



Credible Catholic

CREDIBLE CATHOLIC

Little Book - Volume 2

**EVIDENCE OF OUR
TRANSPHYSICAL SOUL**



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**Credible Catholic Little Book
Volume Two**

Evidence of Our Transphysical Soul

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**This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church,
Part One—The Profession of Faith**

NOTE: All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to respond to current secular myths advocating atheism, agnosticism, and materialism. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, and the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ to bolster your faith.

Part One from the **CCC** is titled, **THE PROFESSION OF FAITH**. The first 5 volumes in the Credible Catholic Big Books and Credible Catholic Little Books fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, **THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY**. This is covered in volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is **LIFE IN CHRIST** and information related to this topic will be found in volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Books volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **CHRISTIAN PRAYER**.

We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

“Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven...”

It is therefore incumbent upon us to use contemporary academically credible evidence to support Christian faith.

Please note: The following Table of Contents correlates with that of “The Big Book” (the much larger Compendium). If readers want fuller explanations, footnotes, original sources, and complete arguments, they need only click on that particular link (below), and they will be taken to it in “The Big Book.”

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Evidence of Our Transphysical Soul

Introduction

The question of God's existence is not merely an academic puzzle or an interesting thought experiment—it is intimately and urgently bound up with our own personal destiny. Everything around us—houses, cars, flower beds, coffee cups, phones, highways, hurricanes, the Grand Canyon, the Sun—is going to crumble to nothing sometime between now and the heat death of the Universe, but we are not, because we are destined for a transcendent and eternal existence.

The details of this destiny—that God has called us to live forever with him in our true home—are things we know because God came to earth in Jesus Christ to tell us. We will spend the next volume examining that evidence.. However, there is a lot we can learn about our immortal soul before we take these revelations into account. There is a wide range of natural evidence to look at—from the insights of classical philosophy to the discoveries of modern science. In this volume we will look at some of this evidence:

- Evidence of a transphysical soul capable of surviving bodily death, reported in peer- reviewed medical studies of near death experiences (Chapter One).
- Evidence of a soul from medical studies of “terminal lucidity” (Chapter One).
- Evidence of our desire for and awareness of five transcendental attributes of human nature. (Chapter Two).
- Evidence of our own interior awareness of the presence of the Divine (Chapter Three).
- Evidence of a transcendental dimension in the way we think and use language and even how we do math (Chapter Four).
- Evidence of the transphysical nature of human self-consciousness (Chapter Five).

We will conclude this survey by looking at the unique kind of freedom that comes with our transcendent nature, and what that means for our ultimate destiny as we are confronted with the historical choice between good and evil.

Chapter One: Evidence of the Soul and Heaven from Near Death Experiences

The very topic of near death experiences must be approached with caution. There is a lot of unscientific writing about near death experiences, often based on nothing but anecdotes which is sometimes focused on the writers' own agendas rather than evidence. However, there is also a growing body of legitimate research -- actual medical studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Before we look at some of these studies, we must consider what is meant by "near death experiences."

I. Definitions and Descriptions

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In cases where people undergo clinical death and then return to physical life, some of those people afterwards reported that they maintained consciousness during the clinical death (despite the absence of brain function). Since this clinical death often happens in a hospital setting with professional medical oversight, thousands of these near death experiences, or NDEs, have been sufficiently well-documented for scientific study. The patients' reports reveal a pattern of several recurring elements.

The Transphysical Component of Near Death Experiences

In many cases of clinical death (virtual "brain death"), people retain their consciousness—they can see and hear what's going on around them, they can remember what is happening and know who they are—but their consciousness is operating independently of their physical body. Thus, their consciousness is 'transphysical'—not limited by the physical. People report the experience of moving outside their body, of passing through walls in the hospital, and sometimes of being transported to a transphysical domain (this is where the popularly-known details of moving through a tunnel and encountering a bright light come in).

Clinical Death

Many traumas, like heart attacks and drowning, can deprive the brain of oxygen. Within 30 seconds, electrical activity in the brain drops off and most brain functions shut down. Signs of this state of "clinical death" include a flat EEG (which measures electrical

activity in the brain), fixed and dilated pupils, and the absence of a gag reflex—indicating that even lower brain functions have stopped. In this state, higher brain functions such as language, memory, and thinking as well as sensation (seeing and hearing, etc.) are neither functional nor possible.

The Relationship between the Transphysical Component and the Brain

Now we come to the significance of understanding NDEs. The common presumption today is that our consciousness originates with our brains and is therefore a strictly physical process. When our brains stop working, that's it. BUT...

When we look at what is happening to the brain during clinical death, and we compare that to the mental and sensory activity that people report experiencing in near-death experiences (much of which can be verified independently as we'll see below), it suggests a more complex relationship—that our consciousness cannot be reduced to the brain, and has a transphysical component that persists even when the connection with the brain is severed. Our minds are not just matter. They appear to have a transphysical component (that we might term “a soul”) that interacts with our physical brain which appears to mediate higher conscious activity to our bodies.

This idea corresponds with developments in other branches of science. Near death experiences are certainly pronounced and conspicuous evidence of a transphysical soul,, but they are by no means the only evidence.. We will be looking at some of that evidence later in this chapter, but you can also find a survey in the Big Book, Chapter 5 on the “consciousness” questions in modern physics and philosophy.

II. Four Important Studies

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Here are some of the scientific studies on NDEs that provide evidence of survival of human consciousness after clinical death. Many other studies have reported similar findings, as cited in the Big Book.

II.A Parnia-Southampton University Study (2014)

In 2014, scientists under the direction of Dr. Sam Parnia at Southampton University completed the (then) largest study of near death experiences—a 4-year study of 2,060 patients who had suffered cardiac arrest in hospitals. 9% of patients (185) reported a near death experience. Some of them maintained visual awareness for several minutes, even

though the brain shuts down beginning 30 seconds after cardiac arrest; the researchers verified patient accounts of what was going on in the operating room.

II.B The van Lommel et al Study (2001)

This study, published in *The Lancet*, surveyed 344 cardiac patients in Dutch hospitals and found that 18% of patients (62) experienced an NDE. The study ruled out several potential physiological causes for the NDEs, identified some recurring characteristics, and reported verifiable out-of-body experiences. In other words, patients reported seeing and hearing things during an out-of-body experience that researchers were able to corroborate afterwards as accurate. There is no physical way to account for these sensory experiences in the absence of brain function, thus indicating some form of transphysical conscious existence.

II.C Dr. Kenneth Ring's Studies of the Blind (2006)

These studies focused on an interesting subgroup—patients who are blind. Among the 31 blind patients studied who had a NDE or out-of-body experience, 80% reported being able to see during their experience. The perceptions described were consistent between those who had previous experience of seeing and those who had been blind from birth—and consistent with the reports of sighted patients in other NDE studies. The ability to see during these experiences, with enough clarity to report it back afterwards, by people who do not physically have the ability to see, shows once again, the existence of a transphysical consciousness (a soul) capable of perception and intelligence despite the body's incapacity to do these functions through physical processes.

II.D Consistency of Data in Moody, Ring, and van Lommel

In a 10-year-long study, interviewing over 1,000 patients who had had a near death experience, Dr. Moody identified several characteristics that consistently recurred in their reports of the experience, in similar proportions to the studies mentioned above by Ring and van Lommel. For example, one of the characteristics Moody included—the experience of moving through a tunnel—was also reported in 23% of the cases in Ring's study and 31% of those in van Lommel's. The full list of characteristics and percentages for these studies can be found in the Big Book

II.E Dr. Janice Holden's Assessment of 39 NDE Studies (2007)

If someone awakens from a state of clinical death and reports that they passed through a tunnel and encountered a being of light that was overwhelmingly loving and peaceful, there is no way for a scientist to directly verify such a report. But since it should be

physically impossible for someone in clinical death to see, hear or remember anything (especially things happening out of view or earshot), what a scientist can do is look at things reported in NDEs that *are* verifiable to see if this physically-unaccountable ‘transphysical perception’ is accurate in those cases.

Dr. Holden researched 107 cases from the reports of thirty-nine NDE studies in which this kind of “veridical” (verifiable) experiences was included. Defining “accurate” in the most rigorous sense, where a single incorrect reported detail would make an NDE report inaccurate, Holden’s report found inaccuracy in only 8% of cases.

It’s hard to see how this degree of verifiably accurate reporting from a time when there was no electrical activity in the brain’s cortex could have a physical explanation.

III. Three Kinds of Verifiable Evidence

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The five medical studies mentioned above (Parnia, van Lommel, Ring, Moody, and Holden) provide probative evidence of a transphysical soul capable of surviving bodily death in four ways. – (a) reported veridical data, (b) visual perception of the blind during clinical death, (c) the absence of death anxiety, and (d) meeting deceased persons in a transphysical domain (e.g. like heaven). It is virtually impossible to explain this evidence by appealing to causation by physical processes or the brain (see Section IV below).

III.A Reported Veridical Data

As we just saw in Holden’s study, NDEs often include perceptions by the patient of the places around them (rather than in an otherworldly domain) that can be verified afterwards. Often, unusual events that occur during a medical procedure (such as resuscitation) are seen and reported by the patient; for example, in one case in van Lommel’s study, a patient in a deep coma accurately told a nurse where she had placed his dentures during resuscitation efforts, even giving a description of the cart where she had put them. Patients who describe moving beyond their body to other parts of the hospital also give verifiable details, often correctly reporting the clothing or conversation of relatives and friends in the waiting room. Some patients report going into other rooms in the hospital, giving accurate descriptions of conversations, clothing, and strangers. Some actually go through the hospital walls to the outside three or four stories up. One patient reported seeing a tennis shoe on the ledge with a worn left toe and a shoelace underneath the heel which

had probably been there from the time of hospital's construction. It was found exactly as described. These veridical experiences are found in every major study (and confirmed in overviews like Holden's study) and help to corroborate the patients' reports of a conscious yet transphysical (i.e. "out-of-body") experience.

III.B Visual Perception of the Blind During Clinical Death

As mentioned in Ring's study, 80% of patients who don't have the physical capacity to see nonetheless report visual data accurately about their experiences during clinical death. Some of this data is veridical, highly unusual and thus difficult to guess. To date, no adequate physical explanation has been offered for the visual perception of the blind during clinical death.

III.C Absence of Death Anxiety after Near Death Experiences

Several studies of the aftereffects of near death experiences by B. Greyson, P. van Lommel, J. Holden, D. James, and P. Atwater show a significant decline in measurable death anxiety after near death experiences. Many individuals showed no death anxiety whatsoever, which is a significant departure from the norm. Children who underwent clinical death *with a near death experience* had a much lower level of death anxiety than the normal population of children who did not have a near death experience, and children who underwent clinical death, *but did not have a near death experience*, had a higher than normal death anxiety. The lowering of death anxiety in children who had a near death experience continued into adulthood without abatement.

