eventually, you cannot find a new song to listen to, and "the next big thing" looks like every other previous "next big thing". Eventually you would beg for release; likely well before 1000 years was over. If you lived long enough, it would be easy to see that life is boring.

Second, you live for a very long time in a world of swords, sorcery, and kingdoms rising and falling, like the TV show "Game of Thrones". Likely you would enjoy this version of life longer than middle class TV land but even this life would not escape boredom forever. Even if you were king, queen, or the most adept wizard in the world, eventually it would be not fun, and it would be boring.

Third, scientific and philosophical problems go on for a long time. It seems, for every scientific problem we solve, several new ones arise. If a person could get deeply interested in science, he-she might work on scientific problems almost forever without getting bored. Life might seem worthwhile. Yet it is not true that scientific problems last forever. Science is only 400 years old. In that time, scientists have solved many problems such as that the Earth goes around the Sun and life evolved. Even problems that remain theoretically open, such as gravity, have practical solutions, Newton's equations and Einstein's equations, that let us do what we need. Someday in the not-so-distant future, we will solve even difficult problems such as merging quantum mechanics and Relativity. Philosophical problems might not have definitive theoretical solutions but we will come up with practical solutions that help society carry. We will be able to make smart computers. Ten thousand years from now, even intellectual life might not be fascinating. Life might not seem deeply interesting even to a nerd.

Fourth, maybe the human life we see is not the realest human life. Imagine that real immortal people of the future, bored and desperate, have set up a simulation in which the short-lived ugly people that we see around us are only game characters for the real people. You are only an avatar for some other long-lived beautiful person living somewhere else. By living a short while as a character, pretend-dying, and then pretend-being-reborn, the real immortal people operating the simulation can fight boredom for a long time. But not forever, not even for them. Someday they will become bored with every simulation. Even if they do not become bored with every simulation, eventually they must realize that even simulations are not worthwhile. Simulations are not anything qualitatively different, they are just variations on the same old themes. Even when particular simulations break the rules of physics, eventually all simulations become just variations on the same old themes. Life is not fascinating even in fantasy land.

Fifth, maybe we can make the simulation interesting if we make it the right kind. Scientific, intellectual, philosophical, and social problems might all be solved but moral problems keep arising. Even if a moral problem is not new, it has to be addressed every time it appears in slightly different clothes. Almost by definition, we care about moral problems, so we have to engage. When we engage, we are not bored, and life seems worthwhile. Create the kind of simulation that appeals to moralists and to do-gooders like me. Create a world where moral issues keep coming up. Maybe that is what this world is. As long as there have been people, we have had moral issues, and they seem to be the same moral issues. Maybe we already live in a game where moral problems have kept us engaged for at least a million years. We

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hardly ever get tired of them. We always get excited about which politician is right and wrong. We always get excited when a dirty old pervert subverts an innocent young life. Yet even this can get old. After a while, we stop caring even about morality. After a while, we say, "To hell with it. Let the politicians and power mongers figure it out. Let that ethnic group take care of its own troubles. Let that gender group take care of its own troubles. Let the Liberals whore themselves out. Let Conservatives stop lying and balance the budget, or they can do down with the rest of us." Even moral life wears out. Even if good and evil depend on each other and are locked in a never-ending game, moral life wears out.

Sixth, suppose one or more of these scenarios, separately or together, succeed. Every time a superior person gets bored, he-she pretend-dies and pretend-gets-reborn over and over. The previous boredom is forgotten, and a new life begins. In this way, a person can stave off boredom indefinitely. Then life seems worthwhile. This solution is offered by Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism. Please keep in mind all these scenarios, in particular this last scenario, for the chapters on them. Even this solution does not avoid boredom. The perpetual life of satisfying illusion is not a solution.

Dealing with Boredom.

Faced with deep boredom, the idea of death makes more sense. Maybe death is not a bane but a boon. Maybe death makes sure life is short enough to be interesting. A short interesting life seems much better than a never-ending dull boring life. Even a short interesting life that ends in old age and moderate pain seems much better. When we face the end, we wish it would go on for a while longer, but do we really want it to go on for 10,000 more years, especially if we are old and in pain?

We can improve on the idea of death to make it make even more sense. We can be reborn with most of our memory wiped out. Instead of truly dying, and instead of being faced with deep boredom, we face deep forgetfulness. If we are reborn to a sequence of short lives, we need never be bored. Each life faces fairly new situations with fairly new problems. As long as we can forget between each life, we could go on like this forever. A sequence of short lives is better than an infinite one life. We never really die, we just go away for a while to get ready to come back.

