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GOD: THE INVENTION OF AN IDEA

ABSTRACT:
In this essay, I argue that the God hypothesis is merely an idea based on a fantasy principle. Albeit a logical concept born of social convention, God is a semiotic embodiment and symbolization of ideal value. Put laconically, God is only a thought. Rather than an extant ontological subject or agency traditionally attributed to a supernatural, transcendent creator or supreme being responsible for the coming into being of the universe, God is a psychological invention signifying ultimate ideality. Here God becomes a self-relation to an internalized idealized object, the idealization of imagined value. This thesis partially rests on the psychoanalytic proposition that mental processes and contents of consciousness are grounded in an unconscious ontology that conditions the production of our conscious thoughts through fantasy formation. Although ideas have both conscious and unconscious origins, their articulation in consciousness is predicated on linguistic constructions governed by the psychodynamics of wish-fulfillment based upon our primordial desires and conflicts. The idea or notion of God is the manifestation of our response to our being-in-relation-to-lack, and the longing to replace natural absence with divine presence. Hence God remains a deposit of one's failure to mourn natural deprivation or lack in favor of the delusional belief in an ultimate hypostatized object of idealized value.

God does not exist. God is merely an idea—the invention of imaginative thought. God is the product of a collective fantasy ensconced in the basic desire for wish-fulfillment. It is easy to appreciate why the human psyche is compelled to invent the notion of God as an ultimate metaphysical reality, because millions of people, especially in America today, have a profound need for God. People want consonance, love, enjoyment, satiation, perpetual peace, perfection—no one in their right mind would deny this universal yearning! Yet for believers, a secular existence fails to meet this felt necessity. It is deeply comforting to believe in an Ideal Being, for one's anxieties, conflicts, and emotional pain is mitigated by believing in a divine beneficence that promises a satisfying afterlife. This hegemonic fallacy—the belief or faith in such an afterlife—makes personal, daily existence more tolerable with the dream, that deep down, sometime in the future, when you perish, you will have everything you desire but are deprived of in your momentary life. Death no longer becomes an ending in-itself, but rather an Eden where all cherished wishes and values are realized—the Perfect World. God is a signifier for flawlessness, salvation, everlasting tranquility, or any qualitative value that signifies perennial happiness or bliss. As the mere product of fantasy life, God is solely a coveted fiction.

God as a Metaphysical Question

Richard Dawkins tells us that it is "almost certain" that God does not exist based upon improbable statistical odds.[1] But I would argue that the God hypothesis is not really an empirical question, because if it were, we already have proof in God's non-existence *via abstinentia*; for God neither has manifested nor revealed itself directly. If the God question was truly an empirical one, then science has already *proven* that God does not exist. The very notion of existence employs the predicate of identity, namely, that something *is*. The empiricist's criterion of reality is based on the premise of that which is, that which has presence or being (*esse*). A representation and concept of existence is further constructed based upon the mode in which an object presents itself. But with the God assertion, we have the converse: a Being is predicated to exist based on that which is *not present*, that which does not present itself. Although most sensible people can generally agree that the universe exists because it presents itself to us as a manifold of sense impressions, objects, and processes that we are necessarily obliged to participate in and acknowledge as real, the masses often show deference to illogic. Perhaps such tendency toward deference is partly out of conditioning or habit tied to social custom, but also out of sensitivity (if not perspicacity and respect) for the needs of all believers to maintain emotional illusions that serve discernable psychological functions.[2] We accept the universe as part of our natural circumstances because we experientially sense it to be real and substantive, what we are thrown into,[3] as part of that which is *given.* So why should we not impose the same criterion on the question of God?

In the context of God's non-instantiation as non-materialization, how can we justify the assertion that there is a divine something rather than an apparent nothing?

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[1] *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), Ch. 4, p. 137.

[2] Living as an outspoken atheist is a tough row to hoe as a minority in societies that condemn free speech and inquiry. But social discrimination and marginalization abounds in free societies as well. Those who question others or speak unabashedly about religious disbelief are often lambasted for their deviant convictions and lack of observance to social decorum. Moreover, we are quick to be labeled as radicals, heretics, or antisocial who thrive on creating interpersonal discomfort in others. We should challenge this political hegemony and militate against it. Yet this may come with certain costs. An inevitable social distance and alienation occurs when a lack of tolerance for difference in belief systems is experienced by atheist and theist alike. Cryptic discriminatory practices are prevalent on all stratifications of culture, economic class, and political dynamics operative within social organizations, from tiny cliques to large political bodies that collectively determine almost anything, from the fate of how one is treated interpersonally by others to social policy. This is why many atheists are cautious about offending others because their authentic, uncensored views could have tangible consequences that encumber the concrete quality of their lives. This is quite conspicuous in smaller communities where anonymity is limited or non-existent, which influences everything from social gossip, exclusion or expulsion from group membership, to ostracism in public schools, business, and communal practices. It is likely that with increased education, awareness, and social dialogue these emotional prejudices will acquire reform.

[3] See Heidegger's discussion of historicity and our thrownness into existence in *Being and Time* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, Trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, 1927).

Given the unequivocal fact that the universe exists, shouldn't the God question be asking: Why is there nothing rather than something? If God exists, why does God abstain from revealing itself? Yet this question presupposes that we as mortal humans should assume the existence of a supreme Being in the first place that has reasons not to appear or manifest directly, hence imparting a certain intentionality onto God, and projecting a cornucopia of motives which we are not privy to.[4] But this very supposition rests on the presupposition that there is something behind the veil of nothingness (viz. the non-manifested), or more precisely, that there is something *in* nothingness—namely, the inverse of what does not appear. The collective fantasy is that there is a hidden reality—the *Ding an sich;*[5] in this case, a divine presence animating the cosmos.[6]

The very definition of empiricism rests on the notion that something is observable and potentially measurable as revealed to our experiential senses and cognitive faculties. Although one may claim to experience God as the reality of the unseen,[7] in order to escape the charge of a radical or oppressive subjectivism (e.g., "It is true because I say so!"), or crass idealism ("I think it, therefore it exists!"), experience must be subject to universal (replicable) criterion that gains validity through verification, which by definition transcends subjectivism for objective consensual agreements, what we typically—and practically—call facts. From an empirical point of view, God does not exist because there is no observable or tangible object/agent that is manifest or present; hence we cannot scientifically study nothing (literally, no-thing) under the rubric or parameters that define the scientific method. Although we may charge science with its own hegemonic agendas, here it may be argued that the God question is not a legitimate scientific topic because it does not meet the basic requisite of falsifiability through testability.[8] In other words, if you can't falsify a premise through the potential refutation of conjectures, then anything is potentially true. How can you observe, measure, or quantify something that eludes the sensuous world? How can you refute that which does not appear if the presupposition in question does not allow for an empirical assessment?