Since death anxiety is instinctual and subconscious, it is very difficult to control or lower by voluntary techniques. Even highly religious individuals experience normal death anxiety when subjected to the threat of death or symbols of death. This makes it very difficult to explain the lowering of death anxiety in patients who had an NDE by either physiological or psychological explanations (causation). Thus, near death experiences seem to have a special healing power transcending the power of survival instincts and subconscious fears that fall outside of known physiological and psychological explanations.

III.D Meeting Deceased Persons in a Transphysical Domain

Obviously, in reports of meeting deceased persons in a transphysical domain, the meetings themselves are not directly verifiable. Nevertheless, such reports frequently occur in NDEs, and give circumstantial evidence of such meetings with deceased relatives and friends. They often include information that the patient couldn't have known but can be confirmed by others. This happens with surprising frequency: a third of these

reports involve meeting relatives that the patient wouldn't know personally, sometimes even meeting strangers or distant acquaintances. This last point also militates against the "hallucinatory expectation" hypothesis for such meetings (the idea that people "see" the loved ones they are naturally thinking of and would want to see in their dying hours). For a catalogue of the kinds of meetings experienced and the data reported that was not otherwise known by the patient prior to clinical death (gathered by Greyson and Kelly at the University of Virginia Medical School), see the Big Book – Volume 2.

IV. Response to Physicalist Explanations

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Some have sought to find physical explanations that can account for NDEs without appealing to a transphysical consciousness (soul). Let's review the evidence for transphysical consciousness after clinical (bodily) death:

1. Remarkable consistency in ten features of the experience, seven of which are unique to near death experiences, in all 15 studies cited in the Big Book.
2. Veridical sensory evidence (things seen and heard by patients who were unconscious and corroborated later by others) in all 15 studies cited in the Big Book.
3. Veridical sensory evidence by blind patients in multiple studies
4. Reports of encounters with deceased people unknown to the patients and/or supplying information unknown to the patients in multiple studies.

While a physical explanation might be able to account for a hallucination, it does not explain how people can accurately report empirical data, how the blind can see, and how people can acquire previously unknown information about deceased individuals during the time of clinical death.

Let's consider the proposed physicalist explanations in current literature:

Electrically stimulating the brain (Olaf Blanke, 2003)—Researchers placed electrodes in the brain (specifically, the angular gyrus of the parietal lobe) and triggered an "out-of-body like" experience in several patients. These experiences were abnormal and illusory—patients reported unusual distortions like seeing their legs growing shorter or seeing a body double of themselves. Such hallucinations, though, are very different

from the highly detailed and accurate reports of the patient's real (and often out-of-view) hospital surroundings found in NDE studies.

Anoxia (Susan Blackmore, 1993)—Oxygen deprivation in the dying brain, or anoxia, could cause neurons related to visual sensing to fire, causing an experience of a white light at the end of a tunnel. However, 100% of dying people experience anoxia, so if this was the cause, we would expect everyone to have NDEs. In fact, only 18% of adults do, and some NDEs happen to people while feeling well.

Dreamlets (James Whinnery)—These occur in the stressed brain (e.g. of fighter pilots) immediately prior to unconsciousness. Hard to connect with NDEs, as research indicates people wake up from dreamlets confused and anxious—instead of having lucid recollections and positive life-transforming experiences.

Narcotically-induced hallucination (Karl Jensen)—Research has found drugs that can produce a sense of being out-of-body, but like the electrically-stimulated hallucinations, the images are “weird” and exaggerated, not the accurate perceptions of NDEs.

Weak Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (Michael Persinger)—This process can replicate the psychic states experienced in epilepsy, which—once again—are not in fact similar to NDEs.

Surge of Electrical activity speculation (Jimo Borjigin)—Experiments found a surge of electrical activity in the brains of rats during cardiac arrest. This was proposed as an explanation of NDEs but this presupposes that humans have a similar surge, that this surge produces consciousness and images, and that these correspond to the consciousness and images described in NDEs. There is no evidence for any of these presuppositions, so this explanation isn't even a hypothesis. It's merely speculation.

Overall problems with physical explanations of NDEs:

1. Radical discontinuity between NDEs and physically induced illusory states—Most of the physically-produced hallucinations discussed above occur in an actively-functioning brain, in contrast to NDEs with no electrical activity in the cerebral cortex.

2. Difference in perception—The experiences in these illusory states also don't match the experiences of NDEs. They produce distorted and false images and feelings of disorientation and unease, in contrast to the sensory clarity and positive feelings of NDEs.

3. Accurate veridical experiences during NDEs—Even if there were somehow a way to explain NDEs as physical illusions, it still wouldn't account for the accurate sense perceptions of both sighted and blind people during clinical death, when their physical senses are not functioning. All the verifiable evidence in section III above calls for a transphysical perception that physical explanations necessarily lack.

V. Near Death Experiences, Love, and Resurrection

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There are interesting clues in the reports of NDEs that indicate our consciousness is eternal, and several points of similarity between the reports of NDEs and the revelation and resurrection of Jesus, who did preach that God intended us for eternal life as recipients of his unconditional love. Three notable similarities:

1. Freedom from physical limitations—Patients in NDEs maintain bodily powers like seeing and hearing but are free of physical constraint: able to move through walls, ascend upward, and move beyond the physical domain. The resurrected Jesus has these freedoms in his glorified body, and Christian revelation further teaches that our own bodies will be similarly transformed at the resurrection.

2. The essence of eternal life is love—Jesus told us love was central in the Kingdom of God, and NDE patients describe overwhelming love as their dominant experience in the realm of light.

3. Transcendence—There is a dimension of beauty, joy, and paradise—ultimate fulfillment—in many accounts of NDEs as well as in Christian revelation about the Kingdom of Heaven (this comparison is discussed in Volume 5—seventh chapter).

We might conclude from this correlation between medical studies of near death experiences and Christian revelation that NDEs provide empirical veridical and circumstantial corroboration of Jesus' message in the New Testament – and that Jesus' message in the New Testament confirms that our transphysical soul is destined for eternal life.

VI. Complementary Evidence of a Soul from Terminal Lucidity

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Another kind of evidence for our souls and the afterlife comes from an unexpected phenomenon known as terminal lucidity. Several studies indicate that the minds of many persons with dementia, Alzheimer's, or other severe disorders of the brain suddenly become clear (lucid) shortly before death. One week to one day prior to death, some of these patients phoned family members and friends, and had rational, meaningful, emotional, and religious conversations with them, even though they had no use of their cerebral cortex (needed for these higher intellectual functions).

The brain when it is severely atrophied (e.g. from Alzheimer's disease) is not capable of such higher functions, so it appears that consciousness separates from the body shortly before death.

Persons with terminal lucidity manifest an awareness of relatives, friends, practical details to which they must attend before dying, God's presence, prayers, good and evil, and right or wrong, even though their brains may have been completely incapable of rational thought for many years or sometimes never (in cases of severe mental impairment). For instance, in 1922, Anna Ehmer, born severely mentally impaired, experienced terminal lucidity. She had never learned to speak a single word and suffered several severe meningitis infections that had damaged her brain. Yet, a half an hour before dying, she sang, "Where does the soul find its home, its peace? Peace, peace, heavenly peace!" During her terminal lucidity, Anna's face was transfigured and spiritualized. Then, she quietly passed away. These final events were witnessed and verified by two physicians working at the mental institution where Ehmer resided. This is not an isolated case - researchers found a total of 81 references to similar cases, reported by 51 different authors, in which people with severely damaged brain tissue needed for cognitive processes suddenly come to a heightened sense of consciousness, focus, deliberation, and affective death between one week to one hour before death. (See the Big Book for details on this research.)

Terminal lucidity shows the presence of a soul even in cases of severe mental impairment. All persons, even those with physical, emotional, or intellectual limitations, have souls allowing them to understand and communicate with God. There is yet another important consequence of the data coming from the study of terminal lucidity—namely the existence of a rich inner world within even the most mentally challenged individuals. Many of these

individuals display full cognitive functioning, linguistic usage, and memories of the past shortly before dying – even though they have been incapable of it from the time of their birth (or shortly thereafter). Therefore, even the most outwardly intellectually and emotionally challenged individual probably has a transcendent soul similar to our own. This means all persons, from the unborn to the terminally ill, and regardless of their circumstances, have an inherent dignity and are worthy of respect. To treat them any other way, based simply on their outward appearance or expression, would be a violation of their dignity and their right to respect.

Chapter Two: Evidence of the Soul from our Transcendental Desires

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I. The Basic Argument from Plato to Lonergan

While modern medicine has provided intriguing new evidence for the existence of a transphysical soul, there is a much older source of evidence dating back to Plato. Plato laid out a philosophical argument that begins with a simple observation, one that you've probably casually used in conversation: "Nobody's perfect." School constantly reminds us of the imperfections in our knowledge; we're disappointed in relationships by imperfections in love; we're angered when life is unfair and people hurt others; we yearn after beauty but feel dissatisfied when our surroundings (and we ourselves) fall short; sometimes things just feel "*off*" in a way we can't put our finger on, and we wonder if we simply don't belong here at all.

Plato asks: How could we recognize these imperfections unless **we had an awareness of what perfection** in these five areas would be like? Our very frustration reveals a desire somewhere within us for perfection that transcends the limitations of the world around us. As we shall see below, the source of our awareness of these five kinds of perfection would have to be the five kinds of perfection themselves, and these five kinds of perfection—perfect **truth, love, justice/goodness, beauty** and **home/being**—turn out to be the one perfect God. These transcendental desires, which we all experience every day, indicate the presence of God to our consciousness.

II. The Five Transcendental Desires— Considered Individually

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So how do we know that we have an awareness of perfect truth, perfect love, perfect justice-goodness, perfect beauty, and perfect home, indicating that these realities are somehow present to our consciousness? We will consider each kind of awareness in turn.

II.A Perfect Truth

1. We relentlessly ask questions because we are aware that our knowledge is imperfect and incomplete. It may seem obvious, but we know that every time we find the answer to a question, that answer isn't the complete ultimate answer to everything (knowledge of "everything about everything"). If we didn't recognize that our knowledge was still incomplete, we would never ask another question.

2. But as we mentioned above, how can we always *know* that our knowledge is imperfect—and that we have not yet reached the goal of perfect knowledge—unless we had some idea of what perfect knowledge would be like? It can't be the *knowledge* of perfect knowledge, obviously (since we don't know everything); it's more like a tacit awareness of it as a goal, something we can see on the horizon yet still out of reach.

3. Where, then, does this tacit awareness of "everything about everything" come from? It can't come from anything we've experienced in the world around us, because everything around us is limited in space, time, power, and qualities, meaning that they can't contain the truth about everything. It cannot come from our brain, because that too is limited in knowledge and power. Since a cause must be commensurate with its effect, many philosophers have concluded that our tacit awareness of perfect truth comes from perfect truth itself. Think about it – how could an imperfect cause (imperfect truths) produce a perfect effect (an awareness of perfect truth)? For this reason, philosophers through the ages have concluded it must come from perfect truth itself. No other reality can produce the idea of perfect knowledge except the idea of perfect knowledge itself.

