

Heart in Hand

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Searching for God

*We follow the turn of the road and it leads us on.
Where? To actuality; ourselves, others and God.*

Jack Kerouac

Travel Diary 1948-49

I was born a Presbyterian. My mother was born a Presbyterian, my father, a Lutheran. She grew up in a small town in eastern North Carolina called Faison, and her great-grandfather, Jacob Warden, was General Stonewall Jackson's chaplain in the Civil War. (Stonewall Jackson, himself, was a fire-breathing Presbyterian.) Other relatives in her family were Presbyterian ministers.

At eight months of age I was baptized into this Protestant sect of Christianity in the family church in Faison, surrounded by the names of deceased relatives memorialized on brass plates on its walls. At the age of twelve I served as an altar boy in the chapel at the Naval Hospital in Newport, Rhode Island, where my father was then stationed. For a time I considered becoming a Presbyterian minister like some of my forebears. I studied philosophy of religion in college and have maintained a life long interest in this subject.

My inquiries into the role that God plays in the realities of life have led me down a number of different paths over the years. In addition to more conventional theological and philosophical lines of inquiry, I have also included a study of the work of Woody Allen and religious aspects of the Beat Generation.

A central question concerning any inquiry about God is this: Is God a supernatural Being that we can relate to on a personal level? If so, is God a She or a He? Or is God, instead, a “Primal Hermaphrodite”? James Morrow uses this term for a conjoint She/He God in his fascinating science fiction/fantasy novel *Only Begotten Daughter*. Or is “God” a non-personal deity, and, if so, how can we describe it? Should we use words like an “Elemental Source of Energy,” a “Cosmic Intelligence,” an “All Encompassing Oneness,” a “Unifying Cosmic Force” to describe this non-personal God?

Science has shown us that all life on this planet is composed of molecules that were spewed forth from a giant star that exploded in this region of the Milky Way Galaxy more than six billion years ago. We now know that all living things are derived from bacteria that existed on the planet more than three and a half billion years ago. We know that our sun will someday—about five billion years from now—run low on its hydrogen fuel and bulge out into a red giant about a hundred times its current size and swallow up the inner planets in the solar system, including ours. Given such knowledge about the cosmos and our place in it, how does God—She, He, She/He, or It—fit into this scheme of things?

Our species’ biological and cultural history informs my views on this subject. More than 30,000 years ago people carefully buried their dead with jewelry placed around their head and food and hunting weapons around the body. They also placed other ornaments, flowers, and decorative objects at burial sites next to the dead. At a 30,000-year-old gravesite in the Czech Republic, for example, archeologists uncovered a skeleton where more than six hundred tube-like fossil mollusks are arranged around its skull. They have found skeletons of a similar age in France painted with a red pigment, and in Italy they have unearthed a painted skeleton that also had a bonnet constructed of shells and a crown of pierced reindeer teeth around its skull. These practices suggest that, early on, our forebears possessed either a respect for the departed or, more likely, a spiritual awareness that embraced the idea of a continued existence after death.¹

Awareness of the fact that we are going to die gives rise to religious beliefs. How do we cope with the fact that our loved ones and we are going to die? One way is to embrace a religion that promises our loved ones and us a continued existence after death. Schopenhauer puts it this way:

We find that the interest inspired by...religious systems has its strongest and essential point absolutely in the dogma of some future existence after death. Although [they] seem to make the existence of their gods the main point, and to defend this most strenuously, at bottom this is only because they have tied up their teaching on immortality therewith, and regard the one as inseparable from the other.²

I think he is right. When my sister died, leaving behind her husband, a Presbyterian minister, and two young daughters, age four and six, the only way that my mother was able to endure this loss and go on with life was to hold dear her religious belief that we have a future existence after death. Believing this, my mother, now 80 years old, while appreciating the value of life and living it to the fullest with a large measure of compassion, finds great comfort in knowing in her heart that when she dies she will be reunited with her deceased daughter.

The first Deity that our ancestors worshiped was a Mother Goddess. This should not be too surprising when you think about it. Humans capable of reflective thought had to confront the remarkable and mysterious fact that a woman can create within her body a fully formed, miniature human being. Our curious ancestors sought explanations for what the cultural historian Erich Neumann has termed *the blood transformation mysteries* of puberty, pregnancy, and lactation. Our ancestors could readily observe, as a result of the public manner in which they all lived, that a woman inexplicably sheds blood from her vagina in synchrony with the phases of the moon! They saw that this periodic bleeding starts at puberty and then suddenly stops during pregnancy. They apparently believed that the fetus is built up from retained menstrual blood. Then, following birth, our inquiring ancestors were presented with the remarkable fact that the mother produces milk from her body, instead of menstrual blood, which is used to nourish her newborn infant. Archaeologists and cultural historians have discovered that our early ancestors responded to these stunning mysteries by venerating and worshiping a Mother Goddess.

The Mother Goddess was believed to be the creator and ruler of the world. She was thought to wield supernatural control over the mysterious forces of birth and death. Our early ancestors believed that She embodied a dual nature, manifesting the polar extremes of good and evil. In her creative and nurturing aspect the Goddess was the *Giver of life*; in her terrifying, destructive aspect She was the agent of death and disease and the *Destroyer of life*. Our forebears worshiped the Great Mother Goddess as the source of the cyclical patterns in nature. They believed that she maintained the equilibrium of seasonal recurrence. She renewed vegetation and promoted the growth of crops and the propagation of animals. It is She who gives us all to each other as food. E.O. James, in his book *The Cult of the Mother Goddess*, writes:

Behind her lay the mystery of birth and generation in the abstract, at first in the human and animal world with which Paleolithic Man was mainly concerned in his struggle for existence and survival; then, when food-gathering gave place to food-production, in the vegetable kingdom where Mother-earth became the womb in which the crops were sown, and from which they were brought forth in due season.

Statuettes and bas-relief carvings of the Goddess, known as Venus figures, have been found in caves and excavations throughout Europe. One 18-inch high bas-relief sculpture of a woman holding a bison horn, the Venus of Laussel, is more than 21,000 years old. It was found on a sheltered wall of limestone in the Dordogne Valley in France. This faceless Venus has pendulous breasts, a protuberant stomach, and exaggerated hips; and prehistoric religion specialists believe that the curved bison horn she is holding symbolizes both the crescent moon and the Universal Vulva, the source of all life. The horn is incised with thirteen marks, corresponding to the 13 lunar months in a year.

Two symbols intimately connected with Goddess worship are the *moon* and the *snake*. The snake is a symbol of eternal life, gliding as it does in and out of holes in the earth and being “reborn” by shedding its skin. The moon sheds its shadow each month and is also “reborn.” Likewise, blood issues forth from a woman’s vagina each month, and then it magically “heals” itself, all in synchrony with the phases with the moon. Indeed, studies have shown that women living near the equator have a marked tendency to menstruate at the beginning of the new moon and then to ovulate during the full moon.

And, uncannily, a woman's pregnancy, from her last menstruation until the birth of her child, spans exactly 10 twenty-nine-and-a-half day lunar months. *Moon, menstruation, measurement, and month*, in most languages, are derived from a common word root. Some cultural historians contend that humanity first began to miniaturize its world into a symbolic form, which led to iconography and then to writing and mathematics, by counting "moons" on a lunar calendar stick.

The worship of the Mother Goddess reached its peak in the Neolithic period (10,000-3,500 BC) in the Middle East, just before male gods began to take over.