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[4] In *Breaking the Spell: Religion as Natural Phenomena* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), Daniel Dennett views the concept of God as an "intentional object." Here I wish to emphasize that the intentional stance or object is in fact the human subject whom cannot help but project their own internal human attributes onto the *idea* of what is construed to be God.

[5] Cf. Kant's discussion of "Things-in-themselves" as unknowable but thinkable, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1781/1787, Trans. Norman Kemp Smith, 1929), p. 27, 74, 87, 149.

[6] Stephen Maitzen (2006) argues that according to the argument of divine hiddenness, "God's existence is disconfirmed by the fact that not everyone believes in God" (p. 177) based on an uneven distribution of theistic belief due to a dwindling reduction in the demographics of theism (see "Divine Hiddenness and the Demographics of Theism." *Religious Studies*, 2006, 42, 177-191.)

[7] See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin Books, 1902), Lecture III, p. 53.

[8] See Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Routledge, 1959), "Falsifiability as a Criterion of Demarcation," Ch. 1, p. 17.

By positing the existence of something that is not observable or manifest, verifiable or falsifiable, one dislocates the object in question away from science to the realm of *thought*. Although thoughts are to some degree introspectively observable and extraspectively recordable, they certainly cannot be dislocated from the thinker or agent entertaining such ideas, even when they become an object of study.

The study of religion, theology, and philosophy are not the same as the natural sciences precisely because they entertain different subject matters and employ different methodologies. Even in contemporary physics, when objects are postulated to exist independent of consciousness, they are still subject to observation selection effects that must pass the test of a replicable method. Yet non-empirical fields within the humanities are comfortable with making ultimate metaphysical truth claims that support the objective realism of God's existence. This is what is generally meant or implied when God is predicated to *be*, that is, to exist as an external entity independent of mind. And if we concede that any object of our sense perception, experiential faculties, and rational contemplation is necessarily predicated on the hermeneutic interpretation of the natural world—in other words, that *all* experience is mediated by mentation and our faculties of cognition—we cannot epistemologically justify the ontological assertion of God's existence independent from mind. In other words, we cannot even conceive of the idea of God's independence and ontological separateness from our own subjective thoughts that, even if shared by others, condition this conception.

Whether one avouches scientific realism, or any of its variants, such as naturalism or critical realism, we are left with the same conclusion: We cannot observe and verify that which does not present itself other than our *ideas* about its lack of presence. This is why the God question, from my point of view, is more properly considered a metaphysical enterprise.[9]

God as the Inversion of our *Pathos*

For the Greeks, to be human is to suffer. Our human *pathos* (πάθος) is to create God through thought, the invention of mind; and we are compelled to do this precisely because we lack. The human condition is suffused with psychic pain, what modern society is quick to label as pathology. Riddled with anxiety, deprivation, uncertainty, and daily adversity, the believer postulates the opposite of what we experience—the negation of our suffering and finitude through the fantasy of permanence, fulfillment, and

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[9] In contrast, the linguistic, postmodern turn in Continental philosophy, which developed contemporaneously with Anglo-American analytic philosophy, reduced all propositions to linguistic predications governed by social construction and the conventions of grammatical relativism. In essence, what we *think* is a product of our socialization practices grounded in language. The original content of our thoughts—what we posit, conceive, imagine, or hypothesize about—does not ensure a direct correspondence between the object of thought and an external independent reality. Instead, all ideas are cultural-linguistic mediations. Here the stability of the modern notions of truth, reality, and absolutism are overturned by the context and contingencies of society, historical and cultural relativism, and linguistic construction. From this perspective, metaphysics is untenable.

immortality, where we achieve abundance, plenitude, and deep satisfaction—*eudaimonia*.[10] But God does not exist as anything more than a thought conceived by our unconscious fantasies and superimposed on our consciousness as an imagined reality we deeply long to believe in. The idea itself has governed world history and the lives of most of its inhabitants since the inception of our human ancestry—even conceivably other primates—who would have had some crude, elemental notion of a powerful Other. This concept, that is, this imagined construct, surely would have had its gestation in the minds of primitive man, which was transmitted over the ages as the human race and civilization evolved into its present condition. The idea and belief in God is entrenched in human consciousness and fortified by communal and cultural self-deception based on a collective delusion that treats the concept qua idea *as-if* God is 'really real.'[11] The projective fantasy is that the Idea itself is identical with an extant God rather than what the idea signifies. So the world masses reify the thought to the status of a concrete ontology rather than view the idea itself as a product of our psychologies. Rather than view God as a semiotic, hence giving birth to a whole host of meaning structures with symbolic functions, there is an isomorphism between the signifier (as thought) and signified (as external object). Therefore God becomes an invisible *sensus divinitatis*, a supreme personal being animating the cosmos, when this psychological proclivity to yearn and believe is itself an ideational deposit of our developmentally infantile thinking fuelled by fear and fantasy, nothing more than a fairy tale. Like superstition and mythology, fiction becomes hypostatized rather than reflective of metaphorical meaning, and ideas are imagined to be real independent of ideation.

Humanity's overwhelming need to invent the idea of God is also reflective of the fact that we can't give up on it. This tells us something profound about human nature, for man is a wishing animal. Millions, if not billions of people, cannot forsake the hope in the possibility that their fantasy is 'really real,' that is, independent of their fantasy lives and wishes, and that hope and faith become the panacea for their existential malaise. And the cryptic nature of their subjective private fantasies is validated and fortified when communal consensus elevates this culturally sanctioned, ideological unrealism to the dominion of the 'really real.'

As relational beings, the believing masses cannot accept the fact that we are ultimately alone and there is nothing else after we die. There is no family we return to. There is no bosom. There are no prospects for anything else than what we experience

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[10] This is Aristotle's term for happiness, the end goal of all action for the good of man. See *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), Book X.