4. So, what is the idea of perfect knowledge itself? As you might suspect, it is God. This proof was given in the previous volume (Volume 1 — Chapter Three — The Five Transcendental Attributes of God) where we saw that God must be an unrestricted act of thinking. God not only exists—he incites our continuous questioning and creativity as the horizon of "perfect knowledge" that is present in all our questions.

II.B Perfect Love

1. Even as very small children, we already notice imperfection in the love of parents and teachers, family and friends. We notice when people are not paying attention to us, their moments of selfishness or competitiveness, and their acts of inauthenticity, envy, and pride. Children have the amazing capacity to look into parent's or sibling's eyes and recognize when their love and respect are clouded by egocentricity and personal concerns. Interestingly, children, as distinct from other animals, *expect* to be loved with some degree of authenticity, and if they are not, a sense of unlovability (with real consequences for their adult life), begins to set in. Adults perfect their "radars" for authentic love and are quite aware of these imperfections – even when their friends have cultivated the art of hiding it. Thus, the expectation of love and the capacity to recognize it in its perfection and all its imperfections, seems to be built into our very nature.

2. If we did not have an awareness of what perfect love would be like, we would not be able to notice these imperfections in love (seemingly inexhaustibly). Stated the other way around—if we didn't know what perfect love would be like, we would be fully content with any kind of affection no matter how thoughtless, distracted, or imperfect it might be. We would be reduced to the state of a friendly dog that would have no expectation of authentic love, or any recognition of love's imperfections.

3. But how can we have this awareness of what perfect love would be like? It cannot come from the imperfect manifestations of love that we experience from others or in ourselves – which are limited by egocentricity, lack of understanding, imperfections in our upbringing, feelings of anger or betrayal, as well as simple exhaustion or stress. Inasmuch as an awareness of perfect love (a perfect effect) cannot come from imperfect manifestations of love (an imperfect cause), we draw the same conclusion mentioned above – it must be produced by perfect love itself (a perfect cause).

4. So what is perfect love itself? As we saw in Volume 1 (Chapter 3), perfect love is another attribute of God because it manifests perfect inclusivity and perfect unity which belongs to the one unrestricted reality (God) alone. Thus, God is present to our consciousness as the horizon of perfect love, inviting and calling us to strive for ever greater perfection in our love for others.

II.C Perfect Justice/Goodness

1. We are not only aware of injustice in the world, we are dissatisfied with it. From the time of our youth, we are able to discern the difference between what is fair and unfair in the conduct of our friends, and even our parents – seemingly without being told. As we become more mature, we notice hundreds of additional manifestations of imperfect justice in the world around us – an imperfect legal system, educational system, socio-political system, and in every dimension of the social reality around us.

2. Yet how would we be able to recognize virtually every imperfection in fairness or justice in the world around us (as well as ourselves), if we did not have some tacit awareness of what perfect justice or fairness would be like? If we had no sense of the ideal, we would likewise have no sense of falling short of it, and therefore, no feelings of indignation or outrage toward being treated basely.

3. Once again we must ask how we obtained a tacit awareness of what perfect justice or fairness would be like. As above, we must conclude that it cannot come from all the imperfect manifestations of justice or fairness in the world around us. Since a cause must be commensurate with its effect, we must conclude that the perfect effect (our awareness of perfect justice or fairness) originated from a perfect cause (perfect justice itself).

4. As we saw in Volume I, Chapter 3, perfect justice or fairness is an attribute belonging to God alone, because it is perfect inclusivity and perfect unity which must belong to the one unrestricted reality (God) alone. Once again we see that God is present to our consciousness as the horizon of perfect justice or fairness, calling and inviting us to strive for ever greater perfection in fairness and justice in our lives and the world.

II.D Perfect Beauty

1. Beauty has a particular power to stir our awareness of transcendence, but even when we are immersed in a beautiful natural vista or work of art, we still have a sense that it could be somehow better. A #1 song comes out to wide acclaim ... followed by the remixes. We see endless imperfections in the beauty of ourselves and others and fuel billion- dollar industries as we strive to overcome those imperfections.

2. As noted above, our seemingly inexhaustible awareness of imperfections in beauty imply our tacit awareness of what perfect beauty would be like.

3. As we have seen above, our tacit awareness of perfect beauty cannot come from the imperfect manifestation of beauty in the world around us or from any kind of imperfect

beauty. Since a cause must be commensurate with its effect, our awareness of perfect beauty must come from perfect beauty itself.

4. As we saw in Volume I (Chapter 3), perfect beauty is yet another attribute of God alone, because it is perfect inclusivity and perfect unity in its power to harmonize all aesthetic forms, leading to ever greater manifestations of beauty. This perfect inclusivity must belong to the one unrestricted reality (God) alone. Therefore, God is present to our consciousness as the horizon of perfect beauty, causing us to strive for ever greater forms of perfection in art, music, architecture, poetry, and literature, as well as the portrayal of nature and human attributes. He also calls us to Himself as perfect beauty – the beauty of perfect truth, love, and goodness intrinsic to His perfect glory, splendor, and magnificence.

II.E Perfect Being/Home

Have you ever felt a sense of alienation even when things are going well? You might be confused, as you mentally list all the specific things in your life that are working well, yet you still feel an emptiness that you can't trace. We frequently have a sense that we are not at home in this world, even when things are not particularly frustrating or difficult. These feelings of imperfection with respect to being at home in this world manifest yet another dimension of our tacit awareness of perfection – for perfect home.

As with the other four manifestations of our tacit awareness of perfection, we can adduce a similar source – perfect home itself. This awareness of perfect home seems to resemble another attribute of God, because it implies perfect inclusivity and perfect unity in its power to overcome all forms of alienation from self and others. Hence, God appears to be present to our consciousness as a horizon of perfect home inviting us and calling us to strive to overcome alienation from self and others, and to seek perfect home in Him—the source of the invitation to us.

Many philosophers and theologians connect this feeling with a human being's yearning to be at home with the totality—it's not enough for things to be okay, to be content, because we have a desire to be *perfectly* in harmony with the whole cosmos, perfectly at home without even a hint of alienation.

This yearning can improve our lives when it pushes us to mend relationships that are alienated and to strive for more harmony in our lives. However, it can also make us feel discontent and put a strain on our relationships: even a healthy and happy family life or romantic relationship cannot satisfy our cosmic need to feel at home, and we can grow resentful to our loved ones if we expect them to satisfy it and they (inevitably) don't.

Instead, this yearning for a perfect home can only be satisfied by the reality that inspires it. When the desire for perfect home is even partially fulfilled, philosophers, theologians, and mystics variously refer to it as *joy–love–awe–unity–holiness–quiet*. They speak of a sudden moment of overwhelming ecstasy, a sense of unity with all of creation, an awe in the face of an unfathomable “Other” that doesn’t alienate us but invites us in. (See the Big Book for several examples.) God presents himself to us not simply as a collection of abstract transcendent perfections, but as an “invitation to Perfect Home”. We will encounter this call again and again through this book—in external manifestations (Volume 13, Chapter 5) and interior prayer (Volume 20, Chapter Four), in the deep alienation we feel if we ignore the call (Volume 13), and—coming up in the very next Chapter—in the initial encounter of God’s presence in our consciousness.

III. Final Conclusion

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Our picture of God begins to expand—God is not only the unique unrestricted uncaused reality who is the cause of everything else; He is also perfect intelligence, perfect love, perfect justice (goodness), and perfect beauty, and as such He is present to our consciousness, moving us to seek these perfections. God not only gives us a transcendent soul (manifest in the evidence of near death experience), He also fills our soul with the horizon of His perfection, and beckons us. Our next chapter will explore more deeply this presence in our souls.

Chapter Three:

God’s Presence to Our Consciousness: The Numinous Experience, Intuition of the Sacred, and Conscience

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Introduction

The evidence for our interior awareness of a Transcendent Reality is primarily subjective, but not restricted to us alone. Rather, this interior awareness is an overwhelmingly widespread human experience throughout different cultures and eras. Every individual seems to feel a call to worship something sacred, mysterious, indescribably profound,

spiritual, and transcendent – what Rudolf Otto calls, the “Wholly Other.” This leads virtually all cultures to a commemoration of sacred places and times, as well as to ritual worship of the divine who calls them to holiness. Furthermore, all individuals within every culture appear to possess a set of archetypal symbols (reflecting good, evil, God, devil, sanctification, creation, heroic virtue, and much more) which appear in our dreams and subconscious impressions. These symbols point to our place in the cosmos and moral propriety – and they also form the symbolic basis of cultic religion.

Religious believers and mystics assert with conviction that this inner awareness comes from a divine source—something greater and beyond us that we can welcome in but cannot control, let alone invent on our own. Secular psychologists and anthropologists assert the opposite—such feelings of awareness, if they even exist, are just the product of our own unconscious mind or imagination. These opposing conclusions stem from different presuppositions. Religious people are likely to be open to more possibilities not just because they “have faith”, but because they are willing to intellectually consider the spiritual and transcendent as potential realities distinct from the material. Conversely, many secular thinkers believe that fidelity to science requires being closed to the *possibility* of the transcendent, and therefore, faith.

However, this presupposition—that only physical things exist— is unprovably reductionistic, because the transcendent by definition is what goes beyond the physical. Studying the physical realm does not necessitate a denial of the existence of everything outside that realm.

If we look at the human experience of the transcendent on its own terms, as the authors below have done in vast cross-cultural studies, we will be able to uncover the interior foundations for our religious feelings, impressions, and symbols that constitute the universal awareness of the sacred Wholly Other and Its call to public worship (religion).

I. The Numinous Experience—Rudolf Otto

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Perhaps the most influential of these studies is the book *The Idea of The Holy*, by Rudolf Otto, a scholar of comparative religion.

I.A A General Description of the Numinous Experience

After surveying both historical and contemporary religions, Otto concluded that most human beings have a direct interior experience of something transcendent (the “numen”), something which presents Itself to them as “wholly Other.” He calls this the “numinous experience” and this presence of the numen to individuals is the foundation of religion throughout history and the world. The numinous experience is irreducibly non-rational—it isn’t something we “figure out” but simply encounter. There are two distinct poles to this experience—a sense of something mysterious, overwhelming, and even frightening that evokes feelings of awe, humility, submission in us, and a sense of something fascinating and good that evokes feelings of invitation, fascination, energy, and joy.

I.B The First Pole: *Mysterium Tremendum* in the Numen

Many differences in religions can be traced to how we respond to and synthesizes these two poles. The sense of dread and awe in the face of a daunting, overwhelming mystery seems to occur earlier in history, so let’s look at that pole first.

To begin with, we experience the numen as an objective presence, a presence unlike anything else we’ve known because it is deeper and all-encompassing. The two special characteristics of this first pole of experience are overwhelming power and spiritual presence.

Our first response to this presence is fear. It isn’t the kind of fear that natural dangers provoke, where we feel panic and adrenaline and become warm and flushed. Instead, it’s a fear provoked by a spiritual presence, the kind that makes us feel cold, where the blood drains from the face and the flesh creeps, because it is “ghostlike”. This spiritual presence can be benign but it is nonetheless “beyond us”—unpredictable and clearly superior in power making it overwhelming and incomprehensible. Finally, there is an urgency to this power—something personal and passionate in its energy.