There is another way to deal with boredom. Risk is fun as long as it does not kill us prematurely or make us unhappy with life such as by crippling us or trapping us in a bad marriage. People don't want real risk. We want pretend risk, risk that feels real as long as we are caught up in it but in which we can't really die, or get crippled. Suppose the immortal people of the future create an electronic simulation. Life in their game is much like life now, with all its fun risks. A character in the simulation is like a real living person now, and faces death in the game. An immortal person of the future can take on the persona (avatar or character) in the game. All risk is real within the game but is not real to the person outside the game who voluntarily entered the game. To make the game right, the immortal person of the future gets lost is his-her game character. While playing the game, the immortal person of the future forgets that he-she is anyone but the character in the game. The game is like the movies "Total Recall" or "The Matrix" but fun and benevolent. For a while, risk is real, life is worthwhile, and life is not boring. When he-she dies, he-she remembers. But nobody really dies. Death is not really real. After a fake death, of course, boredom sets in again, and the immortal person of the future goes back to the game. Besides getting out of the game for a while by dying, he-she also can get out of the game if, while in the game, he-she remembers that he-she is only playing a game, and that the game life is not the realest life. In that case, a person

does not disappear from the game right way, but only waits to die the natural death of the game life. In effect, this is the same as living many short real lives on this Earth. The characters in the game could not tell the difference between living short "real" lives in the game versus living short real lives on this Earth in which we die and are reborn. It could be one of the major goals of the game to remember while still in the game, and the real immortal people who manage to recall while still in character would earn extra prestige. Maybe this game already happened, so that we, and all the people around us, are real in this game but are not real for the immortal people of the future.

God Loses Himself to have more Fun.

Maybe God gets bored too. In that case, this world, all worlds that have ever been, and all possible worlds, is how God deals with boredom. God deals with his boredom by losing himself to put himself into the world. God falls asleep (loses himself) to dream the world (create the world).

In a classic episode of the revived version of the TV show "The Outer Limits", Ron Glass plays the Devil. The Devil is trying to gather the soul of a man, I think a schoolteacher. The Devil will give up if the man can give the Devil a task that the Devil cannot do. The Devil can do anything. The Devil can make or destroy anything, even whole galaxies. The Devil knows where everything in the universe is, can zoom to retrieve it, and can get back in no time at all. The Devil can go to any time past or present. To the Devil, there is no lost item or lost moment of time. The Devil can espouse and refute any philosophy. At first the man is worried. Then, in a stroke of inspiration, he tells the Devil to "get lost", that is, to lose himself. This the Devil cannot do. The Devil cannot negate himself, especially the Devil cannot negate himself in fantasy. The Devil is an all-competent unlimited intellect; but only an intellect. The Devil has the limited creativity of a formula, of a machine. The Devil does not have the true creativity of God. God could lose himself. This story is a modern version of true creativity versus false creativity. This is a modern version of the Devil as the Lord of this world of matter, energy, and power. This is an embodied version of the Liar's Paradox, of Godel's Paradox.

In this view of the world, God can only overcome boredom by losing himself. A lost God has more fun than a self-aware found God, at least temporarily for a very long time. For God to lose himself is the same as for us to die and be reborn over and over. What is around us is one instance of what happens when God loses himself, when God dreams or plays. As long as we believe this world is the realest world, and the only real world, and we stay committed to this world, then God continues to sleep and to dream and to have fun. We are also the way in which God sometimes wakes up and finds himself again. We are the way in which God recalls that he is God. Each time a particular person understands that this world is God asleep dreaming, God partially wakes up. Luckily for God, at any given time, few people feel this, so mostly God keeps sleeping and dreaming through people being deeply involved in this world of his dreams. When everybody has awakened, then God will be fully awake. When that happens, God likely will lose himself again, and it will start all over again, perhaps in a world with different physical laws and a different feel to reality.

The idea that the world results from God falling asleep and dreaming, or from losing himself, shows up in Mahayana Buddhism, Hinduism, and in other European-and-American stories. In Mahayana Buddhism, God is Buddha Mind or Emptiness while the Devil is the ordinary mind or the material floating world. In

Hinduism, God is Brahman the true Creator (although he creates a dream world) while the Devil is Maya (who is not evil but merely seduces us into accepting as fully real this dream world of illusion).

The idea was a theme in the work of the science fiction writer Philip K. Dick, whose work was the basis for the great movie "Blade Runner" and the good movie "Total Recall". In "Total Recall" the hero, played by Arnold Scharzenegger, at first an agent of the Martian ruling corporation, has his memory wiped so he can better infiltrate rebels against the corporation. However, in losing his memory, he also changes his character. I don't give away any more of the plot. If you look, you can see hints that the movie is not reality at all but a fantasy, intended or otherwise, even though, in one scene, the movie specifically repudiates that interpretation. In the science fiction movie "The Pusher", starring Dakota Fanning, the small band of heroes, who have mental powers, faces an evil government agency who wishes to control such people, and faces a family of evil people with mental powers. The bad guys can read the minds of the good guys, and so always can foil their plans. The heroes can only defeat their enemies by blocking their own plans from themselves, that is, by falling partially asleep.

Combo Pack.