[11] From Hans Vaihinger's philosophy of the "as-if" (see *The Philosophy of 'As-If:' A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind.* New York: Hartcourt, Brace, & Co., 1925), to Alfred Adler's "fictional finalism," fictions are thoughts and propositional attitudes, as well as unconscious ideas or mental structures that have no legitimate counterpart in reality, but they serve an adaptive purpose and are lived out in a pragmatic way in order to enable us to function more effectively. Fictive activity, therefore, becomes interlaced within personality development and serves deep motivational and affective aims tied to fantasy formation. Here fictions serve defensive functions integral to the subject's worldview.

now or create in our own process of becoming. Many mistakenly, yet quite wilfully at times, create the illusion of a wishful afterlife when there is nothing beyond our natural embodiment.[12] What we call God—what we think of as an *object-relation*—is really a *self-relation* to a wishful idea we imagine is an other-worldly divine and beatific supernatural (yet personal) being that exists, and who we are in communion with; when we are in fact only relating to our own minds.[13] This self-relation is indeed an internalized unconscious relation to an idealized object turned into a reified (and deified) subject; when this fantasized object is in essence a fixation to an *idealization of imagined value*. This fixation to an idealized value-object is tantamount to a delusion, for there is no substantive evidence to prove the facticity of the belief that the Ideal *as* idea is a metaphysical entity apart from the psychological motives that underlie the invention of the idea itself.

An element of our superego—the seat of conscience and moral judgment,[14] that which stands over and above us in developmental importance and idealized value—is itself a valuing microagent or part of our personality that is invested in constructing a fantasy system of perfection in all its myriad forms, particularly an Ultimate Object of idealized value. The believer, I suggest, as opposed to a person of faith,[15] harbors a delusional nucleus in the sense that a valued object is extraordinarily idealized and worshiped as a substitute for one's fallible (earthly) objects (i.e., this could be one's parents, society, the Fatherland, Big Other, etc.). In essence, this delusional hegemony is, with qualifications, analogous to—but not reducible or equivalent to—the pathological organization of the

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[12] Of course we can debate the question of life after death, the transmogrification of matter, mind-body dualism, reincarnation, and so forth, which I would argue is not the same as the God question; however, it is incontestable that the death of organic life is a biological state of finality. Scientific naturalism and contemporary materialism generally argue that mind and body are, with stipulations, virtually identical and dependent upon physiological corporeality; and that the cessation of the physical body is a terminal ending point, as any anatomist or mortician will tell you.

[13] It should be assumed that mental contents (e.g., specific ideas or representations of God) are largely, originally derived from interiorized collective, cultural processes introduced in familial, communal, educational, and institutional social life.

[14] *Über-Ich* is Freud's term for moral sense, which is a critical-moral agency that stands over against itself and holds itself up to a higher authority. What is familiarly known as the "superego" is the modification of the ego or split off portion of the I that stands in relation to a particular form of identification: namely, a set of values and prohibitions it internalized from attachment figures, familial relations, and cultural experience, ideals and principles the self strives to attain.

[15] Here I wish to make the distinction between the believer, who takes an epistemological stance of asserting God's ontological existence, verses the person of faith who may be epistemologically agnostic or uncertain; albeit in phenomenology and practice, there may be said to be a structural tension or ambivalence than underlies both belief and faith.

inner world of a paedophile.[16] Here I wish to emphasize the essential (hence necessary, conditional, and non-accidental) structure of the similar psychological dispositions inherent to the *fantasy life* of each process, not the specific content or actions of either party. What is essential, that is—indispensible—in each case, is that an idealized object is worshiped for its imagined ideal value. The fantasized object of worship in both theism and paedophilia alike is the delusional idealization of imagined value that is attached to the fixated object *within* the fantasy constellation itself. In other words, what is structurally similar is the *form* of the fantasy, not the content or the context. Just as the paedophilic object unconsciously represents the ideal child-self, God signifies the Ideal Other that loves the Ideal Self unconditionally. God, like the sexualized child, becomes a fetish object to love, venerate, and adore: "If I can possess that object, then I will be complete!"[17]

For the large majority of humanity throughout the world, God, and its semiotic derivatives, symbolize ideality—the conception of absolute perfection. This is none-other than what we prize or cherish above all else—the Good, the True, the Beautiful—Pure Excellence. As our self-relation to ideality, God becomes a signifier for the highest form of valuation imaginable. And the hallowed relationship we form with our values—what we find most worthy—may be the most sacred covenant that governs the law of the heart, namely, the moral principles that define selfhood and what we conceivably live and die for. If this were not the case, then the history of religious conflict throughout the world in the name of God would be a vacuous testament to human stupidity.

Religion as Naturalized Psychology

When we hear the word God, or its equivalent in other cultures, it immediately evokes the notion of religion, its semiotic correspondent. Religion has many names for what God ultimately signifies, such as a divine deity as supernatural intelligence, a supreme Creator[18] or First Cause, the Holy Father, the Unmanifested,[19] the Revealer, the

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[16] See Franco De Masi's discussion of his treatment of a paedophile in "The Paedophile and his Inner World: Theoretical and Clinical Considerations on the Analysis of a Patient." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 2007; 88: pp. 147-165. In his words, the idealized object "promises all manner of pleasure and happiness" (p. 147).

[17] It is interesting to note that the preponderance of paedophiles within the clergy or religious environments are purportedly carrying out God's work. Of course, anyone working clinically with sexual offenders has to therapeutically address the almost universal fact that they themselves were victims of childhood sexual abuse and developmental trauma that conditioned their pathologies and compulsions to prey on children they unconsciously identify as their ideal (untainted or pure) self.

[18] Cf. John Calvin's "God the Creator." *Institutes of Christian Religion* (I, iii, i), Trans. Henry Beveridge. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846).

Nameless,[20] and the Wholly Other[21] as the condition and ground of existence, where phenomenological experience of the sacred and mystical union with Ultimate Reality may be captured by the term *numen*.[22] Theosophic approaches broadly encompass a religious philosophy where a mystical component to the so-called truth of God as the absolute Ultimate Being and Source of everything is emphasized,[23] yet there is always a personal element to it.[24] The *mysterium tremendum* inspires awe and mystery,[25] whereby value is attained by believing in Something More that is Other-Worldly.