The advent of agriculture and animal husbandry in the Neolithic period led to the adoption of male deities. E. O. James explains:

With the establishment of husbandry and the domestication of flocks and herds, the function of the male in the process of generation became more apparent and vital as the physiological facts concerning paternity were more clearly understood and recognized. Then the Mother-goddess was assigned a male partner, either in the capacity of her son and lover, or of brother and husband. Nevertheless, although he was the begetter of life he occupied a subordinate position to her, being in fact a secondary figure in the cultus.

Experts on prehistoric religion have learned a great deal about the religion of the Mother Goddess from James Mellaart's excavation, in the 1960s, of Çatal Hüyük. This 32 acre-sized town, in what is now central Turkey, thrived for a thousand year period from 6,500 BC to 5,600 BC. It had a population of about 6,000 people and was a center for the worship of the Mother Goddess. More than forty rooms containing ornamented shrines to the Goddess have been unearthed at this site. Their walls are decorated with color murals, and the rooms contain statuettes of the Goddess (made of stone, clay, and terra cotta). In these statues the Goddess is variously depicted as a sexually alluring young woman, as a mother giving birth, and accompanied by a vulture, as a withered old woman. Sexuality and spirituality are united in Her. In his discussion of these findings, William Irwin Thompson makes this interesting point:

The three images of the goddess--maiden, matron, and old crone--present us with the three archetypal relationships of the female to the male: she is huge and calls us from her womb; she is beautiful and calls us to her bed; she is old and ugly and calls us to the tomb. Womb and tomb rhyme in the unconscious as well as in the English language.³

At the height of the Neolithic period the Mother Goddess came to be known as Inanna, in Sumer; as Ishtar, in Babylon; as Asherah, in Canaan; as Isis, in Egypt; as Rhea, in Crete; as Kali, in India; and as Gaia, in Greece. The growing complexity of human society, however, led to the demise of the universal religion of the Great Mother Goddess. Cultural historians point to the fact that as trade increased people began to acquire increasingly larger amounts of personal property and wealth that they needed to protect. Male hunters with their spears and bows and arrows now found a new occupation—protecting both their women and their wealth. As a result, warfare became an integral component of the human condition. The development of metallurgy in the following Bronze age radically changed the techniques of warfare, and the holistic, magical authority of the Mother Goddess finally succumbed to masculine military power. Kali became the spouse and underlying power, or *shakti*, of Shiva, one of the two main gods in the Hindu religion. Gaia’s descendents in Greece—Hera, Athena, Artemis, and Aphrodite, among others—became subordinate to Zeus, the male Sky God. In Canaan the religion of the Mother Goddess was replaced by the patriarchal religion of the nomadic Hebrews. Asherah became, for a time, until she was completely suppressed, the consort of the Hebrew male God Yahweh. In Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, according to inscriptions that have been excavated at this desert oasis halfway between Beersheba and Elath, travelers stopping there in 700 BC—long after the Goddess had been supposedly overthrown—deposited offerings both to Yahweh and to “his consort Asherah”.

The feminist scholars Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor point out that the primary theme of the Old Testament is the constant fight that God’s “chosen people” waged against matriarchal religion and custom. In their book, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth*, they write:

The settled people of the Old Testament, like everyone else in the Near East, practiced Goddess worship. The Old Testament is the record of the conquest and massacre of these Neolithic people [the Canaanites] by the nomadic Hebrews, followers of a Sky God [Yahweh], who then set up their biblical God in the place of the ancient Goddess.⁴

In the Old Testament, God commands Moses to go forth and destroy the stone idols on Mount Sinai. According to the authors of *The Great Cosmic Mother*, Mount Sinai, which

means “Mountain of the Moon,” was a Canaanite shrine to the Mother Goddess. The idols that Moses destroyed, they tell us, “all had breasts.”⁵

Today more than 1.4 billion people have affirmed their faith in Christianity, 700 million in Islam, 600 million in Hinduism, 270 million in Buddhism, and approximately 13 million in Judaism. But despite the emergence of the great patriarchal religions of Judaism and Hinduism, which were then followed by Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, Mother worship remains a universal religious theme in all human cultures. It is undeniably an irrepressible, basic consequence of human consciousness. Within Christianity some worship the Virgin Mary, who is celebrated both as the mother of the church (*Mater Ecclesia*) and the mother of God (*Madonna*). She fills a deep-seated need human need for a Mother Goddess in a culture where the established religions are dominated by male Gods. In Mexico, for example, she is Our Lady of Guadeloupe; in Poland, the Virgin of Czestochowa. Apparitions of her have been seen at her Shrine in a grotto at Massabielle near Lourdes; at Santa Anatasia, near Naples, she is worshiped by the Cult of the Madonna of the Arch.

From a more secular standpoint, instead of Venus figurines and bas-relief carvings of the Great Goddess that adorned rooms in Neolithic times, a calendar photograph of a reclining, naked Marilyn Monroe may be displayed. Since she died in 1962 more than forty biographies have been written already about this “ultimate sex goddess,” including one by feminist Gloria Steinem. Videotapes of her films continued to be viewed by millions of people. I do not think it is too farfetched to say that Marilyn Monroe has taken on, to some degree, at least, the role of a modern-day Venus of Laussel. One of her biographers characterized her as, “pouting, suggestive, submissive, subversive, erotic, available, forbidden, sometimes naked, sometimes overdressed, and always blond.” Like the ancient Goddess, she embodied a basic duality that continues to generate a feeling of profound awe in her admirers. Those who knew her well described Marilyn as an alert, intelligent, warm, compassionate person. In Goddess fashion she wrote this poem:

I stood beneath your limbs
and you flowered and finally clung to me
and when the wind struck with ... the earth

and sand — you clung to me.⁶

As our Paleolithic and Neolithic ancestors did before us, people in various parts of the United States are once again participating in covens and ritual groups to celebrate and worship the Great Mother Goddess. According to *The Womanspirit Sourcebook*, women in western Connecticut, for example, have been gathering in a secluded meadow every month on the full moon since 1980 to perform the Sweat Lodge ceremony, a Native American religious ceremony where the participant affirms the guiding power of the Earth Mother. In Pittsburgh, a group of women have formed an organization named Motherhearth, whose stated purpose is to revive Goddess mysteries, rituals, and healing. In Madison, Wisconsin, the Re-formed Congregation of the Goddess has been established “to provide the benefits and recognition of organized religion to its members.” And the Wise Woman Center in Woodstock, New York, like other similar organizations across the country, exists “to draw together the threads of our lost heritage as healing women of power and knowledge, where the Goddess is alive and green Witches grow.”⁷

Our deep-seated feeling that there is a higher spiritual plane, or power, is a basic facet of conscious human life. It impels us to worship a Supreme Being, one that has both paternal and maternal attributes. Nevertheless, even though humankind possess the *idea* of God, it does not necessarily mean that there really *is* a God or Goddess that watches over us and who can grant us everlasting life.

I became interested in questions about God when I was an altar boy. Motivated by a desire to help people, I thought that going into the ministry would be a fulfilling thing to do. And I would be able to write sermons, which even then appealed to me. The Chaplain at the Newport Naval Hospital at the time that I assisted was inspiring and served as a good role model. But medicine won out. At the age of fifteen I watched my father remove a patient’s esophagus and bring the stomach up into the neck in its place. I stood there for ten hours looking over the ether screen watching the procedure, and despite sore feet and a full bladder I was hooked. The importance of religion in the lives of many of my patients and their families, however, has continued to interest me. When a family tells me that they and the entire congregation of their church are praying for a successful outcome with their loved one’s surgery, I am very happy and grateful to accept

His help. But the question remains, what evidence can we point to which indicates that God really does exist?