Overall, there are four layers in our encounter with the numen:

1. **Feelings** of spiritual overwhelming mystery (as discussed above)
2. **Perception** of the numen as a wholly Other spiritual power with passion and will
3. **Reaction** to the presence of this mysterious higher power—humility, respect, a sense of our own smallness and creatureliness
4. **Action**—we are moved to reverence and worship

Some religions and cultures—and even individuals - do not move beyond this initial encounter, but most major religions do move beyond it to a second, more fascinating and inviting pole.

I.C The Second Pole: Fascination, Desire, Love, and Bliss in Our Experience of the Numen

In the second pole, we experience the mystery of the numen not simply as an imposing mystery but as something fascinating and attractive, even intoxicating. What exactly is so appealing in the numen? It is the same qualities that are appealing in our own world—love, goodness, beauty, home—but here found in a purer and more integrated form, a reality so intense and perfect that in heightened experiences it can elicit ecstatic joy.

Interestingly, these characteristics are attributed to the transcendent or Divine Being by Plato and other philosophers. Some followers of Plato even attribute the experience of the numen as flowing directly out of contemplation of the One which is good, loving, and beautiful. You may already be reminded of the philosophical arguments we have examined that trace these transcendental qualities to their ultimate perfection in God.

In fact, normal real-world experiences of goodness or beauty or truth can often serve as “gateways” through which ordinary people encounter the numen in a heightened experience. A prayer or scripture passage, a work of art or a walk-in nature, or simply sitting at the dinner table—suddenly the curtains part, and we feel transported and calm at the same time, swept up in a profound sense of unity with everything. In that moment, all the alienation is gone. We feel at home with the whole of reality, suffused with a spiritual joy in which our material concerns fade in perspective. Otto summarizes three key characteristics in this *heightened* experience of the numen:

1. The numen causes a sense of propulsion into itself (we are swept up into it).
2. In this propulsion, we sense the numen as perfect goodness and a Supreme Being (known only in religion).
3. Our temporary connection or unity with this Supreme perfect goodness reveals to us our highest transcendent nature—our soul which can only be satisfied by the Supreme Goodness.

This experience isn't reserved for monks and mystics—many individuals from virtually every major religion and culture have heightened experiences of the numen. Indeed, we don't so much seek them out as receive them on God's initiative. Often, we experience sparks of the transcendent so quickly and subtly, and from such simple “gateways”, that

we don't appreciate their significance. This is especially true of experiences in childhood, which tend to be forgotten until some random encounter, like an old picture, brings back a sudden flood of feeling which surprises us by its unexpected intensity. Otherwise, these experiences simply recede to our subconscious, exerting a more subtle influence. As we'll see in the next section on the Intuition of the Sacred, this unconscious sense is often what makes us feel a connection to external symbols of the sacred in our communities.

I.D The Unity and Opposition of Both Poles in Our Experience of the Numen

These two poles are like the double-helix in DNA—they aren't really separate in the numen but fully integrated and complementary. Our understanding of this complementarity, however, often develops over time. Otto's historical survey suggested that societies sometimes begin by emphasizing the first pole of mystery and awe. Only gradually—often through the preaching of enlightened wise individuals—does the second pole of joy and goodness and love come into focus, showing that the wholly Other has a personal element and in fact wants to enter into a loving relationship with us. We can see the complementary influence of the two poles in the seven common characteristics that Friedrich Heiler charted among the world's major religions:

1. The transcendent, the holy, the divine, the Other is real (from the first pole).
2. The transcendent reality is immanent in human awareness (from the first pole).
3. This transcendent reality is the highest truth, highest good, and highest beauty (from the second pole).
4. This transcendent reality is loving and compassionate—and seeks to reveal its love to human beings (from the second pole).
5. The way to God requires prayer, ethical self-discipline, purgation of self-centeredness, asceticism, and redressing of offenses (from the first and second poles).
6. The way to God also includes service and responsibility to people (from the second pole).
7. The highest way to eternal bliss in the transcendent reality is through love (from the second pole).

The probable reason why early religious consciousness emphasized the first pole was because its characteristics are powerful and fearful, and like children, we pay most attention to what can harm or overpower us. As we mature and become less daunted

by the overpowering and uncontrollable Other, we allow the Other's more benign and compassionate qualities to be recognized.

I.E Conclusion

The numinous experience is one form of evidence for our transcendence and relationship with a Transcendent Being. A conclusion is stronger when it combines evidence from different sources, so we move on to studies of the sacred and of the conscience.

II. The Intuition of the Sacred—Mircea Eliade

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Where Otto studied data on *individual interior* experiences, Mircea Eliade's research encompassed the *outward community* expression of the sacred across cultures. We will explore the significance of Eliade's findings in three steps:

1. The common elements of religions he found across cultures
2. What it means as an individual to be religious
3. The effects on "modern man" produced by our unusual rejection of the sacred

II.A Common Elements in Cross-Cultural Religious Expression

Eliade groups all the common cross-cultural elements of religious expression under two major concepts: "hierophany" and "*homo religiosus*."

Hierophany means "appearance of the sacred." Every religion is based on the belief that transcendent reality (God or gods or some quasi-personal force) has broken into the world, bringing sacredness or holiness with it, and splitting the world into two parts: "the sacred" (connected to transcendent reality) and "the profane" (not connected to transcendent reality).

Moreover, each religion identifies a place and a time (or several) when the transcendence breaks into the world and makes the site and time of the "breakthrough" sacred. This site isn't just a reminder, but a place pilgrims can come to encounter the sacred. Villages often are built around a sacred center, whether it be a sacrificial altar in ancient Mesopotamia or a country church in Vermont, that mirrors the sacred origin from which all creation unfolds.

The sacred time of the hierophany is usually the origin or creation of reality. How can a pilgrim enter into the sacred time? It would seem that the world would move further

away from this sacred time, becoming more profane as time passes. However, most religions believe in the “myth of eternal return” in which one returns to the sacred time by participating in religious rituals or recounting sacred myths. As with the sacred places, these rituals and recounting of sacred myths are not simply memorials, they are a *reliving* of the sacred time, allowing participants to connect with the transcendent reality present at that time. Participants come into contact with absolute truth and goodness, embedding in the stories of creation and the heroes that completed that creation and are called to imitate the actions and virtues of those heroes.

Eliade terms this absolute truth a “paradigmatic model” that shows us our true purpose and how to live our lives. In other words, religion doesn’t simply connect us to the transcendent reality beyond—it’s equally crucial in guiding the purpose of our current life. To disregard our connections to the transcendent and dismiss religion to focus on “real life” would deprive human beings individually and collectively of their seemingly innate connection to the transcendent, spiritual, sacred, and religious. It would leave us radically incomplete, reducing us to the realm of the profane, and robbing us of our transcendent spiritual and sacred nature.

How do all these observations constitute evidence of God’s presence? , First, it cannot be mere happenstance or coincidence if far-flung societies across millennia, from the Incas to the Japanese, all express a yearning for the sacred in the same four ways:

1. A belief in the sacred (transcendent reality) in which there is absolute truth and goodness.
2. The Sacred (transcendent reality) desires to connect with human beings and so enters into the profane world at a particular place.
3. When the sacred reality broke through, it sacralized (made holy) the place and time it entered. When human beings celebrate the ritual of origin and recount the myth of origin, time collapses, and they re-enter the sacred time of origin, again connecting them with the Sacred reality who strengthens them.
4. The celebration of rituals and recounting of myths not only strengthens the participants but also imparts “paradigmatic models”—lessons about purpose in life, the goods to be pursued, evils to be avoided, the virtues and laws that will help to achieve the good, and the vices that will undermine it.

How can we explain this? Since cultures are too diverse to find a common social cause for these four similar dimensions of religious belief, we must look to a common cause

within individual human beings. We just looked at a potential common cause among individuals—Otto’s numinous experience. But are there alternative, natural causes? If so, they would have some difficult questions to overcome:

1. How does a *natural* (physical) cause produce an awareness of transcendent reality, a desire to draw close to that reality, and a passion to seek it?
2. How can a *natural* cause produce a belief that the transcendent reality wants to connect with human kind, and will even “step down” to enter into the profane world to make it sacred for human kind?
3. How can a *natural* cause produce a belief that the transcendent reality is *absolutely* good and possesses *absolute* truth?
4. How can a *natural* cause produce a belief that real meaning—and reality itself—does not come from profane nature, but only from the sacred reality?

Eliade and his colleagues never found an adequate answer. Realizing that no combination of natural phenomena could add up to a transnatural or supernatural one, he concluded that the cause of these universal yearnings for the sacred must be some *irreducible* presence of the sacred- transcendent reality within us. This is why he believed that Otto’s numinous experience was (and is) the likely common cause of our religious feelings, impressions, desires, and symbols. Inasmuch as the numinous experience is universal, transcendent, and spiritual, it is not a far leap to attribute its source to the God we have already encountered in science, Aquinas’ and Lonergan’s proofs, near death experiences, and the five transcendental desires.

II.B *Homo Religiosus*

We just discussed Eliade’s four similarities among world religions and how to explain this remarkable phenomenon among utterly diverse cultures throughout history. We now move into the interior domain of the people who participate in these religions (who Eliade terms *homo religiosus*). Do the similarities among world religions indicate a similarity among religious people?

The short answer is yes, according to Eliade. The designation of places and rituals and symbols as “sacred” would not have the power to captivate and endure at the center of so many different societies unless individuals had an awareness of (and desire for) transcendent reality. If these interior dispositions were not already present, traditional man would never have sought out religion and would certainly not have made it his center of meaning and the source of reality.

Thus, again, we find ourselves looking to that personal experience of the transcendent - Otto's "numinous experience"—for explanation. Merely natural explanations fall far short of what is needed to explain this most peculiar common desire to invest ultimate significance and reality in what is invisible, out of reach, wholly Other, and uncontrollable. If no alternative explanation can be found, then it is likely that our inner experience of the numen (transcendent reality) has incited our fascination and desire for the sacred.

Building on this numinous experience, *homo religiosus* seems to possess an additional "religious intuition" of hierophany—i.e. an intuition that the transcendent reality doesn't simply exist in the great beyond but has entered our world. This is what incites the formation of religious communities that create the rituals and sacred spaces and times whereby we can find contact with this transcendent reality and be fulfilled by it.

II.C The Anxiety of "Non-Religious Man"

Of course, our own modern times have marked a unique departure from this near-universal world tradition, and many cultures today are colored by a non-religious perspective. In the last couple of centuries since the Enlightenment, we have acquired a vague idea that humanity's collective awareness of the transcendent was basically a delusion and that today's science has disproved all that.

Even today, 84% of people identify themselves as religious and still possess characteristics of *homo religiosus*: belief in an absolute transcendent reality that appears in the world and sanctifies it; belief that our own lives are sacred and can only find fulfillment through a vital connection with the sacred transcendent reality; and passion for the sacred stories, rituals, and symbols that help people make that connection.