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[19] In the *Yoga Aphorisms* of Patanjali, advanced yogic meditation purportedly leads to mystical union with all-being (see "Subtlety Pertaining To Objects Culminates in A-Linga Or The Unmanifested;" Sutra I, 45; p. 102). Although the Unmanifested does not become manifest, there is a logical need to posit a Latent or Unmanifest to an underlying, transcendent constant. See Swami Hariharananda Aranya, *Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali: Containing his Yoga Aphorisms with Vyasa's Commentary in Sanskrit and a Translation with Annotations Including Many Suggestions for the Practice of Yoga.* Trans. Peresh Nath Mukerji, 3rd Ed. (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1981; rpt. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1983.)

[20] In Lao Tzu's, *Tao Te Ching*, he discusses the cosmic origin of the transcendent: "The Nameless is the origin of heaven and earth" In Paul J. Lin, *A Translation of Lao Tzu's* Tao Te Ching *and Wang Pi's* Commentary. (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1977), p. 3.

[21] This term was introduced by Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy, 2nd. Ed.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

[22] Dan Merkur (in "The Numinous as a Category of Values." *The Sacred and its Scholars*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996, pp. 104-123.), while interpreting Rudolf Otto's "The Sensus Numinis as the Historical Basis of Religion," (*Hibbert Journal*, 1932, 30: pp. 283-297; 415-430.), describes the *sensus numinous* as a category of values that inspires majestic awe and splendor, which at the same time is clouded in mystery imbued with an emotional sense of urgency. This phenomenological amalgamation of psychic experience also nicely captures Jung's numinous notion of an archetype (see" On the Nature of the Psyche," 1947, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8: pp. 159-234, Princeton University Press).

[23] The 17th Century philosopher, mystic, and theosophist, Jacob Boehme, provides an account of the origins of the soul and refers to the mystical being of the deity as the *Ungrund* (the "unground") (see *Forty Questions on the Soul*, 1620, III 11/1.15, in *Sämtliche Schriften*. 11 vols. Edited by Will-Erich Peuckert & August Faust. Stuttgart: Frommanns Verlag, 1955-61; originally published in 1730. Cf. pp. 146-149 in Andrew Weeks', *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991). Inspired by the study of Plotinus, (see Eric von der Luft's "Comment," in *History and System: Hegel's Philosophy of History*, Ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994, p. 39), Boehme radically reconceptualized God as the *ens manifestativum sui*, "the being whose essence is to reveal itself." (Refer to David Walsh's, "The Historical Dialectic of Spirit: Jocob Boehme's Influence on Hegel," in Perkins' *History and System*, p. 16).

[24] This may also be said of Gnosticism. There are many different systems of Gnosticism that offer varying accounts on the nature of first principles and the coming into being of God and the universe. However, a cardinal element of Gnostic thought is a radical dualism that governs the relation between God and the world. Gnostics conceive of God as the "Alien" or the "first" "Life." This appears in a standard introduction of Mandaean compositions: "In the name of the great first alien Life from the worlds of light, the sublime that stands above all," and is reflected

Religion is ultimately about ontology—about what is 'really real,' the World of all Worlds. Although some sects of religions are devoid of a God construct, such as in some forms of Buddhism and Shinto, religion has historically attempted to answer to the greater metaphysical questions of Being, especially when it posits a transcendental ideal. For example, we are once again preoccupied with the evolution vs. creationism or intelligent design debate, which is a modern day re-packaging of the cosmological argument that challenges the biological sciences. More metaphysical approaches are concerned with the Absolute, Transcendent, or Principle of the Ultimate, or with more abstract equivalents to the universe or material cosmos as a substitute for a supernatural creator, such as relegating God to Logic or pure thought, even Nature itself. In all these traditions, God becomes a living system, which is the matrix of everything, some sort of Cosmic Mind or suprapersonal agency that exists 'out there.'

Although we may characterize God in many fashions, from different cultural anthropologies to variances in religious studies, what I mean by God is this: Any proposition, belief, or faith that there is an independent supraordinate creator, agent, or entity operating in the extant world outside of the living subject or human mind, which *a fortiori* animates the universe, and is viewed as a supreme being that is the primary source underlying all facets of the universe. This is merely a fantasy. No such being or entity exists. There is no evidentiary or verifiable proof for believing that God is *anything but* an idea; and even philosophical rationalism is severely challenged, because you cannot simply reason something into tangible existence. Furthermore, if we import a transcendent realm independent of the energetic-material universe, where space and time are suspended for a non-embodied, atemporal, cosmic paranormal order, then are we not

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throughout gnostic literature such as Marcion's concept of the "alien God," "the Other," "the Nameless," "the Hidden," "the Unknown," and the "unknown Father." Belonging to another (nether) world, the divine 'alien' is "strange" and "unfamiliar," hence "incomprehensible." Estranged from the comprehensible world, the "great first Life" is conceived of as possessing both positive and negative attributes of superiority and suffering, perfection and tragedy, transcendence and alienation from its original being. Further competing dialectical forces are attributed to the godhead, which are understood differently by various gnostic myths and theories on cosmology, cosmogony, and anthropology. The second century gnostic, Basilides, is said to have postulated a primal "non-existent god," which was later taken up by Valentinus who claimed that "there is in invisible and ineffable heights a pre-existent perfect aeon (i.e. a supernatural being), whom they also call Pre-beginning, Forefather and Primal Ground (Bythos), that he is inconceivable and invisible, eternal and uncreated (or: begotten) and that he existed in great peace and stillness in unending spaces (aeons)" (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 11). Due to the indescribable nature of the "divine Absolute," the Valentinians were content with using a few alchemical symbols as "Abyss" or "Silence" to represent the ineffable. See Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 2nd Ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), pp. 42, 49-50, 199; Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), p.62; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, ed. W.W. Harvey, 2 vols., (Cambridge, 1857; reprint Ridgewood, New Jersey, 1965); Jon Mills, *The Unconscious Abyss* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), p 206, n5.

[25] Otto (1950) also identifies the tremendous mystery that is another component of the numinous, where the sense of the holy is experienced as overwhelmingly awesome and majestic.

embracing an equally improbable antiquated panpsychism, animism, anthroposophy,[26] or some form of unsophisticated shamanistic folk lore?