Having seen how our species has developed a sense of the sacred and the concept of a female and then male deity from a cultural historical perspective, we now come to a crossroads in a search for God. We can travel in a number of different directions to try and determine if God really does exist. There are at least six different routes that I can think of. These include *scientific proof*, *faith*, *mysticism*, *art*, *theology*, and *philosophy*. Woody Allen, in his unique and insightful way, provides us with some helpful signposts along several of these routes. I refer especially to his films *Love and Death* and *Hannah and her Sisters*; his one act play *God*; and “Mr. Big,” a short story that appeared in *Getting Even*, his first published collection of short stories and comedic essays.⁸

“Mr. Big,” can be viewed as a parable on the search for God. It is worth reviewing here. In this story, a woman who claims to be a philosophy student hires a detective named Kaiser Lupowitz to find God. The detective first goes to a rabbi and asks him if God exists. The rabbi replies:

Rabbi: Of course there’s a you-know-what, but I’m not even allowed to say His name or He’ll strike me dead, which I could never understand why someone is so touchy about having his name said.

Detective: You ever see Him?

Rabbi: Me? Are you kidding? I’m lucky I get to see my grandchildren.

Detective: Then how do you know He exists?

Rabbi: How do I know? What kind of question is that? Could I get a suit like this for fourteen dollars if there was no one up there? Here, feel a gabardine--how can you doubt?

The detective then looks up a street-smart “forger, bank robber, strong-arm man, and avowed atheist” named Chicago Phil, who says:

The guy never existed, Kaiser. This is the straight dope. It’s a big hype. There’s no Mr. Big. It’s a syndicate. Mostly Sicilian. It’s international. But there is no actual head. Except maybe the Pope.

The detective next wants to question the Pope, and a meeting is arranged with His Holiness at an Italian restaurant in New Jersey. Detective Lupowitz asks the Pontiff if God exists:

Pope: Sure He exists, Lupowitz, but I'm the only one that communicates with him. He speaks only through me.

Detective: Why you, pal?

Pope: Because I got the red suit.

Detective: This get-up?

Pope: Don't knock it. Every morning I rise, put on this red suit, and suddenly I'm a big cheese. It's all in the suit. I mean, face it, if I went around in slacks and a sports jacket, I couldn't get arrested religion-wise.

Detective: Then it's a hype. There's no God.

Pope: I don't know. But what's the difference? The money's good.

The Pope also tells the detective that the detective's client is actually a physics professor at Bryn Mawr and not a philosophy student as Lupowitz was led to believe. But he learns that his Bryn Mawr client has a jazz musician boyfriend who does study philosophy. An informer describes the boyfriend as follows:

[An] Empiricist, as I remember. Bad guy. Completely rejected Hegel or any dialectical methodology... He used to be a drummer with a jazz trio. Then he got hooked on Logical Positivism. When that didn't work, he tried Pragmatism. Last I heard he stole a lot of money to take a course in *Schopenhauer* at Columbia. [Italics mine]

Lupowitz, the detective, then learns from the Homicide department that a person fitting the description of God has been brought to the morgue. He goes there and confirms that the recently received dead body is indeed Him.

Putting all the pieces of the puzzle together, Lupowitz confronts his client. He accuses *her* of murdering God. He explains it this way:

At the midwinter Hop you get stuck on a jazz musician who's heavily into philosophy. A couple of nights in the hay and it feels like love. But it doesn't work out because something comes between you. God. Y'see sugar, he believed, or wanted to, but you, with your pretty little scientific mind, had to have absolute certainty.

This Bryn Mawr physics professor killed God in order to win her jazz musician lover's complete devotion. Found out, this attractive woman scientist, who is so sexy that she could "cause a cardiac arrest in a yak," as Allen puts it, implores the detective not to turn her in. Instead, she entreats him to run away with her. She seductively removes her dressing gown, and Lupowitz notes that, "I was standing there suddenly with a naked Venus." As she fondles him with one hand she picks up a pistol with the other and tries to shoot him. The detective beats her to the draw and shoots her dead with his own gun.

In his efforts to find God, the detective in "Mr. Big" cannot uncover any substantive empirical evidence that God exists, other than the fact that the rabbi got a bargain on his gabardine suit. Instead, he discovers—at the morgue—that God is dead. Lupowitz, however, does find out who murdered God. It is a voluptuous woman scientist!

Since there is no objectively verifiable evidence which can prove that God exists, the jazz musician lover in "Mr. Big" turns to philosophy—and Schopenhauer in particular—for help. But Schopenhauer tells us, as do other philosophers and theologians, that "religions admittedly appeal not to conviction with arguments, but to faith with revelations." The jazz musician wants to believe in God, but without any supportive empirical evidence, and since he also cannot marshal any logical proof that God exists, he must rely solely on faith.

The Bible defines *faith*, in the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:1), as follows: "It gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see." Religious faith is not concerned so much with what can be *known*, but with what should or may be *believed*. It is a confident belief in the truth of a given idea that does not rest on empirical evidence or logical proof. The television evangelist Jim Bakker put it well when he said, at his trial for tax evasion, that "faith is the supplier of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen." It is a powerful and tenacious emotion. William James, in his

pioneering work on the psychology of religion, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, uses the term “faith-state” to denote this feeling. He argues that it arises from a sense of uneasiness “that there is *something wrong about us as we naturally stand* [his italics],” and when under its spell one has the feeling “that *we are saved from the wrongness* by making proper connection with the higher powers.” James writes:

This emotion overcomes temperamental melancholy and imparts endurance to the Subject, or a zest, or a meaning, or an enchantment and glory to the common objects of life....It is a biological as well as a psychological condition, and Tolstoy is absolutely accurate in classifying faith among the forces *by which men live*. The total absence of it, anhedonia, means collapse.⁹

Schopenhauer makes the point that, “faith is like love; it cannot be forced.” In the Bible people acquire faith through revelations and by witnessing miracles. In trying to muster the requisite faith to be able to believe in God, Boris, in Allen’s film *Love and Death*, laments: “If I could just see a miracle, just one miracle. If I could see a burning bush, or the seas part, or my Uncle Sasha pick up a check.” Faith is also acquired and sustained through voluntary submission to the authority of an organized religion, with its doctrines and codes of conduct and rituals, all directed by a priestly hierarchy to keep a religion’s followers in right relations with the believed transcendental order. These rituals include, in particular, baptism and communion. Other sacraments provide points of ecclesiastical control over the believers.

Once acquired and cemented in one’s mind by the glue of faith, a person’s religious beliefs and practices cannot be easily suppressed. In Poland, for example, during and after the Second World War Hitler and Stalin both tried to destroy the Polish Catholic Church. A third of the clergy were murdered and its schools and seminaries were closed. Nevertheless, by the 1960s, according to the historian Paul Johnson, the Catholic priesthood was back to its pre-war strength, and there were 50 percent more monastic foundations, priories, and convents than before the war. Despite the disassembling efforts of Hitler and Stalin, more than 90 percent of the Polish population continued to practice Catholicism and to be buried according to Catholic rites. And when Pope John Paul II, formerly Cardinal-Archbishop Karol Wojtyla of Cracow, the first non-Italian pope since 1522, returned to Poland for a visit in the late 1970s, the largest single

gathering of human beings on the planet ever, 3.5 million people, congregated at Czestochowa to see him and receive his blessing.¹⁰

Faith in a given religion, and the faith-state itself, is not derived solely from a self-interested desire for immortality. As William James points out, it also arises from an inherent love of life and a desire for “a larger, richer, more satisfying life.” In Allen’s film *Hannah and her Sisters*, Mickey decides that he wants to convert to Catholicism. His reason for doing so, he tells Father Flynn, is that, “I gotta have something to believe in, otherwise life is just meaningless.” They have the following conversation:

Father Flynn : But why did you make the decision to choose the Catholic faith?