Increasingly, though, modern man has a reduced sense of the sacred, and as a result, we feel more disconnected from any sense of ultimate meaning in reality, sometimes in denial about our very desire for such meaning. This "existential anxiety" isn't something we need to take Eliade's word for—it's featured in the work of great non-religious writers like Sartre, Camus, and Kafka. (We'll look at this existential anxiety in more depth in Volume 13, Chapter Five.) Modern nonreligious culture may be headed for a crisis in which it no longer sees a call to higher principles, virtues, ideals, dignity, and destiny—progressively losing its sense of hope in a positive future, leaving its participants in a state of moral and metaphysical alienation, emptiness, and superficiality. (See the Big Book for a 2004 study in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* that correlated nonreligious affiliation to increased depression, impulsivity, aggressivity, meaninglessness, substance abuse, familial tension, and suicide.)

Exacerbating this alienation, the modern non-religious perspective often sees a rejection of the transcendent as necessary for finding fulfillment. In this view, a true and free sense of self comes from “taking the reins” as the only meaningful agent in an otherwise empty universe. If we are instead being called to a relationship with a transcendent reality, this is a dangerous miscalculation, because it radically underestimates and undervalues our transcendent, eternal, and spiritual purpose, dignity, fulfillment, and destiny. Though many thinkers today seem to find the positive evidence of the “numinous experience” too subjective, it may be easier to see the presence of the transcendent by taking account of what happens to individuals and cultures when we ignore or reject the transcendent in our lives -- depression, emptiness, alienation, aggressivity, substance abuse, familial tension, and suicide.

Is this natural, or a result of radical incompleteness arising out of our separation from the transcendent reality within us?

III. Kant and Newman on the Divine Origin of Conscience

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Another way the transcendent reality shows itself to be present in our lives is through our conscience. Remember that goodness is one of the transcendent attributes of God; we experience the *numen* as good, and we are instructed in hierophanies on how to behave to be good ourselves.

Philosophers also have identified the highest reality as good. Plato taught that we can know what is good through reflection and thought, what St. Paul would refer to as God’s law written on our hearts. Centuries later, St. Thomas Aquinas developed this into a general explanation of *Conscience*. For Aquinas, Conscience has two parts:

1. *Synderesis*—an emotional attraction to what is good and fear and revulsion of what is evil. If we do something really generous and virtuous, we feel great about ourselves. If we do something bad, we feel guilty (if it’s bad enough, even feel sickened).
2. Awareness of certain general precepts of the good—an intellectual sense of *what* is good or evil; basic principles like ‘give others their due’, ‘be truthful’, ‘don’t steal’, etc.

III.A Kant and the Divine Origin of Conscience

How is conscience evidence of God's presence? Thinkers like Plato and Aquinas believed in a connection between conscience and God (whose existence they had ascertained from other arguments) but in the 1700's, Immanuel Kant found that you could also reason *from* conscience to God. Basically, conscience is our awareness of what is good and what isn't. But the very idea of "good" includes a duty to do it—from childhood we know that good is "what you *should* do." "Goods" cannot be recognized without the duty to do them, and the *absolute* duty to do them cannot be recognized without an *absolute* obligation—an imposing Subjective presence outside ourselves. This is not a formal proof as much as it is an unpacking of what we experience when our conscience tells us to do something good.

III.B Newman and the Divine Origin of Conscience

John Henry Newman took Kant's idea and developed it further, laying out in more detail how we can find the presence of God in our conscience. Conscience is something we are immediately aware of, like the fact that we exist or the fact that we are thinking. From this, Newman describes in five steps how conscience is an *immediate* awareness or experience of a personal God:

1. This thing we are aware of is a voice commanding us to do certain things and avoiding others. It may not always be clear what it's commanding, but the commands are real even when we would rather ignore them—we clearly didn't make it up ourselves and we can't snap our fingers to make it go away.
2. Hearing this voice that addresses us so directly, praising us when we follow it, blaming us when we don't, means we are aware of an external source, one that we can measure up to or disappoint. The more we follow it, the clearer and stronger its demands become—this authoritative source is thus seeking to draw us out of ourselves to its own higher standard.
3. This is not how feelings usually work—we can feel that something is beautiful or ugly, for instance, or interesting or boring, but those feelings don't impose an obligation on us the way a feeling that something is right or wrong does.
4. The feelings of conscience, in fact, aren't private the way other feelings are, they are *interpersonal*, because we are aware of that external source creating the obligation. The guilt we feel towards a friend when we have hurt them, the cheerfulness we feel towards a parent we have pleased by doing what we should—we have those same sorts of interpersonal feelings inside our conscience even when no other human person is involved.

5. In fact, those interpersonal feelings in our conscience are even stronger than our sense of guilt or happiness in our behavior with other people, because the sense of obligation is absolute. It extends even our most secret thoughts to a supreme authority that is uncompromising in its commands. Newman ultimately finds in this source the voice of an unseen father, omniscient and searching our inmost hearts—ultimately, in other words, a recognition of the presence of a loving supreme authority—God.

As with Kant, Newman is unfolding his own immediate experience of God through his conscience. Newman assures us that the more we listen to and follow our conscience, the more deeply and clearly we will experience the God who both guides and invites us to His life of transcendent and perfect goodness. Once again, we find God present to human consciousness—not only in the numinous experience and our religious intuition of the Sacred, but also in the omniscient, invisible, searcher of hearts who bids us to do good and avoid evil.

IV. The Cosmic Struggle between Good and Evil— J.R.R. Tolkien and Carl Jung

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If the above material on conscience was a little challenging to follow, let's relax and go to the movie theater for our last piece of interior evidence for the transcendent.

What series of blockbuster movies grossed over a *billion dollars* by telling the story of an unassuming youth who is given a mission by a great and wise old man to defeat the forces of evil and who accepts (knowing that the mission will entail sacrifice though not realizing that it will push him to the very breaking point)? Hint: The hero is given a band of helpers and has to battle not only the armies of their enemy, but his own interior temptation to be “turned” by the leader of the forces of evil; ultimately, courage and perseverance win the day, evil is defeated, and the world is restored to goodness and light.

If you answered “Star Wars,” you're right. If you answered “The Lord of the Rings,” you're right. If you answered “Harry Potter,” you're right.

Why is this common story of the “Hero's Journey” so popular and enduring, catapulting these movies (and Rowling and Tolkien's books) ahead of other great works of film and literature? Because such stories as these are myths embedded in our subconscious minds.

Today we casually use “myth” as a synonym for “made-up story”, but a myth is something more important: a story that expresses ultimate truth and meaning, by reaching beyond the limitations of the day-to-day world around us to connect us to the transcendent ultimate reality that is the source of ultimate truth and meaning. Myths tell “high narratives” that are fantastical but deeply resonate with us emotionally and intellectually because they are trying to express for our imagination the ultimate truths that are too deep to express otherwise.

How do myths appeal to us on all these levels? Through the power of *symbols*—worldly images and concepts that have natural meanings yet simultaneously point *beyond* themselves to transcendent truths that we could not directly picture otherwise. Without symbols, we could label these truths in dry and abstract thoughts, like a theorem, but we couldn’t experience and encounter them as living realities.

Where do these “two-faced” images that speak to us both on a natural and supernatural level come from?

1. Some symbols are learned from a particular culture or religion.

Children learn these symbols from the religious rituals, artwork and great stories of their culture.

2. Some symbols are trans-cultural—universal in virtually every culture and religion.

These trans-cultural symbols are sometimes termed “Archetypes” (from the Greek for “origin”). Archetypes don’t seem to be created by cultures, but instead are “embedded,” already present in our unconscious from our earliest days.

According to Carl Jung, founder of the school of analytical psychology, archetypes have meanings that are essential for knowing one’s place in the world, one’s meaning in life, and one’s relationships with God and others. They begin in the unconscious and become symbols when they surface in the conscious mind and attach to images, thus producing such archetypal figures as the great mother, father, child, devil, god, wise old man, wise old woman, the trickster, and the hero. You may recognize some of these figures in the stories we mentioned—the hero, the devil, the wise old man, God, and the trickster are especially prevalent figures in contemporary myths.

The universal presence of these archetypes seems to point, once again, to that interior awareness of transcendent reality that every individual has (the numinous experience)—how else can we all universally, from early childhood, intuitively recognize these archetypes

that hold such essential transcendent meaning? (See the Big Book for an extended discussion of Jung's theory that these archetypes are inherited from a common ancestry and shared in a collective unconscious—which would still require some form of spiritual awareness in whatever ancestors we originated from.)

To summarize, myths fascinate us because they draw us into our numinous feelings and our religious intuition, they tell us about the truth of ourselves—that we are called to be heroes (or helpers of heroes) in a most noble mission—the defeat of cosmic evil and the restoration of cosmic good. Myths tell us that our lives are not purely mundane, but rather involved in matters of the highest consequence—eternal consequences. Though we may look at the hero as distinct from ourselves, we cannot help but think that the hero's challenges are in some way our challenge. Our attraction to and love of myths comes from within us—or better, from the presence of God within us—inviting us into His noble mission, into Himself, and into His destiny.

V. Conclusion: An Initial Conclusion about “the Soul”

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We have seen three ways in which the transcendent reality touches us:

1. **The numinous experience**—in which the numen presents itself as mysterious, daunting, uncontrollable, fascinating, good, and empathetic, and invites us into itself by inciting our interest and desire.
2. **The religious intuition**—in which we sense that the sacred transcendent reality has broken into the world, which invites us to draw closer to the sacred reality through sacred place, ritual, and myth.
3. **Conscience**—through which an omniscient, invisible searcher of hearts bids us to do good and avoid evil.

These three connections with the Sacred-Transcendent Reality are not static: when the Transcendent Reality makes itself present to us, it manifests concern and care for us, calls us into a deeper relationship with itself, and offers us guidance and sanctification in our life's journey. Those who open themselves to the “transcendent presence within” will find not only the mysterious and sacred “wholly Other,” but also a personal, empathetic, and loving being passionately interested in bringing us to the fullness of life through itself.

Chapter Four:

Human Intelligence versus Artificial and Animal Intelligence

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We've been looking at ways we can discern God's presence in our consciousness. However, in the materialist worldview (coloring our modern age), it is tempting to dismiss the transcendent character of our own consciousness by saying it's merely an extension of the intelligence of an animal or even, perhaps, a computer. In this section, then, we'll take a look at the many ways human intelligence is distinct from artificial and animal intelligence.

I. Human Intelligence versus Artificial Intelligence

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There are four major differences between human and artificial intelligence, and it is highly unlikely that we will be able to bridge this gap.

1. The Five Transcendental Desires

We previously discussed these transcendent desires manifesting our awareness of perfect truth, love, justice/goodness, beauty and home (see Chapter Two above as well as Volume 1—Chapter Three) and how the source of them can only be God. Since we don't have the capacity to give artificial intelligence these five kinds of transcendental awareness and desire (because only God can do this) we can assume that computers will never be enlightened in this way. AI does not include a belief, only a program.