There is an inescapable psychologism and anthropomorphism inherent in assigning human characteristics to a cosmic creator entity, especially when there are purported to be subjective dispositions and predilections assigned to a divine Will or personality. Psychological properties attributed to God furthermore take on hypostatized qualities, to the point that they may be viewed as belonging to a supernatural *macroanthropos* as opposed to our own psychic projections. If one's definition of God does not include or imply a personal element, then what is the point of calling it God? Here God merely becomes an abstraction or category of values one aspires to attain or fulfill. That's not God. That's naturalized psychology, or what philosophers typically call phenomenology. Pursuit of the spiritual, the numinous, or transcendental phenomenology does not require the notion of God in order to bring fulfillment and meaning to personal existence, because it is a process of becoming rather than the pursuit of a religious path. If one wants to call religious phenomenology God devoid of a supreme personal agency, then God is reduced to natural experience. If that is the case, then there is no need to appeal to a metaphysical being that inhabits another dimension or lies Beyond.

The Psychodynamics of the Need to Invent God

The notion of a transpersonal, supernatural creator entity is in reality a frightful thought. For those in prayer or in the madhouse, I can think of no greater paranoia. For the believer constantly worried about God's judgment or watchful eye, or the psychotic tormented by religious delusions, the common denominator is anxiety. Here the very notion of God is laced with an inherent ambivalent factor in felt-relation to our unease and trepidations, for God is both an ideal and a feared unknown, omnipotent object. God therefore serves a dialectical function within the abyss of our psyches that lies at the heart of our anxieties, as well as a promissory potential to alleviate them. This ambivalent fulcrum, however, is experienced differently for people, depending upon what side of the dialectic (ideality vs. a fear factor) is most operative at any given moment. This ambiguous tension between God as good versus ominous is not only historically situated, it is dialectically organized within the concept itself, for ideality always stands in relation to its opposition: both are mutually implicative in any discourse on God.

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[26] I have in mind the founder of anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner, who developed a method of perceptual, intellectual, and intuitive attunement to a purported "objective" spiritual world, which has developed into an international movement applied to many different disciplines. It has also been harshly critiqued and largely viewed as a cult, although academics would favor the value-neutral phrase "new religious movement." Dan Merkur tells us that anthroposophy, as well as other theosophical systems, "teach visualization practices, so that people can travel out of the body on the astral plane, [and] perform actions there that ostensibly cause results on the material plane (i.e. accomplishing magic), etc. These practices have practical results, that is, they produce visions that blend autosuggestion with unconscious manifestations, and [are] routinely interpreted in fantastic ways that are self-deluding" (personal communication, 2011).

One reason why God is so instinctive and pined after is that the idea itself serves a primordial need for wish-fulfillment based on unconscious angst that torments the psyche. Psychoanalysis has long ago revealed this insight into the matrix of the human mind, for we are besieged by anxiety, despair, trauma, suffering, and human tragedy. Our being is *pathos*, and that is why we need to invent God.[27] We need something to alleviate our fear and trembling, and the antiseptic voice of reason offers little consolation. That is why irrationality and emotion reign supreme in the minds of the world masses. God is the world's greatest defense mechanism![28]

Paranoia, terror, and dread of annihilation are the consequences if one dare question the Law or divine command. It is to be avoided at all costs, and is an ingrained psychological defense organized around the horror of non-being, usually evoking fantasies of punishment and death due to anxiety about provoking a revengeful wrath from an omnipotent source. This paranoiac knowledge reinforces the fantasy system that one dare not question the existence of God because it is sacrosanct. The uncanny whispers: "It *could be* real." Such prohibitions become holy dogma, which are unconsciously transformed into persecutory introjects that take on an affective contagion unquestionably fraught with fear of pain, death, and eternal persecution.[29] Given that these belief systems are usually laid down in early childhood reinforced by familial upbringing and institutional indoctrination, where limited cognitive brain development is only able to grasp the concrete and preconceptual operations of constructs and their functional consequences,[30] it is not surprising that these compartmentalized teachings

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[27] Contra Calvin's claim that God bestowed us with a faculty "by natural instinct," which purportedly existed "from the womb" to be able to sense His divine presence (*sensus divinitatis*) (see *Institutes*, I, iii, 1; I, iii, 3), John Locke, in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Bk1, Ch. III, Par. 8, elaborates this discussion in his section on: 'Idea of God not innate'. Also see David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Penguin, 1739-40), Bk1, Sec. V, 'Of the immateriality of the soul,' where he concludes that any argument in support of the soul as substance "is absolutely unintelligible"(p. 298), as is the case for the immortality of the soul (p. 299).

[28] For Freud, religion was a cultural neurosis, and particularly an obsessive-compulsive type (see *The Future of an Illusion*. Standard Edition, Vol. 21. London: Hogarth Press, 1927). We may readily witness how cultural observance to ritual, such as prayer, may be construed as a method of displacing obsessionality onto a projected object, and hence motivated as a way of binding or temporarily alleviating anxiety and paranoiac fear. For example, the Catholic in confessional, and the Islamic injunction of daily prayer, are each following a certain set of prescribed rituals. Like superstitions, these practices may be said to symbolize this cultural neurosis.

[29] We likely owe these images to Dante and the medievalists, whom were partly concerned with maintaining political power and influence over the common people through thought control over their spiritual afterlives. It is one thing to remain in servitude to a feudal lord during one's earthly existence, but it is quite another to be eternally condemned to suffering that was other-worldly.

[30] According to Piaget, and generally espoused by contemporary cognitive-developmental psychology, children engage in naïve cognition dominated by "preoperational" thinking; thus they are unable to think critically or rationally synthesize causal attributions and belief systems that an adolescent or adult would be able to perform under normatively adequate developmental

become crystallized into entrenched emotional-fantasy structures devoid of capacities for hypothetico-deductive reasoning or abstract thought. That is why overcoming this psychological prejudice is both a catalyst for critical thinking as well as a developmental achievement. To confront the realization of God's non-existence is to overcome a massive internal resistance that must mourn the loss of the fulfillment of a wish.