Mickey : Well, you know--first of all, because it’s a very beautiful religion. It’s very well structured. Now I’m talking now, incidentally, about the against-school-prayer, pro-abortion, anti-nuclear wing.

Father Flynn : So at the moment you don’t believe in God.

Mickey : No and I want to. You know, I’m willing to do anything. I’ll, you know, I’ll dye Easter eggs if it works. I need some evidence. I gotta have some proof. You know, if I can’t believe in God, then I don’t think life is worth living.

Father Flynn : It means making a very big leap.

Belief in a transcendental personal God requires a leap of faith. Not only is there no empirical, scientific evidence or logical proof to support such a belief, but Schopenhauer, and other philosophers, point out that the concept of God as it has come down to us in the Judeo-Christian tradition is logically incoherent. On the one hand, God is omnipresent and omniscient and yet He is nevertheless supposed to have a particular, personal identity. He is eternal and permanent and unchanging and yet He supposedly has a temporal manifestation and reacts to events in the world. And then there is the problem of evil and the need for theodicy—the doctrine that explains and vindicates the existence of evil in a world supposedly ruled by an omnipotent, benevolent God. As Konstantin Kolenda, a philosopher at Rice University puts it, “How does the infinite reach of God’s power fail to prevent evil, [and] why does the perfect reality of God require the existence of an imperfect world?”¹¹ Woody Allen juxtaposes these

incongruities with telling effect in his work. Boris, for example, in *Love and Death* recalls this vision: “I was walking through the woods thinking about Christ. If he was a carpenter, I wondered what he charged for bookshelves.” In Allen’s short story, “Notes from the Overfed,” the fat person narrator is asked, “Do you believe in God? And if so, what do you think he weighs?” He replies that he does not believe in God. Shocked, the questioner says, “There is a God, despite what you think, and He is everywhere.” The fat man ponders this statement overnight and then comes upon this insight: “If God is everywhere, then He is in food, I had concluded... Therefore, the more I ate the godlier I would become.”

In “Mr. Big” a physics professor kills God. Science, epitomized by modern physics, has killed the father God that humankind needed and loved. It is hard to summon the requisite faith to believe in God when we now know that we are derived from microscopic single-cell bacteria that existed on this planet three and a half billion years ago; and that our sun, in an inconspicuous part of an undistinguished galaxy, is going to burn out in about five billion years. In Allen’s film *September*, a physicist who worked on the atomic bomb project is asked, “Is there anything more terrifying than the destruction of the world?” He replies that, yes, there is something more terrifying:

The knowledge that it doesn’t matter one way or the other. It’s all random, created aimlessly out of nothing and eventually vanishing forever. I’m not talking about the world. I’m talking about the universe. All space, all time just a temporary convulsion. *Haphazard, morally neutral, and unimaginably violent.*

Where, indeed, does a theistic God, one who both creates and rules over the universe, fit into this scheme of things? It is very hard for a knowledgeable person at the end of the 20th century to summon the requisite faith to believe in such a God and to accept the scriptural doctrines of a theistic religion. Schopenhauer puts it this way:

Religions are like glow-worms in that they need darkness in order to shine. A certain degree of general ignorance is the condition of all religions, is the only element in which they can live. On the other hand, as soon as astronomy, natural science, geology, history, knowledge of countries and peoples spread their light everywhere and finally even philosophy is allowed to have a word,

every faith founded on miracles and revelation is bound to disappear, whereupon philosophy takes its place.¹²

Schopenhauer, of course, being quite egocentric himself, felt that it would be *his* philosophy that would take religion's place. And to some degree he was right because the quasireligious movements of the Beat Generation and the New Age Movement, which have replaced traditional religious beliefs for some people in our culture during the last half of the 20th century, are a direct outgrowth of his philosophy. These movements are derived from Schopenhauer's contention that human beings can *intuitively* appreciate, albeit in a necessarily ill defined and non-rational way, the true nature of the world at its deepest level.

Schopenhauer scoffed at the possibility that there might be a transcendent, supreme Being that watches over us and reacts to events in the world. Regarding such religions, particularly Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, he writes:

Perhaps even the time, so often prophesied, will soon come when in Europe mankind bids farewell to religion, like a child who has outgrown his nurse and whose further instruction now devolves to a private tutor. For there is no doubt that religious doctrines based merely on authority, miracles, and revelation are an expedient that is appropriate to the childhood of mankind.¹³

Schopenhauer considered himself to be that tutor. God, for him, is not a transcendent personal deity, a Yahweh, or Great Mother, or a Primal Hermaphrodite. According to him, *God* is another word for the Noumenon, for the universal oneness of ultimate reality. He writes, "To call the world *God* is not to explain it, but only to enrich the language with a superfluous synonym for the word *world*." Schopenhauer goes on to point out that it is misleading to use this term in an impersonal, pantheistic sense to describe the noumenal world because the word *God* has inescapable anthropomorphic connotations. This word, he says, is not only superfluous, but it is also an inappropriate synonym for the word world.

But can we be *entirely* sure that there is in fact no personal God who is concerned with human affairs and gives meaning to our lives? In Allen's *Love and Death*, Boris and Sonia have this conversation:

Boris: What if there is no God? What if we're just a bunch of absurd people who are running around with no rhyme or reason?

Sonia: But if there is no God, well then life has no meaning. Why go on living. Why not just commit suicide?

Boris: Well, let's not get hysterical. I could be wrong. I'd hate to blow my brains out and then read in the paper that they've found something.

It is interesting to note that Allen makes the agent of God's destruction in "Mr. Big" not only a scientist but also a voluptuous Venus. She kills God in order to win her lover's complete loyalty. Our ancestors worshiped a female God until very recently. Human beings have worshiped a male God for only the last four or five thousand years in our modern species' 100,000 year history. In "Mr. Big" it is the Goddess in a modern guise as a sexy Bryn Mawr physics professor, who with the help of the weapons of modern science slays the patriarchal God, variously known in the world's great religions as Jahweh, Christ, Allah, and Vishnu. She wants to re-establish the undivided devotion of her student-of-Schopenhauer jazz musician by getting rid of this usurper. And then she hires a detective to confirm that God—the male version that is—is in fact dead. But in "Mr. Big" not only the male God but the Mother Goddess herself winds up getting killed.

This parable of the human search for God also points out that a priestly hierarchy can relatively easily manipulate believers of an organized religion. Authorities of an organized religion seek to obtain the devotee's loyalty and submission through such trappings as the Pope's red outfit and the confessional. Religious leaders, like all other types of human beings, can be hypocritical and self-serving. Television evangelists are especially adept at exploiting their followers. Leaders of an organized religion can disguise a strong motive of self-interest with earnest piety and thereby find easy pickings among their gullible and trusting followers. The Reverend Ike, a TV evangelist, for example, claimed that God returns His blessings in direct proportion to the amount of money that a person sends to his television ministry.¹⁴

In Allen's short story "Nefarious Times We Live In," we are introduced to the Reverend Chow Bok Ding, "a moon-faced charismatic who combined the teachings of

Lao-tze with the wisdom of Robert Vesco.” His “ardent proselytizers” explain that the Reverend has two modest goals. One is to instill in all his followers the values of prayer, fasting, and brotherhood, and the other is to lead them in a religious war against the NATO countries. We also learn that the Reverend was sued by a fifteen year old Maharishi over the question of which of them was actually God and therefore entitled to free passes to Loew’s Orpheum.¹⁵ As Allen shows us so well, our religious leaders, irrespective of whatever mystical revelations they may have, are nevertheless human beings, and they are also guided, to varying degrees, by the all pervasive motive of self-interest—and its consequent deception and pretense.