2. The Formulation of Conceptual Ideas

We'll take an extended look at conceptual ideas—abstract interrelational ideas that can be used as predicates and objects—and how conceptual ideas are formed when we discuss animal intelligence in the next section. In brief, human language and syntax require both perceptual ideas (that can be linked to a sensorial perception, like a banana) and conceptual ideas (abstract ideas derived from the interrelationship among ideas that cannot be linked to any sensorial perception). Animals, like chimpanzees, are limited to perceptual ideas alone – and computers do even less – they can only link perceptual images to linguistic symbols. The vast majority of the words we use are conceptual ideas

having no sensorial correlates. Now here is the problem – we need huge conceptual ideas to transform perceptual ideas (which we can derive from the sensorial world around us) into conceptual ideas (which we cannot directly derive from the sensorial world). The seven major questions represent some of the necessary conceptual ideas we need to create the rest of our conceptual ideas – “What?” “Why?” “How?” “Where?” “When?” “Who?” and “How many?” If we did not understand the meaning of these huge abstract conceptual ideas, we would be just like chimpanzees – having no conceptual ideas, but only perceptual ideas. Yet if we need these huge conceptual ideas to derive any other conceptual ideas from our perceptual ideas, then we must already know them *prior to* our acts of experience and understanding. Thus, they must be innate (present to us and part of our mental capacity *from birth*). Since these conceptual ideas are beyond the restrictions of sensorial perceptions (e.g. space, time, individuality, material properties, and physical processes), their innate presence within us implies a transphysical cause (like God).

3. Self-consciousness and the experience of inwardness

Some experiences can be imitated by physical processes. You can sense if you are overheating (for instance, if you are wearing a heavy coat on a blazing summer day); a car or computer has temperature sensors that can trigger an alert if the machine is overheating. But this trigger is merely mechanical—the car doesn’t *feel that it is hot* like you do. Why? Self-consciousness is more than an experience of heat, it also contains the experience of *experiencing* heat, and physical processes lack this “inner sense.” We’ll spend the whole next chapter unpacking this idea of self-consciousness and why these inner experiences cannot be replicated by a physical process like artificial intelligence.

4. Transalgorithmic mathematical thinking

“Transalgorithmic” may sound intimidating and technical, but it basically means thinking outside the box—e.g., you can look outside of the set formulas and rules (algorithms) that govern a mathematical system. Back in 1931, The famous German mathematician Kurt Gödel first formulated the proof that humans can look at any rule-based mathematical system (e.g. the rules of arithmetic) and find a proposition that the system cannot prove (e.g. “the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the square of the other two sides.”) Human intelligence is capable of being genuinely original and creative—we can go on to develop another set of rules to incorporate the new proposition (e.g. Euclidean Geometry in this example). And then, according to Gödel’s Theorem, we can do it all again, and identify another proposition that the *new* system cannot prove, and so on and so on.

How is this possible? The answer will be familiar by now—we have a sense of the entirety of mathematical truth, just as we have a sense of the entirety of all truth. Our awareness is transcendent. Artificial intelligence, by contrast, is governed by literal programs—we speak of a computer’s operating system. Its system may be vast and complex but it has no sense of a broader horizon of knowledge. It is limited by its system in a way that we are not, even while it has computational power *within its system* that greatly exceeds ours (e.g. performing vast numbers of mathematical computations per second).

II. Human Intelligence versus Animal Intelligence

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Some have conjectured that the difference between human intelligence and that of animals like the higher primates is only a matter of degree, but the essential intellectual and linguistic activity is the same. In recent years, several tests have been developed to explore this conjecture—we’ll look at one by the philosopher of language Noam Chomsky, and you can find information on others in the Big Book. But first, we need to break down what is involved in human intelligence and language.

Perceptual vs. Conceptual ideas

As we saw above, perceptual ideas are essentially sensorial images of individual things we perceive. These are the ideas you would start with if you found yourself in a strange country and wanted to learn the language—you could point to a chair, a foot, a horse and learn the words used for those things. But perceptual ideas don’t cover most words in a language—including the words “perceptual” and “ideas”. Look at the words in this chapter—you could form a mental picture for maybe three percent of them.

The other ninety-seven percent refer to *relationships*—relationships among pictorial images, relationships among relationships, and the ways in which things and ideas are related. These are conceptual ideas. As our education continues, we build more and more complex relationships to understand more abstract ideas, moving from the “see Spot run” words of childhood to studies of grammar, logic, mathematics, science, etc.

Heuristic Notions

How do we create these relationships among perceptual and conceptual ideas? There must be some context through which to organize them—some kind of map or superstructure within which ideas can be related. Each of the seven major questions – “What?” “Where?”

etc., provide these superstructures for organizing perceptual and conceptual ideas. For example, relationships of location and relative position require a superstructure of oriented spatiality (like a map) to relate one location or position to others. When we ask the question, “Where?” we seem to instinctively bring up this mental superstructure (like a map) which anticipates fitting yet another location into it. This superstructure makes other high-level ideas intelligible, such as “here-there-right-left-center” that determine how ideas are organized. Each of the seven major questions have their own distinct mental superstructure to organize perceptual and conceptual ideas. As with the question, “Where?”, we seem to instinctively bring up the appropriate mental “map” that enables us to organize and interrelate data. The mental superstructure appropriate to each of the major questions are explained in the Big Book (Volume Two, Chapter 4).

We call these organizing superstructures “heuristic notions”, and they themselves derive meaning from the supreme heuristic notion of “the complete intelligibility of reality.” Recall that our sense of “the complete intelligibility of reality” is what tells us where we still have gaps in our knowledge—what parts of the map are still blank, so to speak—and what informs every question we ask.

Vocabulary vs. Syntax—The Test of Language

What does this have to do with animal intelligence? Human intelligence seems to differ essentially (not just in degree) from animal intelligence, because human beings seem to be alone in moving beyond perceptual ideas to conceptual ideas. We see this in language tests with animals. Noam Chomsky observed that animals can accumulate a vocabulary of numerous “words” —most famously with primates that use signs (from American Sign Language for instance) to identify specific things or express biological needs—indicating a grasp of perceptual ideas. However, this linguistic ability does not seem to extend to syntax—the part of language that organizes these words into relationships like subject and object (creating the difference between “dog bites man” and “man bites dog”). Thus, animals in linguistic experiments can be trained to identify things but do not seem able to develop “something to say” about those things or build complex expressions of relationship. A famous case study with chimpanzees (Project Washoe) found this same limitation—an ability to learn many signs in vocabulary, but inability to organize them with syntax. This limitation indicates that animal intelligence does not extend to the formation of conceptual ideas, let alone to heuristic notions or transcendent awareness.

There are four other major differences between human and animal intelligence, beyond the absence of conceptual (abstract) ideas in animals:

1. Non non-human animal has self-consciousness (awareness of awareness), enabling them to have a sense of interiority and to distinguish between “inner world” and “outer world” (as humans do – see below Chapter 5).
2. No non-human animal has a sense of a supreme sacred reality evoking awe and worship (like God) – though animals can sense (and fear) the presence of ghosts and spirits.
3. No non-human animal manifests a sense of conscience or moral duty (as humans do).
4. No non-human animal has a sense of excitement, revelry, or ecstasy in the presence of natural beauty, artificial beauty, music, or poetry – though some animals will howl at music.

Chapter Five: Self-Consciousness

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Introduction

In addition to the evidence of near death experiences, heuristic notions, and Gödel’s Theorem, another indication of transphysical consciousness has emerged in current philosophy—the problem of self-consciousness. The question is this: can the subjective component of human experience be explained by an aggregation of physical processes in the brain? Or is there something about subjective experience that will always go beyond the mere chemical or neuro- biological reactions of the physical processes? If there is something demonstrably “more”, then it will show once again that human beings—specifically, human self-consciousness—must be more than the physical brain. This something “more” must be transphysical and even transcendental (indicating a unique transphysical soul).

I. The Hard Problem of Self-Consciousness

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When we see or hear something, much of what happens can be explained by physical processes—light waves striking the retina or sound waves vibrating the inner ear, electrical impulses firing through nerve systems to the brain. But there is also an inner experience that is produced—a subjective quality of “appreciation” or “enjoyment” or “amazement” or “awe”—and these are qualities that physical processes cannot seem to produce. A camera can capture the same light waves from an ocean sunset, but it will not feel what we feel when that light strikes our eyes. A computer might solve the same math problem or unscramble the same word puzzle, but the act will not produce the sense of satisfaction or relief or enlightenment that we experience.

This is what Chalmers calls “The Hard Problem of Consciousness”—any phenomenon that cannot seem to be explained by physical processes. In contrast to this, “easy problems of consciousness” are ones that can be explained by physical processes. Thomas Nagel approached the same problem from the perspective of the “outwardness” of physical processes. Physical processes are “objective”—manifested outwardly—and can therefore be *shared* in a consistent way with anyone who has the means to observe them, but subjective “experiences”—“inner appreciation and enjoyment”—cannot be shared with anyone. The problem with describing *inner* experiences by means of physical processes is that physical realities have no “inwardness.”

If one wants to exclude the transphysical and take a materialist view of reality, one must reckon with this “hard problem of consciousness” that physical processes cannot seem to account for. But the problem is broader than that. In fact, there are three domains that lie beyond physical processes—living systems, animal consciousness, and finally, the “hard problem” of human self-consciousness.

I.A Living Systems

We can fundamentally distinguish living systems from more basic physical systems as the difference between “Being for-itself” (a being that acts for itself, pursuing survival and replication and avoiding threats) vs “Being in-itself” (a being that does not act for itself and is indifferent to its existence).

Living systems have a higher level of self-organization that physical systems do not. Physical systems simply act in a prescribed way, but a living system takes its internal physical processes and orients them towards preservation of the higher order living

system. If you drop a rock, it will simply fall according to the prescribed laws of physics. If you drop a bird, it will activate its physical wings to keep the whole bird from hitting the ground and breaking apart into not-a-bird.

Thus, a living system is not *reducible* to physical systems because it requires these two additional components—a higher level of self-organization, and information that orients physical systems to the goal of maintaining, preserving, and replicating the higher-order system.

Materialists object that “orienting physical systems to a higher end” isn’t something that can be identified through scientific instruments. But this is true of the laws of physics too—in both cases, we discover these governing systems indirectly through their effects. We watch a rock fall and deduce the law of gravity. We watch a bird fly away and deduce the bird is alive.

Why is all this significant? As we will see, consciousness cannot be reduced to living systems in the same way that living systems cannot be reduced to physical ones.

I.B Lonergan’s Levels of Reality—“Conjugates” and “Things”

Lonergan gives a broader theoretical framework for the last question, i.e. how can we explain the higher-order self-organization and laws governing living systems as distinct from physical systems? Basically, it fits into a bigger pattern in the universe, where the intersection (conjugates) of different systems of laws determine the formation of individual things. (As in any topic that gets this abstract, please refer to the Big Book for a more in-depth exposition if you start to feel lost.)

Strange as it may seem, “things” are not the most fundamental manifestation of reality. They are derived from three more fundamental principles—which are “law-like” or “information-like,” rather than “thing-like.” The principles are these:

1. The mathematical laws that define space and time
2. The physical laws that define matter and energy and how they interact
3. The laws that define the formation and behavior of distinct physical “things”

The most solid, fundamental “things” you can think of are, themselves, the product of all three levels of laws and principles operating.