Mourning object loss and lost fulfillment is common to human dynamics, especially in relation to loss over not having particular childhood wishes and life desires fulfilled. But here mourning is not only in relation to the absence of a lost object, it is in relation to the absence of what *can never be* present, but we feel it *should be*. Here we are simply left with mourning absence.

Many people with religious hunger, which I would argue is not the same as spirituality, have the need to believe in God in their search to assuage this absence—this lacuna, which is felt as a lack of being. But in the despair of solitude, in the residue of emptiness that comes with insight and mourning object loss, comes the compulsion or urge to replace lost presence with a loss of absence—the negation of its negation. In increasingly large portions of contemporary society, and particularly among the intelligentsia, we have lost God, hence any faith in the concept itself, once an untouchable cornerstone of culture. I am not talking about Nietzsche's God, whom we as society have killed in our nihilism,[31] nor Hegel's, where ethical self-awareness is lost in "unhappy consciousness" in search of a "beautiful soul;"[32] but rather the concept itself becomes vacuous when unseen and unfulfilling absence persists, especially when there is nothing else offering to replace it. Here sober reason and sterile science offer no comfort. Hence the compulsion to invent God serves as an antidote to natural deprivation and lack. But such an invention, too, carries its own burdens.

The phenomenology of faithlessness—the brute acceptance of nothing hereafter—leaves a dull internal ache, the feeling that Something is missing, indeed something No-More. When one mourns the loss of Something No-More, there is still a pining for Something Else regardless of how one comes to reorganize their internal experience, for we *must* resolve the riddle that we are condemned to repetitiously relive, like Sisyphus and his eternal boulder. There is nothing more than *this*, yet the torment of uncertainty and apprehension of ultimate finality—death—is too intolerable to bear. So we invent *more than this*. There must be Something More. God becomes the

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circumstances. Hence, they become conditioned to believe in God based on cultural teachings, ideology, and emotional prejudices.

[31] See Prologue, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Penguin, 1892/1954), "*God is dead!*", p. 12.

[32] I am referring to Hegel's discussion of the divided self that can never live up to its own self-imposed ideals we attribute to God when we are so humanly flawed and fallible. See Sec. C. The Revealed Religion, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1807/1977), "'God is dead.'", p. 455. Also see my commentary in *The Unconscious Abyss: Hegel's Anticipation of Psychoanalysis* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), pp. 152-156.

Infinite (*'Ain Sof*),[33] the inversion of what God truly unconsciously symbolizes—An Ending. We all *must* die, but we love good endings.

The atheist can find no justifiable rational argument to believe in a transcendent supernatural being that has a sense of personal agency, let alone any claim that such an entity possesses omnipotent powers of supremacy, omniscience, and creationism, which is often attributed to a theistic God. Put simply, these are grand fantasies of invincibility fuelled by fear and ignorance instilled in childhood that stand in relation to our most cherished unconscious wishes and desires to be *unconditionally loved* and accepted by our original love objects or attachment figures;[34] and by extension, humanity itself, free of all the ills that define our human condition. Unfortunately, everything is conditional. The ideality of Heaven—of unadulterated perfection—is defensively transmuted into an illusorily constructed, abstract invisible deity. Philosophers have been quite ingenious in salvaging the purported existence of God from the bog of indeterminacy, including relegating God to nature itself, panpsychism (ala Spinoza), nothingness or non-being, as well as pure abstraction, what we may refer to as an incorporeal intelligible,[35] or what Whiteheadcalls the non-temporal concrescence of all eternal objects.[36] But unlike St. Anselm's depiction of God as an insuperable being, a being greater than which nothing greater can be conceived,[37] *you simply cannot think something into existence*. The Unmoved Mover, Uncaused Cause, Absolute Spirit, or Pure Reason as pure thought thinking itself into existence is merely an omnipotent grandiose fantasy of our desire to affirm, in thought, that which we cannot directly experience or know. But if *I think it*, it must be so! The fallacy one is seduced by is that of assuming that an object of thought is equivalent to its substantive material existence. This is the Hegelian resurrection of

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[33] In the Kabbalist tradition, *Ein Sof* literally means "Endless," God's radical transcendence. Daniel Matt informs us that Jewish mystics adopted the negative theology of Maimonides when attributing *Ayin* or Nothingness to the first sefirah, which comprise the ten sefirot (see *The Essential Kabbalah*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995, p.7).

[34] Freud (1927) equates theism, and particularly Christianity, with the belief in an idealized and infallible Father who will bring us salvation from our childhood dependency and helplessness. I would argue that the anthropomorphic properties attributed to God could easily be an idealized maternal attachment figure where all the basic psychological requirements for nurturance, love, acceptance, attunement to physical and emotional needs, affective responsiveness, trust, protection, and safety and security are fulfilled. This is the foundation of attachment theory in ethnology and the biological and developmental sciences.

[35] See David Bakan, "On the Reality of the Incorporeal Intelligibles: A Reflection on the Metaphysics of Psychology." *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 2001, 93: 531-540.

[36] A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*. Corrected Edition. (New York: Free Press, 1929). Also see my neo-Whiteheadian critique of concrescence as a naturalized account of process and reality without God in "Whitehead Idealized: A Naturalized Process Metaphysics," *Process Studies*, 2002, 31.1: 32-48.

[37] This appears in chapter 2 of his *Proslogion*.

Anselm's thought experiment: We know the *Ding an sich* by virtue of the fact that we posit it. But just because we posit it doesn't mean it is real. It exists only as an idea. Even Hegel's dictum that 'essence is appearance' fails because God has not appeared as a Being-in-itself, let alone For-itself. Even though I admit that I feel an emotional void and wish it were otherwise, I cannot deny what my senses and my intellect tell me are desirous longings for a fictitious reality I must mourn, because it does not exist. We sustain the need to believe because it gives us comfort through hope.