Schopenhauer describes the vulnerability of the faithful believer to manipulation by religious authority figures as follows:

The fundamental secret and cunning of all priests, at all times and throughout the world, whether they be Brahmins or Mohammedans, Buddhists or Christians, are that they have rightly recognized and understood the great strength and ineradicability of man’s metaphysical need. They now pretend to possess the means to satisfy this by saying that the word of the great riddle has in some extraordinary way reached them direct. Once men have been talked into this idea, the priests can guide and control them at will.¹⁶

In this regard, Judge Robert Potter, in sentencing the TV evangelist Jim Bakker to prison for fraud said, “Those of us who do have a religion are sick of being saps for money-grubbing preachers and priests.”¹⁷ One of the most chilling examples of the control that preachers and priests can exert occurred in Guyana in 1978, where the Reverend Jim Jones ordered the mass suicide of an entire village of his followers. He ordered more than 900 people, many of them children, to queue up and drink, in turn, a cyanide-tainted punch that was dispensed by assistants from a large vat. Many of them stood in line sobbing as they waited their turn and watched their family members and friends rapidly succumb to the fatal effects of the cyanide.

One thing is clear. Humanity has a compelling *metaphysical need*, as Schopenhauer terms it. It is manifested by a yearning for a Supreme Being. We have a strong, deep-seated need to believe that we are connected to a higher spiritual plane that lies beyond our day-to-day mortal world. This higher spiritual plane, humans need to

believe, is connected to a deeper level of reality—a level of reality that goes much deeper than the one we live in in our individualistic, self-serving world.

The concept of a Mother Goddess was the first manifestation of the human yearning for a deeper, more meaningful level of reality.

More recently, humankind has worshiped a father God; and it led to the formation of the great religions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. These religions teach us, however, that the search for God is best carried out within the unconscious inner core of our being. They tell us that the search for God must be conducted within the inner world of the human soul. Christianity tells us, “The Kingdom of God is within you;” or as St. Paul puts it, “It is not I that lives, it is Christ that liveth in me.” Islam teaches, “He who knows himself, knows his Lord.” Hinduism says, “Atman [individual consciousness] and Brahman [universal consciousness] are one.” And Buddhism teaches, “Look within, thou art the Buddha.”

This approach of looking inward into the innermost core of our own being, into our unconscious inner core, has been a special feature of American intellectual thought over the last two centuries. It began in the 1700s when the Calvinist theologian and philosopher Jonathan Edwards expounded his concept of *aesthetic spirituality*. He believed that “a Divine and Supernatural Light [is] immediately imparted to the soul by the Spirit of God.”¹⁸ In the 1800s Ralph Waldo Emerson taught that the “the Divine principle lurks within,” and he argued that the deeper levels of the unconscious are inherently spiritual, “wherein, as a firmament, the natures of Justice, Truth, Love, Freedom arise and shine.”¹⁹

The idea of an unconscious mind was formulated by Europeans, at least—Australian aboriginals, Africans, native Americans, and Haitian voodoo priests probably knew about it sooner—in 1774 when Franz Anton Mesmer discovered “animal magnetism,” better known today as hypnotism. He and his student the Marquis de Puységur induced a sonambolic, or “mesmerized,” state of consciousness in their subjects to treat various illnesses. They untapped a rich stratum of mental life that exists beneath the threshold of ordinary consciousness. Mesmerists, as they were then called, held well-attended public demonstrations of this trance-like state, and hypnotism evoked a great deal of interest in both Europe and America. Schopenhauer followed the developing

science of animal magnetism closely.²⁰ He believed that its “marvels” could help make known to us the innermost reality that lies beyond the framework of space-time-causality. In Europe, this discovery culminated in Freud’s view of the unconscious as consisting principally of libidinous and pleasure-oriented drives. A normal person censors and dissembles these drives by a variety of psychological defense mechanisms. These include the now well-known defense mechanisms of repression, rationalization, projection and sublimation. In America, influenced by the teachings of Emerson, Mesmerists came upon the idea that the farther reaches of the unconscious mind encompasses not only sexually based instinctual processes, but also metaphysical and spiritual realities. They saw the deeper levels of the unconscious as an inherently spiritual, transpersonal realm. They looked upon the unconscious mind as a conduit for mystical union with a transcendent spiritual order.²¹ William James explored this aspect of the unconscious in his seminal work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, published in 1902. Humanistic psychology and Transpersonal psychology are two recent manifestations of this American view of the unconscious, with its religious connotations.

In addition to hypnosis, the unconscious mind can be explored through a number of different avenues. These include drawings, dreams, myths, and mystical experiences. Drawings can reveal much about the unconscious life of the mind, as Bernie Siegel, the Yale surgeon, shows so well in his widely read book *Love, Medicine, and Miracles*. Dreams, plumbed by psychoanalysts, provide important insights into the unconscious mind; and myths are what the mythologist Joseph Campbell terms “the world’s dreams.” But a number of thoughtful observers of the human condition tell us that mystical experiences unlock the innermost door to the unconscious core of our being.

A mystical experience can be defined as a fleeting, non-rational, self-surrendering state of mind where one experiences an ecstatic sense of communion with Ultimate Reality. Those who experience it say that this intense spiritual experience provides insights into a much deeper level of truth than that obtained by rational thought and conceptual analysis. Jean Lanier, a spiritual counselor and gestalt therapist, gives this description of a mystical experience:

Flashes: St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross... Feelings of oneness, feelings of flight, feelings of groundedness, seeing into, seeing beyond, ineffable, inexpressible, indescribable. The One. The Three in One. The All in One...

...Something in me burst into light--and this is the part that is indescribable (for was it in words, was it a feeling, was it a Voice?)--and I *knew* that *God is Love*. I cannot put into words the sense of exaltation, or peace. Neither can I put into words the feeling of lightness, of clarity, of purity that invaded me.²²

A mystical experience is *ineffable*. This means that words, based as they are on symbolic, rational concepts and metaphors, cannot convey the full meaning and impact of this experience. Mystics use paradoxical and self-contradictory phrases like “whispering silence” and “grounded flight” when they try to describe this experience. A mystical experience also has what William James terms a *noetic quality*—a sense that one has gained an insight into depths of truth that cannot be plumbed by the discursive intellect. The “knowledge” obtained is intuitive and direct, and it carries with it a certain sense of authority. It is not the standard subject/object, dualistic, conceptual kind of knowing that we generally think of as “knowledge.” The mystic eschews this kind of intellectual knowledge and instead gains a “holy fool’s” heart-wisdom that lies beyond the reach of rational thought. The mystic cultivates an altered state of consciousness where the confines of time and space are overcome. As Francis Vaughn describes it, “Time disappears into the eternity of the present instant, and one is nowhere and everywhere simultaneously.”²³ Other terms that have been used to describe this state are *Rapture*, *Revelation*, *Satori*, *Enlightenment*, *Peak Experience*, *Samadhi*, *the experience of Being*, *Cosmic Consciousness*, and *Transcendental Consciousness*. William James writes that mysticism is “the mothersea and fountainhead of all religions.” Moses, for example, came to lead Israel out of bondage after he encountered the Holy in a burning bush, and St. Francis of Assisi gave up his worldly possessions and began his unique career as “God’s fool” following an intense mystical experience. Julien Green describes St. Francis’ experience in *God’s Fool: The Life and Times of Francis of Assisi* this way:

Francis felt that mad joy of the convert who sees the world vanish before his eyes. Where was he? Had he been able to talk, he would not have found the words to say—human language no longer

made sense. All notions of time and space faded away. He had no more awareness of his own identity. He was simply lost, swallowed up in indescribable happiness.