The interrelationship among these laws gives rise to a hierarchy of five levels of self-organization. The higher levels of self-organization unify higher levels of law leading to higher levels of activity.

Thus, there are basic laws that organize physical systems, higher-order laws that organize living systems, and still higher ones that organize sensate consciousness and self-consciousness. The five levels are—the laws of physics, the laws of chemistry, the laws of biology (living systems), the laws of sensitive psychology (organizing sensate consciousness), and the laws of rational psychology (organizing human self-consciousness). These higher-order laws are not more mysterious or inexplicable than the lower-order ones—we observe them by their effects just like we do the laws of physics. We just don't use microscopes—we look at the interrelationship of higher and lower activities and make deductions.

The important point is that the higher orders of self-organization (with their higher order laws) are not reducible to the lower orders of self-organization (with their lower order laws). Even though living systems are composed of chemical and physical parts (both of which operate according to their respective sets of laws), biological self-organization and biological laws (e.g. metabolism, survival, replication, etc.) cannot be explained or reduced to these lower order parts or laws.

That being said, while these levels of reality give us a system to study the higher-order realities of life and consciousness, we will ultimately find that human self-consciousness also contains a transphysical component that eludes this system. But before we go there, let's stay within the system and address this "hard problem" of consciousness.

I.C Protomentalist Solutions to the Hard Problem of Consciousness

Protomentalism or panpsychism proposes to solve the hard problem of consciousness (subjective experiences that cannot seem to be explained by physical processes) by saying that everything is conscious in some form. Protomentalism posits that there is no hierarchy from the physical to the living to the conscious. They flatten the hierarchy by saying that the most basic physical systems are conscious in some elementary "proto" way. Thus, all forms of consciousness can ultimately be reduced to a purely physical process, and we are free to say, for instance, that the brain is the sole source of human consciousness.

There are several difficulties with this theory. The reason the hierarchy of levels of reality was defined in the first place was to account for living systems—there is something higher than basic physical processes governing the atoms in a bird to fly and build nests, something that isn't there when those atoms are in a corpse. If protomentalism is flattening this hierarchy, what alternative account is it offering for living systems? The short answer is none.

The problems increase in the case of self-consciousness. Protomentalism says all consciousness is physical. However, we looked at evidence in Chapter One indicating that self-consciousness persists after the death of the physical body (and brain), meaning it must have a transphysical component independent of the physical brain.

Moreover, we have looked at ways the human consciousness can perceive the entirety of reality—in heuristic notions, in the horizon of complete intelligibility (transcendent awareness of absolute truth), and even the horizon of higher mathematical intelligibility (when we looked at Gödel's Theorem). This means our consciousness, in some way is, not limited by any physical system, let alone by an individual physical brain.

Finally, if self-consciousness is intrinsic to physical systems, why do we not find human self-consciousness manifested in higher primates, like chimpanzees, who have sufficient cranial and frontal lobe capacity to give physical expression (through the body) to self-consciousness? If this were the case, chimpanzees would act very differently—emphasizing autonomy, independence, centrality of self, and they would have early egocentric, domineering, and narcissistic impulses. (In other words, we would expect them to act as they do in the *Planet of the Apes* films.)

So, if self-consciousness cannot be explained by materialism (which asserts that consciousness is reducible to the physical processes of the brain) or protomentalism (which asserts that everything is conscious), then is there some more nuanced explanation? There are models that treat the *transphysical* element of human self-consciousness as a higher-order self-organization that orients the physical systems of the brain and body towards self-reflection and thought, the same way the higher-order self-organization of living systems orients the physical systems of the body towards eating, surviving, and reproducing. We'll explain this solution in section III, but first it will be helpful to define some terms when talking about self-consciousness.

II. Sensate Consciousness and Self-Consciousness

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Phenomenology is the biggest contributor to the study of “interior presence,” and starts with the idea that a perception is always embedded in conscious experience. The sight of a sunset only happens when someone is seeing it, so you can't think about perceptions without thinking about the consciousness that's perceiving as well. When we look at the

perception of *self*, i.e. self-consciousness, phenomenology identifies several layers in this perception.

The first layer is a “prehensive” feeling of self as part of a field of perceptions (Sensate Consciousness) while the second is an inward apprehension of self over and above the field of perceptions (Rational Self-Consciousness).

II.A Animals, Sensate Consciousness, and the “Feeling” of Self

The “prehensive” feeling of self is so basic we almost aren’t even aware of it. Imagine someone tosses you a ball and on reflex you reach out and catch it. You can do this because you have a sense of where the ball is and a sense of where you are, as physical objects. Many animals have this same basic sense of self as “one of the things in the room”—if a dog is chasing a rabbit, it can feel how close it is to the rabbit because it senses where it is and where the rabbit is. (We even have this perception of our own locational presence in dreams.)

This is not the same as self-awareness, where one can step back from the stream of perceptions and reflect on one’s own unique existence. Many researchers have developed different criteria and devised different tests to explore the sense of self in different animals to see how closely it approaches self-awareness (e.g., whether they can recognize a reflection in the mirror as themselves, whether they can mentally project themselves into the past and the future.) You can find further reading on these tests in the Big Book.

II.B Human Self-Apprehension and Self-Consciousness

Humans do not just sense themselves within present perceptions (the juxtaposition of a ball and a feeling of self); we also have an independent sense of self outside of these perceptions. This independent sense of self allows us to unify all the different experiences through our lives as belonging to the “same self.” We still retain the experiences that happened when we were five because they happened to *us*—the same inner awareness that existed then and exists now. We have the power to remember those experiences and reflect on them and how they influence us, etc. If we did not have this independent awareness of our inwardness (self) outside the totality of our perceptions, our experience would just be a stream of sensations happening in the moment, with no unifying coherence. This is why animals, from all outward appearances manifest no sense of experiencing and living within a unified narrative stream moving from the past to the future.

What is the source of this self-apprehension? This level of awareness requires:

A. **Interiority**—we are not merely something *within* the stream of perceptions, we are something *in which* perceptions can be. We have an inner world.

B. **Independence From the Perceptual World**—this interiority leads to a distinction between the “inner world” and the “outer world” of perceptions. This builds a sense of the independent self.

C. **The Inner Self as Above the Outside World**—this “inner world” is what receives and unifies the stream of perceptions, so it gains a privileged position as something “over” the outer world.

Hence we have a tendency to be self-centered beginning at childhood. After the age of thirteen months, we assume the world revolves around our own inner world, and so we have to be taught (by parents and authorities) that we are but one reality among many in an “outer world” that will not always do our bidding.

This ability to privilege our own inner self as something independent of the outer world requires one further, rather tricky power. To be able to experience a stream of perceptions (like animals do) and at the same time be aware of ourselves as something independent means we have a power of apprehension that can “feel *itself* feeling”. At the very moment we experience ourselves experiencing, we are aware that we are the experiencers and that the sensory images are not us. This multidimensional experience of experiencing does not happen in stages over time—it’s instantaneous, and makes us categorically different from other highly developed animals.

The uniqueness of human self-awareness (experiencing ourselves experiencing) reveals a problem with protomentalist solutions to the hard problem of consciousness, because again, animals with similar physical systems do not demonstrate this kind of self-awareness. (Animals may get aggressive in pursuit of biological needs, but do not exhibit the self-centeredness that is independent of need and concerned only with imposing its own will; human children exhibit such behavior very early.) If physical systems cannot account for this unique self-consciousness, then we once again look to a transphysical solution.

II.C The Transphysical Nature of Human Self-Consciousness

We have already seen the likelihood of transphysical consciousness in the capacity to survive bodily death, the innate presence of heuristic notions, and the presence of a horizon of complete intelligibility—and now we see yet another indication of it in *self-*

consciousness' capacity to be in two relative positions with respect to itself simultaneously.

How can the very same act of experiencing be in two relative positions with respect to itself simultaneously—as *experiencer* and *experienced*? For the purposes of illustration, we might analogize the *mental* phenomenon of self-consciousness with the *physical* phenomenon of, say, trying to put a briefcase inside of itself (making it be in two relative positions with respect to itself simultaneously). There are only two ways in which this could be done:

1. By travelling at an infinite velocity so that it could be at two relative positions simultaneously—inside and outside of itself.
2. By not being conditioned by space-time—if the briefcase were unaffected by space-time, it could be in multiple relative positions with respect to itself simultaneously.

Both ways of enabling a single reality to be in two relative positions with respect to itself simultaneously require transcending the conditions of space *and* time, implying transphysicality. As such, it seems that human self-consciousness comes from the *same transphysical* ground as our capacity to survive bodily death, and to be aware of heuristic notions and the horizon of complete intelligibility. The origin of our self-consciousness is not the brain or its physical processes or constituents, but rather this transphysical ground.

One final note for this part—some readers may be thinking that quantum systems (*physical* systems) also avoid the conditions of *both* space *and* time, as manifest in quantum entanglement. If this were true, then quantum systems would be transphysical, and the protomentalist solution to the hard problem of consciousness would seem to have merit. But quantum entanglement, which is when pairs of particles closely interact with one another over very large distances, only means that certain spatial conditions (e.g. “a physical object is influenced only by its immediate surroundings”) are negated within the quantum system. Quantum systems as a whole are still conditioned by space and time. You can examine this question in greater depth in the Big Book.

III. Dualism and Trialism

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If we accept that self-consciousness is transphysical, our final mystery is explaining how it can interact with the physical brain. How can something transphysical interact with something physical? (This is an age-old philosophical problem of Dualism, which divides the world into the material and immaterial and then wonders how or if it can all be integrated.)

There must be what we might term a “third substance” that can mediate the transphysical and physical domain—a substance which is both constrained and unconstrained by space and time. As we saw above, the most likely candidate for this third substance is a quantum system which as a *whole* is constrained by space and time, but *within* is free from certain conditions of spatiality.

Hence, Sir John Eccles, the Australian neurophysiologist who won the Nobel Prize for his research on brain synapses, has proposed a theory of “trialist interactionism.” He proposes a third mediating reality—quantum fields—which exist in the physical world, but have a transphysical property—that is, it can be affected by purely mental phenomena (such as a conceptual idea). This third mediating component moves him from “dualism” to “*trialism*.” In fact, quantum science already has encountered this kind of mediation. Observation (a non-material input) can collapse a quantum wave function (a state of probabilistic potentials) to an eigenstate (an actual physical state). Accordingly, Eccles proposes, intentions, self-consciousness, conceptual ideas, and other immaterial contents of consciousness can have an effect on the classical physical systems of the brain through quantum systems

In sum, the *trialist* interactionism of Eccles (and other scientists) has considerable potential to explain how five seemingly transphysical dimensions of consciousness interact with the biophysical systems of the brain:

1. Capacity of consciousness to survive bodily death (implied by near death experiences),
2. The need for heuristic notions to transform perceptual ideas (material images) into conceptual ideas
3. The need for a horizon of complete and unrestricted intelligibility to explain our awareness of the incompleteness of all restricted intelligibility,

4. The need for a horizon of mathematical intelligibility to explain how human consciousness can continuously transcend rules and algorithms in the development of higher mathematics (implied by Gödel's theorem), and
5. The need for self-consciousness to be in two relative positions with respect to itself simultaneously (implied in “experiencing ourselves experiencing”—the hard problem of consciousness).