Because we have properly determined that the God hypothesis is a metaphysical question, there is no scientifically verifiable basis for justifying the belief in a transsubjective, suprapersonal entity or cosmic being encompassing the universe; however, there is a plenitude of empirical reasons to attribute such an idea to our deepest psychological needs and desires for wish-fulfillment. Freud tells us that God is merely an exalted Father who holds the promise of salvation from our childhood helplessness and conversion of our suffering into the ultimate fulfillment of our ideals.[38] And this is why Freud believed that the great theistic traditions were repetition compulsions borne of a world plagued by obsessional neurosis. I would amend his thesis to argue that the theistic conception of God is the ideal projection of our primary conglomerate attachment figures based upon our familial identifications, whereby our ideal self and object relationships are concretized in the immaculate abstraction of pure wish-fulfillment. In Hegel's terms, religion becomes a concrete universal of spiritual embodiment in the cultural institutions that define our collectively shared humanity. But unlike Hegel, I would say that these universals are the productions of imagination as value-idealizations colonized by our collective unconscious wishes instantiated in social custom and practice, the future of a delusion.

Secular Humanism as Value Inquiry

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[38] **Error! Main Document Only.**Freud's contempt for religious ideologies is exemplified by the following quote: "what the common man understands by his religion—with the system of doctrines and promises which on the one hand explains to him the riddles of this world with enviable completeness, and, on the other, assures him that a careful Providence will watch over his life and will compensate him in a future existence for any frustrations that he suffers here. The common man cannot imagine this Providence otherwise than in the figure of an enormously exalted father . . . The whole thing is so patently infantile, so foreign to reality, that to anyone with a friendly attitude to humanity it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life" (*Civilization and Its Discontents*. Standard Edition, Vol. 21. London: Hogarth Press, 1930, p. 74). Recall that the significance of the father is central to the psychoanalytic theory of Oedipalization, when the father is imbued with authority and omnipotence in childhood, as well as a rival and moral threat over the child's possession of the mother. This is purportedly resolved through identification with His values and ideals and in obeying his laws.

Although statistical consensus differs,[39] and despite religious variances, it is generally accepted that most of the world population believes in some form of religion, which more often than not includes some notion of God. Here we must reiterate that religion is the main defense mechanism that allows people to function in the face of existential absurdity. Arguably, to take that away would result in calamity. A valid argument could be made that most of the world population is not intellectually capable or enlightened enough to live life on its own terms free of this type of unconscious need for self-protection from the truth of reality. Instead illusion through fantasy replaces the harsh confrontation with one's defences, without which would surely bring internal tumult and horror if one were forced to tackle head on their own irrational beliefs in favor of faith that provides some solace.

Should we strip away the defense with the education of atheism via *logos*, philosophical inquiry, and rational science? Perhaps the answer is obvious. But is it possible? We are not talking about the educated public, let alone the intellectual elite, such as those who hold academic prestige, popular esteem, and are typically wealthy. The world masses have no such privileges. Contemporary humanists who are educated, well-informed, and disposed to think critically about the God question are a small number in comparison to the rest of the world.[40] Although there is a new consciousness burgeoning within many parts of North America, Britain, and various reformed European countries that have abandoned the idea and belief in God, especially among the youth, this does not eradicate the prevalence of belief in God in some form throughout the rest of the world that is now 7 billion in

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[39] What is interesting to note is that there is statistical variance and a lopsided distribution in theistic belief throughout the world. Maitzen (2006), for example, highlights an interesting polarity. As he notes, "The populace of Saudi Arabia is at least 95 per cent Muslim and therefore at least 95 per cent theist, while the populace of Thailand is 95 per cent Buddhist and therefore at most 5 per cent theist. The approximate total populations are 26 million for Saudi Arabia and 65 million for Thailand. Presumably these samples are large enough to make the differences statistically significant and not merely a statistical blip that would disappear if we took an appropriately long view of the matter. If those data are even roughly accurate, the distribution of theistic belief is at least highly uneven between those two countries, and they are hardly unique in this respect" (pp. 179-180; also see *CIA World Factbook*, 2004, http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html). Whether we want to generalize this distribution to the rest of the world based on the small populations of Saudi Arabia and Thailand are another matter altogether.

[40] Secular humanist organizations are represented worldwide in at least 31 countries, but there are likely to be substantially many more. Those who identify themselves as Humanists are estimated to encompass as many as five million people worldwide; but because there is a lack of criteria or consensus in providing a universal definition, it is logical to assume that many more million exist. Having said that, a few million people is a drop in the bucket in comparison to the world masses. (See the historical development of the American Humanist Association at http://www.americanhumanist.org/what_we_do/publications/Humanism_as_the_Next_Step/ Chapter_8:_The_Development_of_Organization. Also see demographical data produced at http://www.adherents.com/rel_USA.html#religions.

population. It is historically understandable why the notion of God would have been socially acceptable and customary for many societies in the past to embrace, for it served as a viable solution to life's dilemmas based on a lack of knowledge. Today it becomes harder to sustain this social illusion due to the progressive advances in education, science, social awareness, consciousness-raising, and culture. But most of the world is not sufficiently educated, trained to think critically, nor encouraged to have free inquiry. Non-industrial and developing countries in particular are enslaved by ignorance, hardship, authoritarianism, patriarchal religious subjugation, a paucity of resources, lack of education, and psychological distress. Until these oppressive conditions improve, I cannot envision a world where belief in God is abandoned. This fantasy is culturally ingrained and recalcitrant to change. Even many atheists are unhappy about this unsavory state of affairs, because they have to confront their own non-being directly, while the believer gets a convenient ticket to bliss and salvation. And they will be the first to tell you so, usually with sarcastic humor concealing a forlorn melancholia suffused with deeply felt envy.

It is precisely because God does not exist that humanity had to invent Him. Humanity simply cannot live up to its own self-imposed ideals informed by Lack—the absence of fulfillment, so we must locate an imaginary invisible space where meaning, truth, and value are said to exist outside of ourselves. Rather than accept the brute facticity that we are ultimately responsible for making our lives into what we are capable of becoming, we must defensively transfer this responsibility onto a displaced imaginary idea we call God. Because we are desirous and appetitive animals, our given nature is informed by an unrelenting absence that unconsciously pervades through our feeling soul—the heart or core of our felt sense of inner self, our being-in-relation-to-lack.[41] This pervasive lack dialectically generates an unabated craving that constantly requires objects to satiate its appetite, including all modes of spiritual hunger.