By all accounts it is a captivating, powerful, and exhilarating experience that can lead to a reordering of life's priorities. Arthur Koestler nicely describes the close connection of this spontaneous, self-transcending spiritual state with established religions, as follows:

Because the experience is inarticulate, has no sensory shape, color, or words, it lends itself to transcription in many forms, including visions of the cross, or of the goddess Kali; they are like dreams of a person born blind... Thus a genuine mystic experience may mediate a *bona fide* conversion to practically any creed, Christianity, Buddhism, or Fire-Worship.²⁴

It turns out that such experiences are not all that rare. Investigators have found that about one-third of the adult American population have had at least one intense spiritual experience where they have felt themselves in the presence of a spiritual force that lifted them outside of themselves. Approximately half of these people have had such an experience on more than one occasion. Mystical experiences most commonly occur when a person is listening to music. Other frequently reported triggers are prayer, observing the beauty of nature, quiet reflection or meditation, and attending a church service. One well-designed study showed, however, that only about one in a hundred people who have had an intense spiritual experience actually have had what they term a “genuine” mystical experience. Such an experience is said to include the following: a sense of the ineffable; a feeling of oneness with God, nature, or the universe; a changed perception of time and surroundings; and a feeling of “knowing” coupled with a reordering of life's priorities.²⁵

I have had several “intense spiritual experiences” in my life. Mine have occurred when listening to music, particularly the operas of Wagner, and observing the beauty of nature. One such experience, which I still remember vividly, occurred on a glorious spring day in a park in Boston when I was a third year medical student, lying on a blanket after a picnic lunch with my girlfriend resting next to me. But I personally have never had what these investigators would describe as a life-reordering “genuine” mystical experience.

Mystics tell us, like Schopenhauer, that the Noumenon is one and undifferentiated, that the thing-in-itself is an integrated and unified whole. And they recognize that each human being is “at one” with each other and the world in some very deep and ultimate way. They tell us that the boundaries of the self are ephemeral and illusive, that achieving a unitive state, an at-one-ment, or atonement, is the most desirable of all conditions, even though it entails the dissolution of the self.

The intense spiritual experience that most us can have and have had with sex is closely allied with the mystical experience that only a very few people have had. In Woody Allen’s play *God*, when Doris is told that there is no God, she says:

But without God, the universe is meaningless. Life is meaningless. We’re meaningless. [Deadly pause]. *I have a sudden and overpowering urge to get laid.* [Italics mine]

Her sexual impulses reassure her that her informer is wrong. God does indeed exist. She knows intuitively that by getting laid she can refute the statement that there is no God. She has an inner sense that tells her she can find God through sex, the God of Universal Oneness, that is.

One of Richard Wagner’s biographers, Michael Tanner, is of the opinion that the opera *Tristan and Isolde* “is one of the two greatest religious works of our culture,” the other one being Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*. The intense yearning that Tristan and Isolde have for each other has a religious character to it. Their “rhapsodic striving” for union, for an all-embracing oneness is propelled by sexual love. Their loss of self-identity in an ultimate merging with the other has a redemptive quality to it. Their desire for unity takes them to the Noumenon, to the God of Universal Oneness.

Schopenhauer identified four pathways that can lead us to the Noumenon. These are sex, compassion, mysticism, and music. As one might by now expect, these four facets of the human condition are interconnected. Behavioral scientists tell us that listening to music most often triggers a mystical experience. Mystics tell us that “All is One” and “God is Love.” Lovers wrapped together in the passion of sexual intercourse can have the powerful feeling come over them that they are two halves of the same person. They can experience an intense blissful exhilarating sense of oneness. For them,

also, God is Love, experienced through sexual love. And compassion—unconditional love in its broadest sense—comes from the same place.

One direction that a person can take to find God is to embrace the gospels, scriptures, and doctrines of an organized religion with a “big leap” of faith. Another way, which Schopenhauer described, is to plumb the inner core of our being through intuitive perception. In the second half of the 20th century, this self-assessing, and ultimately self-transcending approach brought about in American culture the quasi-religious movements of the Beat Generation and the New Age movement.

Following the Holocaust and other atrocities committed during the Second World War, group of disaffected Americans initiated a social and literary movement known as the Beat Generation. They were the first generation in our society who became subject to peacetime military conscription. They were also the first generation of young Americans who had to confront the stark possibility that two powerful nation-states, which might someday be at war with each other, possessed enough weapons of mass destruction (nuclear bombs) to possibly destroy the world. This movement, which presaged the hippie movement of the 1960s and the “Me Decade” of the 1970s, was begun by a small group of writers and their friends in New York. They expressed their alienation from mainstream American society by seeking enlightenment and a new sense of values through sex, drugs, modern jazz, and forays into Eastern mysticism.

The two main spokesmen for this Cultural Revolution were classmates at Columbia University in the 1940s. They became friends there before one dropped out and the other was suspended. These two spokesmen were Jack Kerouac, a ruggedly handsome, athletic French-Canadian novelist from Lowell, Massachusetts, and Allen Ginsberg, a flamboyant, visionary Jewish poet from Paterson, New Jersey. (Other notable writers of the Beat generation include William Burroughs, Lawrence Ferlingetti, Geogory Corso, Michael McClure, Gary Synder, and Diane DiPrima.)

In the 1950s the center of the Beat movement shifted to San Francisco, and it came under nationwide scrutiny following the publication of Ginsberg’s *Howl and other Poems* in 1956 and Kerouac’s novel *On the Road* in 1957.²⁶

To place some perspective on the importance of this movement, a rare book catalogue in 1998 offered a copy of *On the Road*, a First Edition in fine condition, for

\$5,500.00. When it was published in 1957 the same hard cover first edition retailed for \$3.95. The bookseller describes this book as follows: “This novel may well lay claim to being the most influential of the post-war. Its portrayal of rebellion against convention affected a generation and changed popular culture, and through that, altered politics and about everything else. Call it credit or call it blame, depending on your view. In any case it represents the trunk of a family tree leading to Bob Dylan, the Beatles, drugs, Vietnam War protest, long hair, the sexual revolution, Woodstock, *Easy Rider*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, dress-down days, and a President who claimed he didn’t inhale.”

The central figure and guiding light of this movement was, not Kerouac or Ginsberg, but Neal Cassady, an energetic, sensual, fast-talking, bisexual, compassionate con man from Denver, Colorado. In Ginsberg’s poem “Howl,” Neal Cassady, as N.C., is the “secret hero of these poems,” the celebrated “cocksman and Adonis of Denver” whose ultimate purpose in “ecstatic and insatiate” copulation is to achieve spiritual enlightenment. In the poem, it was Cassady, with his irrepressible energy and spontaneity, “who talked continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar to Bellevue to museum to Brooklyn Bridge.” In Kerouac’s *On the Road*, Cassady is Dean Moriarty, the main character in the novel, who’s “got the secret we’re all bursting to find.” This photograph shows Neal Cassady, on the left, with Jack Kerouac in their early days together. Kerouac called him a “new American saint,” who introduced him to the religion of *IT*, a self-transcending attainment of synchronization with the Infinite Present and the Eternal Now. Dean [Cassady] says, “You can’t make it with geometry and geometrical systems of thinking. It’s all *this*.” For the Beats, the *this* is found through such activities as digging the riffs of the bop saxophonist, orgasms, drug-induced mystical states of consciousness, and a compassionate, ecstatic affirmation of existence which is expressed by the repeated Beat refrain of “YES.”