It is easy and fun to combine the individual version and the God version. Rather than have the immortal person of the future take a role in a simulation, think of all possible created worlds as simulations that God sets up, and let God take all the roles in any simulation. God is each and every person in every simulation. For God to forget himself is for God to take a role in the simulation. Each of us is God, and God is each of us. For any person to remember that he-she is in a simulation is for God to remember that he lost a bit of himself in the simulation, but not necessarily for God to recall that the whole thing is a simulation, and so to wake up completely. God simply chuckles that this one person awoke, waits for this one bit of himself to die, and, in the meantime, carries on forgetting as all the other characters in all the rest of the world. The whole business keeps going on as a lot of fun for God. Any given life might not be a lot of fun but many lives are fun, and the whole thing is a joy even if no one life is fun. If ever everybody wakes up all at the same time, God might wake up entirely too. That possibility is quite remote. If it does happen, God just loses himself in another simulation.

Super Combo Pack.

It is easy and fun to combine many of the visions in this chapter, and the combinations don't even have to be consistent.

For example, God loses himself, and, in so doing, emanates the first world. That first world is made up of Jesus and the Devil, who, together, make up the demiurge. Jesus and the Devil have an argument. Their argument pervades their world and all the worlds that they make as a result. We are on one of the made worlds. Our world is thus not the realest world but is more like a simulation. We can wake up to realer worlds, or we can wake up to the ultimate reality of God before God lost himself. It is easier to wake up to realer worlds, and to ascend those one-by-one until we reach the world of Jesus and the Devil, where good and evil need each other, and where their interaction creates a never-ending sequence of worlds. We can live in that world and have a lot of fun.

I invite you to watch movies, read comic books, listen to politicians, listen to various kinds of pop music, watch TV dramas, watch TV pseudo-news shows such as on CNN, and use your imagination to pick out the Dualism. It is harder to pick out the Emanation and the Descent but usually not too hard; just think of the Devil as in the second or third level from God, and the present world as a couple of levels below that. The great hero of your religion usually is in the level just below God. I invite you to make up your own combinations.

Some form of combined Emanation, Descent, Levels, Ascent, Gnosticism, and Dualism is part of most major religions, including Christianity. It is also part of most major political stances even when they deny the validity of religion, including Marxism and some kinds of Political Correctness. Some combined form is part of modern militant atheism and even part of Darwinism when it is put in the service of ideologies such as militant atheism. As far as I can tell, the Church of Scientology is an almost-textbook example of such a combination.

I think this mindset can be a serious impediment to getting along properly when it is used to get people to do what we want.

Widespread Similar Morality.

The world as a dream, God lost, simulation, or game, are all versions of the same kind of verging away from this world. All versions come from people with good imaginations. To the extent the versions are fun and make this world more interesting, I find nothing wrong with them. If they get us to act badly, then they are wrong.

The implied questions in all these alternative worlds are: What lies behind them? What does it mean when we figure out that this world is not quite as real as it seems? Who is dreaming, running the game, and losing himself? Does it make a difference who is dreaming, running the simulation, or losing himself? How do we find out who that is, and what difference it makes? Just knowing that the world is a dream, a simulation, or God-lost- in-himself does not necessarily tell us who it is or much about who it is and what he wants. Does figuring out that the world is a dream etc. automatically set us free? If it does set us free, free to do what? If it does set us free, free from what? In the realer world behind this world, what are the rules? What are people there supposed to do? Is the morality there like the morality here? Are we supposed to do what they are supposed to do? I can't answer any of this for sure. I can only deal with this world as it comes along. I assume that is what the maker of this world wanted, for us to deal with this world as well as we can, however the maker made the world.

At least in our world, the key question seems to be morality. What matters is how you act, and how you act toward the world. Suppose this is a simulation, or suppose this is God forgetting himself, and you figure that out. Then what? Does that release you from morality? Does that release you from acting according to Jesus' message, from working hard to make a better world? I think it does not. In fact, if you can be sure God made the simulation, it seems to make acting well even more urgent.

Assume the laws of physics can change within different simulations. Even if people made the simulation, and it was not a creation of God, the makers could adopt different laws of physics for use within the game as long as the laws were consistent. Modern games in our world hardly follow the laws of physics or the

laws of evolution, and they have to be fairly consistent. Even if were not as it is on this world, but physics would support sentient-moral-aesthetic game players, would the laws of morality change much, and could the laws of morality change much? I think not. I think it is harder to change the laws of morality than to change the laws of physics and the laws of evolution. The modern philosophical way to say this is that the morality that we know here on our world "would hold in all possible worlds". I can imagine variations on moral-like feelings that might hold up for a while under some particular evolutionary conditions but I cannot imagine well-developed morality for fully sentient-moral-aesthetic beings other than as described in this book, even under somewhat different physical laws and different evolutionary histories. I hope I am correct, and that the Golden Rule, "applies equally to everybody", and the other points of Jesus' message would be valid in all evolutionary histories and all simulations. In that case, the key question in all worlds would be how sentient-moral-aesthetic beings act. I am not sure if that issue is enough to make all simulation worlds interesting but it is an interesting idea itself.