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[41] In *Origins: On the Genesis of Psychic Reality* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010), I systematically articulate how mind desires because it stands in relation to absence or lack. Thus, our conscious wishes, urges, and bodily drives emerge from an unconscious primal desire, the desire to fill the lack. In the most primitive phases of psychic constitution, mind is an active stream of desire exerting pressure from within itself as drive, clamoring for satisfaction, what Freud would call "pleasure." But unlike Freud, who sees pleasure as tension reduction, mind may be said to always crave, to always desire. While a particular drive or its accompanying derivatives may be sated, desire itself may be said to never formally stop yearning: it is condemned to experience lack. Unlike Lacan, however, who describes desire as "lack of being," and Sartre, who initially views human existence "as lack" or nothingness, here unconscious desire is *being-in-relation-to-lack* (see p. 133).

Although the complex question and nature of spirituality is beyond the scope of this adumbrated essay, we may generally say that the human spirit is an animating principle or vital force within the psyche [Lat. *spiritus*, breath < *spirare*, to breathe]. Spirituality is often felt and expressed through a shared communal activity of ritual and ceremony around a common set of constructed values and construed ideals, which are ultimately individually forged yet collectively entertained. Spirituality is an intimately private process of self-relation, yet one that is subjectively universal. Such subjective universality conjoins others in a mutual dialogue and search for value inquiry, which collective peoples may identify with and relate to. In this regard, spirituality is authentic relatedness to self, other, and world, and specifically a *felt self-relation to value*. It is this felt self-relation to value that is most spiritually rewarding due to its unique experiential quality and emotional resonance, which is what makes it so special. The pursuit of spirituality is a form of value inquiry that resonates within the deep unconscious configurations of each person's soul—their inner being—that potentially stands in relation to a greater collective experience or transcendence of shared meaning and value. The content or meaning of values (viz., love, peace, beneficence) often have universal themes all people deep down truly covet and therefore place on a high existential plane of lived *qualia*. That is why, in part, ritualized ceremonies, which are common to religious, pagan, and shamanic observances alike, concretize these ideal values and hence symbolically bestow onto them an embodied reality of idealized value that transcends the subjective attitudes of the individual.

We generate metaphysical beliefs based on these experiential feelings of felt-value, and have a tendency to universalize them to a so-called transpersonal realm we equate with a greater cause, force, or animating presence in the cosmos, such as a divine Originator, primary Spirit, or ultimate Source, which people typically intuit to be a supreme being—our transference unto God. These are transcendental illusions, but for most people they are necessary ones in order for them to protect and sustain the felt-meaning of lived spiritual moments reflective of a collective valuation system. Ritual and symbolic communal sharing of value lend a sense of hypostatization to this experience, where the natural mystical wonderment of what is felt subjectively yet shared interpersonally is generalized into a metaphysical factor as supreme transcendence. Here God becomes the Transcendent—the symbolization of all Ideal Value—the One.

When the sublime is intuited or ecstasies experienced, it is conferred with a specific set of valuations and conveyed as the most important of all exalted feelings, hence objects of worship (what we ideally desire) for all humanity. These values are idealized, I suggest, because they cannot be fully attained, yet

they signify the state of perfection we wish to possess. For the believer they remain necessary transcendental illusions to strive toward because they fulfill certain collective unconscious identifications and wishes for ultimate fulfillment and betterment of humanity as a whole. When people participate in these value systems through some modicum of felt-expression as the validation of one's inner world, this honors their (wishful) belief in the existence of a transcendent reality, and engenders further hope and aspiration to pursue the path of spiritual valuation so they may merge with or form a union with such a glorious transcendental state of being. That is partially why some people who have little faith want to believe, and those who have no belief seek to acquire faith.

Secular humanism, as I advocate for here, is a pilgrimage based on the quest for value inquiry and human fulfillment. As a secular life philosophy, *Weltanschaung*, or comprehensive world view, humanism is a way of being that seeks to expand our social parameters and conception of truth, justice, morality, and human satisfaction through critical investigation and rational analysis devoid of ideologies. It is arguably the existential tradition that gave philosophical fortification to this movement as an alternative to faith.[42] Its message is clear: We are ultimately responsible to choose our own life path in commune (*communis*) with others and create personal meaning within our developmental process of self-making and self-liberation. Although life is meaningful on its own terms, it may offer the masses little consolation when they fundamentally wish for something that naturally will not occur. The truth of our *pathos* is that we are condemned to live *this moment* and only experience *this world.* We have to accept the fact that this *only* existence is our provenance and fate. Nothing lies beyond the natural world. And there is certainly no personal or conscious afterlife. Consciousness and personal identity perish along with the physical death of the body.[43] The inevitability of embracing our own lives honestly and courageously is all we can hope for and expect, even if we find life's tribulations

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[42] In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre (1946) tells us that: "Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality. . . Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism" (in *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*, Stephen Priest, Ed. London: Routledge, 2001, pp 28-29).

[43] Although one can make a reasonable case that our death is incorporated back into nature or the cosmos, and that we become transposed through the process of decomposition and resultant new growth in the ecosystem, or that one's personality is memorialized and hence lives on in the lives of our families, friends, and everyone we have influenced, or through our deeds, writings, and legacy, this should not be equated with personal immortality.

and our own desires cause us suffering. We must simply accept our givenness, itself a *numinosum*.

The spiritual quest does not require a supernatural intelligence to give purpose and qualitative value to life, for this is incumbent on us. Even though we are all headed for a pine box, this does not mean that we cannot find intrinsic worth and meaning in living our lives for the present, not for a fantasized future. Despite that the thrust of our being toward death is imposed on us without consultation, we can faithfully choose to live our lives creatively and authentically, as the pursuit of meaning and value, which naturally privileges our relationality to others, for nothing else really matters. The call of finitude is a constant reminder that we are obligated to actualize our possibilities, because we only have one chance at life. This makes every decision we make a priority, and we have no one else to blame for our choices but ourselves. To be honest with ourselves and others, free of blind ignorance or self-deception; to open ourselves up to the affective interiority of our beings; to experience genuine emotion and spontaneity; to love, work, and play; to tolerate ambiguity through the courage to be; to have compassion and empathy for others' suffering, as well as our own; to contemplate the numinous and follow a moral path; and be committed to becoming a decent human being—What else can we reasonably ask for? We are the authors of our own lives, to be lived and relived. Despite our passions, fallibility, and finite natures, we have no other recourse than to accept our thrownness with humility. We call this humanism, or what we might not inappropriately call 'true consciousness.'