Neal Cassady grew up in the slums of Denver. He dropped out of school after the eighth grade, hung around pool halls and stole cars, and by the time he met Kerouac and Ginsberg in New York, at the age of 20, he had spent more than a year in jail. But as a teenager he also spent afternoons in the public library reading Schopenhauer and Proust. A leading attorney in Denver befriended him and helped to guide him in these pursuits. Cassady particularly liked Schopenhauer, his biographer William Plummer writes,

because he was “the philosopher who portrayed man as a creature of will and desire rather than intellect.”²⁷ Gregory Stephenson, in his analysis of the literary legend of this figure, makes this observation about Cassady, as Kerouac portrays him in *On the Road*:

He is energy, both positive and negative. He can be benevolent, libidinous, sage, or baleful. Always he operates beyond the boundaries of rational consciousness. In the manner of a mystic, he can communicate directly with such other surrational persons as the idiot girl with her visions, the ecstatic spastic in the Denver bar, the wild, sweating bop musicians, and the fellahin of Mexico whose spoken language he does not know. Dean is as protean, as powerful, and as unknowable as the human subconscious mind with which he may be identified as a votary, a prophet, and as an embodiment of its energies and mysteries.²⁸

The term *beat* originated with Herbert Huncke, a petty thief, drug addict, hustler, and street philosopher who hung around New York’s Times Square. He introduced the term to Kerouac who used it first in his first novel *The Town and the City*. Someone who is beat, as Huncke views the term, has become beaten-down and relegated to the margins of society—like hookers, junkies, hobos, drag queens, and poor blacks in the South. A university student becomes beat when she identifies with society’s castoffs and rejects traditional values that put a premium on such things as a career, marriage, status and possessions. For Kerouac, *beat* also has a beatific element, a blessedness that arises from the illumination about the true realities of life that one gains being in this state. For Kerouac and his group, being beat has religious significance.

Jack Kerouac once said, “The Beat Generation is basically a religious generation.” He said “we are in the vanguard of the new religion.” He called the Beats a “seeking generation” that is on a spiritual quest. When asked, “What are you looking for?,” he replied, “God. I want God to show me His face.” Neal Cassady was the high priest, or shaman, of this quasireligious movement. Kerouac saw Cassady as a visionary and potentially redemptive figure, a “HOLY GOOF.” (As the bus driver for Ken Kesey’s legendary Merry Pranksters, Cassady was also a central figure in the hippie movement, where he was given the name “Speed Limit”). Allen Ginsberg described him as “the ultimate psycho-spiritual sexcock jeweo fulfillment.” At its very roots, the Beat Generation searched to find *IT*, the (impersonal) God that is Ultimate Reality.

Jack Kerouac, the leading exponent of the movement, died at the age of 47 from the ravages of chronic alcoholism (he bled to death from ruptured esophageal varices, a complication of alcohol-induced liver cirrhosis). And Neal Cassady collapsed and died at the age of 42, from acute alcohol and amphetamine intoxication while walking along some railroad tracks in Mexico. He had set out to count the number of railroad ties along a 15-mile stretch of track between two towns, and his last words were said to have been, “64,928.”

I was 17 years old when *On the Road* was published. I played the saxophone in a high school jazz group. My sympathies sided with the Beats, although I was sufficiently part of the “establishment” to steer a course to college and medical school. But my interests in this movement remain, and I have acquired an extensive collection of Beat literature, including the original manuscript of one of Kerouac’s novels and a letter that Neal Cassady and his wife Carolyn wrote to Jack.

The New Age movement is the most recent secular attempt in American culture to find God. It bears some resemblance to the New Thought movement that thrived in American culture in last two decades of the 19th century. The two leading exponents of this earlier movement were Warren Felt Evans, who expounded the doctrine that we can “come into direct and immediate communication with God” through our unconscious mind, and Ralph Waldo Trine, who in 1897 wrote:

In just the degree that we come into a conscious realization of our oneness with in the Infinite Life, do we make ourselves channels through which the Infinite Intelligence and Power can work. In just the degree in which you realize your oneness with the Infinite Spirit, you will exchange disease for ease, inharmony for harmony, suffering and pain for abounding health and strength.²⁹

The New Age movement, like the New Thought movement a century before it (and Schopenhauer’s philosophy before that), is based on the premise that there is a transpersonal realm to our unconscious minds. This realm encompasses a spiritual dimension to reality that cannot be plumbed by rational thought and the objective experimental methods of science. New Age exponents argue, like Schopenhauer, that one can appreciate ultimate reality only through non-rational intuitive perception and mystical experiences. This movement achieved a widespread popularity following the

publication of Marilyn Ferguson's book *The Aquarian Conspiracy* in 1980, which promotes a world view of holistic, ecological interconnectedness.

A wide range of pseudoscientific beliefs and attitudes carry the New Age banner, such as trance channeling, reincarnation, out-of-body experiences, healing with crystals, various meditation techniques, UFO abductions, altered states of consciousness, precognition (awareness of events of the future), and psychokinesis (the power of the mind to move objects).³⁰ But the basic paradigm of this movement is that everything is one vast interconnected process. Or, more simply, all is one. The New Age God is a pantheistic cosmic oneness, which is also termed Ultimate Reality, Higher Self, Cosmic Christ, and Ultimate Unifying Principle. It is an amalgam of the Eastern mysticism of Hinduism and Buddhism, American psychological thought "from Edwards to Emerson to James" on the spiritual nature of the unconscious, and of a potpourri of more recently developed ideas. These include Abraham Maslow's "self-actualization," the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's "transcendental meditation," and M. Scott Peck's "the unconscious is God." Like the Beat Generation before it, the New Age movement is basically a religious movement. Converts seek to "actualize" their divine nature and achieve union with God by employing various consciousness-altering techniques. The religion writer Russell Chandler lists some of the "psychotechnologies" that can trigger such a transformative experience as follows:

Meditation, Yoga, chanting, mood-altering music, mind-expanding drugs, esoteric systems of religious mysticism and knowledge, guided imagery, balancing and aligning "energies," hypnosis, body disciplines, fasting, martial arts, mechanical devices that measure and alter bodily processes, and mental programs ranging from contemporary psychotherapies to radical seminars designed to obliterate former values and inculcate the New Age mind-set.³¹

New Age converts, in essence, are seeking new forms of religious experience. And like the devotees of established theistic religions, they are also prone to manipulation by self-serving leaders and shamans of this quasireligious movement. One such leader, J. Z. Knight of Yelm, Washington, became famous among New Age followers in the 1980s for allegedly being able to channel messages from Ramtha, a 35,000 year old warrior from the lost continent of Atlantis. The message from Ramtha, she said, was, "God is

within.” According to one TV report, she earned up to \$200,000 in a single appearance channeling Ramtha.

An important reality of life is that our species’ religious impulse, which gives rise to our sense of the sacred, is a strong force. Primitive hunter-gatherer bands and technologically modern societies alike must reckon with it. As Gordon Alport puts it, “Religion, like sex, is an almost universal interest of the human race.”³²

In his search for God, the detective in “Mr. Big” says, “What if Kierkegaard’s right?...If you can never really *know*. Only have faith.” With regards to a personal God, one would be hard put to say that Kierkegaard is wrong. But we *can* intuitively, at least, “know” that there is a God of Universal Oneness that lies at the root of everything. Intuitively derived knowledge is not “scientific,” that is, it is not rationally coherent nor is it consensually verifiable. Intuitive knowledge is what one observer terms a “*surrational*” form of knowledge, a “direct perception,” as Schopenhauer puts it. It is independent of any reasoning process. It is a blind, “holy fool’s” form of knowing. But one should not dismiss it, as the critic Brendan Gill, who writes for *The New Yorker*, prefers to do, by branding it a “no man’s land of nonreason.”³³ Each one of us can intuitively apprehend the God of Universal Oneness both through sex and compassion. Mystics can gain a further appreciation of this deeper world through their intense spiritual experiences. And they tell us that *God is Love*, which is in keeping with Schopenhauer’s views on the importance of *compassion* in such matters

This account of the rock bottom reality of things, however, does not fully satisfy our metaphysical needs and assuage our fear of death. A compassionate Universal Oneness is one thing, but this kind of “God” will not satisfy our desire for a continued individual existence after death. It stands in silent indifference to our transient, personal existence. We have a deep-seated need to form a covenant with a supernatural Being who can grant us immortality, one who can enable our essence, our soul, our spirit—or whatever one might prefer to call it—to somehow live on after the physical death of our bodies. Stonewall Jackson believed that death in battle defending his beloved Confederacy would be rewarded with everlasting life in heaven. In an attempt to escape the oblivion of death we worship a God (or a Goddess) in specially built sanctuaries, in a sacramental manner. This metaphysical need is a very important component of our

psychological makeup, as G. Stanley Hall pointed out early in the 20th century. He writes:

As Freudians find sex, so our analysis finds religion at the root of all. Religion is a passion of the soul comparable in universality and intensity with sex... As the root impulse of sex is to propagate another generation, so the root impulse of religion is to prolong the life of the individual by getting his soul born into another world. Both are forms of Schopenhauer's will to life, which is the Brund-Trieb of all life.

Belief in a supernatural Being arises, in part, from a numinous reaction to the fear of death. Even though we feel a deep-seated need for a divine providence, we nevertheless cannot know for certain if there really is a *personal* God or Goddess that we can relate to. In the search for God, it requires a leap of faith to claim the existence of a *personal* God. In any event, I will continue to happily accept the prayers of a patient's loved ones, prayer groups, and church congregation for a successful outcome with surgery. And in the uncommon instances when the patient does not survive, I will always be grateful to the chaplains, reverends, priests, and rabbis who provide solace and minister to the grieving family.

 ENDNOTES

- ¹ See Hays, H.R. *In the Beginnings: Early Man and his Gods* (G. P Putnam's Sons, New York, 1963), and especially William Irwin Thompson's *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light: Mythology, Sexuality and the Origins of Culture* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1981).
- ² From *The World as Will and Representation* vol. 2, page 161.
- ³ From William Irwin Thompson, *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light: Mythology, Sexuality and the Origins of Culture* (St. Martins Press, New York, 1981), page 103.
See also Elise Boulding, *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time* (Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1976).
- ⁴ From Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1987). This is one of the more provocative studies in the field of Goddess worship.
- ⁵ See also Alexander Marshack, *The Roots of Civilization* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1972); James Mellaart, *Çatal Hüyük* (Thames & Hudson, London, 1967); Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, (Biblical Archaeology Society, Washington, D.C., 1988), page 118; and James Preston *Mother Worship: Theme and Variation* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1982).
- ⁶ See Graham McCann, *Marilyn Monroe* (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1988).
- ⁷ These examples are taken from Patrice Wynne's *The Womanspirit Sourcebook* (Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1988) pages 186-205. See also Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1986).
- ⁸ The one act play *God* is in his book *Without Feathers*
- ⁹ From William James, *The Variety of Religious Experience* (Mentor Books, New York, 1958; originally published in 1902), page 381.
- ¹⁰ Paul Johnson, *Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Eighties* (Harper and Row, New York, 1983), page 699.
- ¹¹ See Konstantin Kolenda, "Thinking the Unthinkable: Logical Conflicts in the Traditional Concept of God." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 8, 72-78, 1969.

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- ¹² From his essay "On Religion" in *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, page 345.
- ¹³ *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, page 347.
- ¹⁴ See Robert W. Crapps, *An Introduction to Psychology of Religion* (Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1986), page 317.
- ¹⁵ "Nefarious times we live in" is in his book *Side Effects*.
- ¹⁶ From "On Religion," in *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, page 362.
- ¹⁷ This statement by Judge Robert Potter was selected as the "Quotation of the Day" in the October 25, 1989 issue of *The New York Times*.
- ¹⁸ See Perry Miller's essay "From Edwards to Emerson" in his *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Belknap Press, Cambridge, 1975).
- ¹⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 12 vols. (AMS Press, New York, 1968), vol. 1, page 27.
- ²⁰ See Schopenhauer's "Essay on Spirit Seeing" in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 1
- ²¹ Robert C. Fuller gives a concise and lucid discussion of this subject in his book, *Americans and the Unconscious* (: Oxford University Press, New York, 1986).
- ²² Jean Lanier, "From Having a Mystical Experience to Becoming a Mystic--Reprint and Epilogue," *ReVISION: The Journal of Consciousness and Change*, 12 (no. 1): 41-44, (Summer) 1989
- ²³ See Frances Vaughan's article "True and False Mystical Experiences: Some Distinguishing Characteristics" in *ReVISION: The Journal of Consciousness and Change*, 12 (no. 1): 5. (Summer) 1989.
- ²⁴ From Arthur Koestler, *The Lotus and the Robot* (Hutchinson Co Lt, London, 1960), page 353.
- ²⁵ See A. M. Greeley, *Ecstasy: A way of knowing*. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974 and L. Eugene Thomas and Pamela E. Cooper, "Incidence and Psychological Correlates of Intense Spiritual Experiences," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 12, (no. 1): 75-85, 1980.
- ²⁶ John Clellon Holmes wrote an excellent analysis of this subject titled "The Philosophy of the Beats," which first appeared in *Esquire* in 1958 and was reprinted in the June 1983 issue (pages 158-167). The three best biographies of Jack Kerouac are by Tom Clark, *Jack Kerouac*. (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, San Diego, 1984); Gerald Nicosia, *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac*. (Grove Press, New York, 1983); and Warren French, *Jack Kerouac: Novelist of the Beat Generation*. (Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1986). Barry Miles has written an interesting, but

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- flawed, biography of Allen Ginsberg, titled *Ginsberg: A Biography* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1989).
- ²⁷ William Plummer, *The Holy Goof: A Biography of Neal Cassady* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981), page 24.
- ²⁸ Gregory Stephenson, *The Daybreak Boys: Essays on the Literature of the Beat Generation* (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Illinois, 1990).
- ²⁹ Ralph Waldo Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite* (Crowell, New York, 1897).
- ³⁰ Paul Kurtz, "The New Age in Perspective" *The Skeptical Inquirer*, 13: 365-374, Summer 1989.
- ³¹ See Russell Chandler, *Understanding the New Age* (Word Publishing, Dallas, 1988).
- ³² Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion* (Macmillan, New York, 1950).
- ³³ Brendan Gill used this phrase to respond to criticism about his scathing article on Joseph Campbell that appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, September 28, 1989. The letters to the editor about this article and his response to them appeared in the November 9, 1989 issue.