It would not be surprising to see additional advances in quantum theory continued to corroborate this conclusion. Indeed a whole new area of biophysics is developing around it—“neuroquantology.”

Chapter Six:

Methodological Considerations and Conclusions about our Transphysical Soul

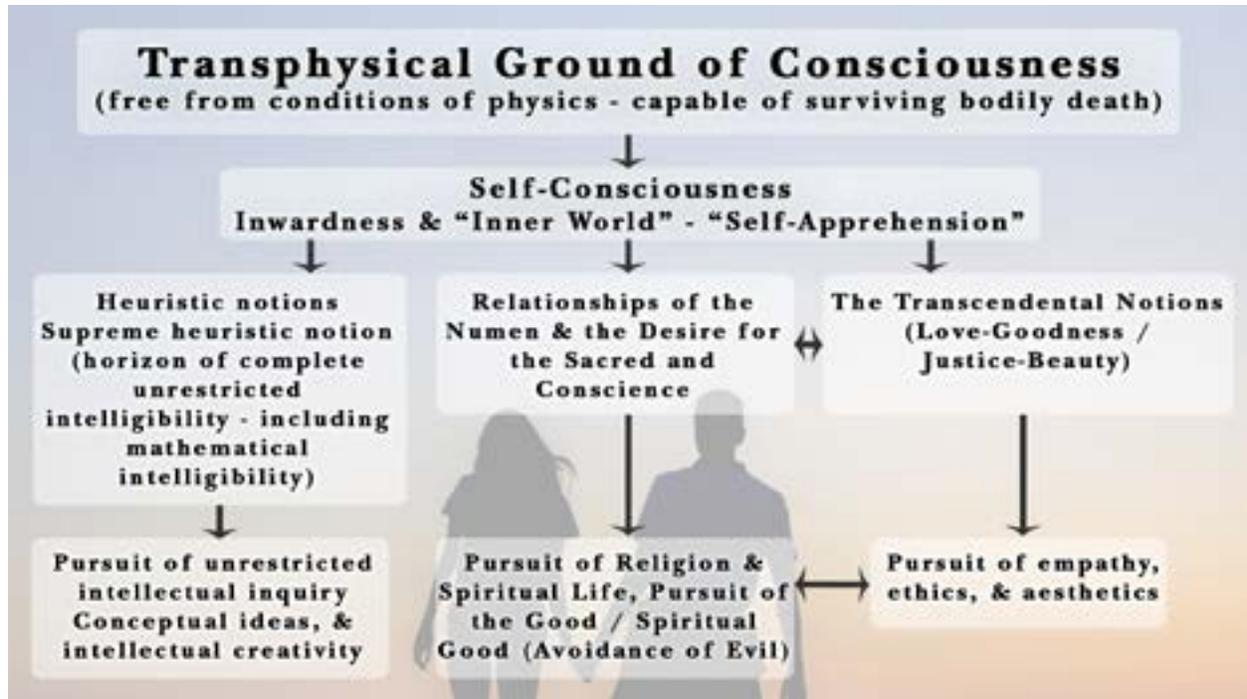
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When we combine the evidence and conclusions of the above five chapters, here is what we can say about human consciousness:

1. There exists a unique instance of transphysical consciousness (a soul) in every human being which is the source of heuristic notions, of the unrestricted desire to know, and of self-consciousness (“experiencing our experiencing”).
2. This transphysical ground of self-consciousness is independent of the brain (and all physical systems), meaning that it can perform all cognitional functions without the brain and survive bodily death.
3. If Eccles, Beck and Stapp are correct, then each unique instance of self-consciousness can interact with a physical brain through the mediation of quantum fields in brain synapses.
4. Each unique instance of self-consciousness can unify the brain's perceptual contents (perceptions, images, perceptual ideas and memories) with transphysical contents (e.g., conceptual ideas and abstract theories).

These transphysical activities and contents are the mediating ground through which human self-consciousness interacts with *Divine* self-consciousness—particularly in the

experience of the Numen and the Sacred, the awareness of moral Authority through conscience, and the awareness of a cosmic struggle between good and evil (see above Chapter 3). They are also how we experience love (empathy) and beauty (aesthetics), as well as our awareness of *perfect* truth, love, justice-goodness, beauty, and home (see above Chapter 2). The following diagram shows the extent of our transcendent nature and activities:



We started this chapter by noting the limitations of any model of consciousness that excluded the transphysical, and we can see now how much is at stake. If we detach ourselves from these transphysical activities and consider ourselves merely a physical process, we eclipse the true mystery of our being—negating the significance of virtually everything on the above diagram. We no longer see our nature and dignity as unrestrictedly inquisitive and creative, seeking perfection in truth, love, goodness, and beauty. We ignore or screen out the experience of the Numen which calls us interiorly into relationship with Itself; we become insensitive to the guidance of conscience and the cosmic struggle surrounding us. We put limits on the unrestricted potential of our goodness and love. We reduce ourselves to the temporal and material—becoming disconnected from our eternal and transcendent purpose and destiny.

The danger isn't just personal, but cultural. Jesus' proclamation that "the truth will set you free" is particularly important here—for if we and the culture falsely underestimate our purpose, dignity, value, and destiny, we will also unnecessarily restrict our freedom and potential to reach beyond the material world into the domain of perfect truth, love, goodness, and beauty. This would be one of the most avoidable, self-inflicted tragedies possible. To avoid this, we need to seriously consider our transcendental nature, dignity, value, and destiny—and upon finding it, act on it

Chapter Seven: Free Will and Original Sin

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Introduction

To act on this destiny, we must now examine human free will. Self-consciousness is how we are aware of our own inner world and of the material and transcendent outer world beyond, but it is the choices we make through our free will that define whether we turn inward or outward. Every choice from early childhood adds to a pattern over time towards one of two fundamental options that will determine who we are, either:

1. To aggrandize ourselves—and seek to possess others and the material world, or
2. To pursue relationships with God and others—and submit to the requirements of conscience, empathy, and love.

We must also look at an obstacle to our free will called concupiscence—a darkening of our soul's awareness of the full beauty and goodness of God. This darkening, an effect of original sin makes us more vulnerable to turning the focus on ourselves and giving in to the seven deadly sins. In the next chapters, we will see how Christ has empowered us to overcome this vulnerability by giving us the unconditional love of His redemption, the power of His Holy Spirit, and the hope of His resurrection.

It may seem hard to imagine today with so much darkness in the world, but before concupiscence dimmed our awareness of God's love and glory, the call to turn outward in love was originally much stronger than the call to turn inward in selfishness. What happened? We'll look at the biblical account of man's original sin to understand the fall and its consequences, then we'll examine the questions raised by original sin in terms of contemporary science.

I. The Fall and Original Sin

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The biblical account of the first sin of the original parents of humanity is found in Genesis chapter 3. The story is brief but full of psychological and theological insight. God has created human beings in His own image and likeness and has withheld nothing from them. He gave them a commandment—likely through their sense of conscience—not to seek for themselves the wisdom and power that belongs to Him alone, and since they “walk with God” and experience His love firsthand, it is easy for their free will to accept His command.

As chapter 3 of Genesis begins, the serpent—representing the evil spirit—seeks to tempt and deceive the couple:

He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

The temptation is based on the suggestion that God is withholding something good from the couple to which they are entitled. The goal is to make them stop trusting and depending on God (who has in reality given them everything) and to think that they must instead reject God’s care and reach out and take something for themselves so they can be like gods.

The choice of the first humans, Adam and Eve, to separate themselves from God had many damaging consequences. Their awareness of God’s goodness and sacredness was weakened, leaving them more vulnerable to the influence of the evil spirit (just as the evil spirit wanted). God did not abandon them—as we will see in the next chapters with Jesus’ mission to save humanity from this evil influence and restore us to God’s care—but the damage of original sin was considerable.

II. The Consequences of Original Sin

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II.A The Interior Consequences of Original Sin

In this chapter, we have often discussed the call of God towards us to participate in our transcendent destiny with Him. With Original Sin, a decreased awareness of God's presence means that it would now be less easy for our free wills to move towards God's call. That loss of focus on our transcendent calling means that the remaining sensual and egocentric desires have more influence on us, leading to a decrease in self-control. We now feel the pull of concupiscence—a strong interest in power, material possessions, sexual indulgence, and other worldly “glories.” This makes us more vulnerable to influence by the evil spirit.

In the aftermath of original sin, then, our interior state became a battleground—staying on the path to God now requires effort and involves fighting temptations from our own desires and the influence of evil spirits. By the time Jesus came, these evil influences had essentially come to dominate the world, a world overrun with slavery and bloodshed. However, Jesus was on a mission to liberate us by his teaching, by his redeeming self-sacrifice, and by the gift of baptism, which incorporates us into the Church and strengthens us with the power of the Holy Spirit.

II.B The Exterior Consequences of Original Sin

Meanwhile, the interior consequences of original sin inevitably led to exterior consequences—our increased inclination to be selfish and indulge in evil desires would alienate us from our relationship with God, with one another, and even with nature. Projecting our own lack of love onto God, societies were unable to move beyond awe and fear of God into the second pole of love and fascination. Enmity with other people engendered pervasive slavery and disregard for human life. And our relationship to nature was poisoned with superstition and a pervasive belief that the material world was evil.

Jesus' mission also redressed these exterior consequences. God's revelation that culminated in Jesus' appearance disproved the notion that God was unloving. Jesus' church was soon able to undermine the habits of slavery and cruelty that underpinned the Roman Empire, slowly replacing them with a more positive social system of education, healthcare, and public welfare. Indeed, just as we must fight the interior consequences of sin in our own life, we are also responsible for continuing this external mission of social transformation in Christ. Christ's mission of salvation is for all humanity.

One other important effect—loss of our exemption from death. When God infused a soul into the first human being, He intended that the body would take its lead from the soul—not vice versa—and so the eternal nature of the transphysical soul meant that we were exempt from death (in God’s plan). The separation from God in original sin meant the loss of this natural exemption, as the soul no longer exerted its own incorruptibility over the body. The very first generation of human beings with a transphysical soul and freewill frustrated God’s plan for us, bringing death and corruption into human existence for all subsequent generations. Yet again, we find redemption in Jesus. We must now look to the example of Jesus’ resurrection, which gave us new hope for our own resurrection when our bodies will be not just restored to life but gloried and transformed.

III. Reconciling Contemporary Science and the Doctrine of Original Sin

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Much has been made about a conflict between the perspective of the natural sciences and the Church’s teaching on original sin, so let’s take a look at the main questions that arise out of the human race’s origin and fall.

III.A Who are our first parents?

The names Adam and Eve clearly have symbolic meaning (“formed from the earth” and “giver of life,” respectively) but what do we know about the individuals themselves? Catholics can believe that the first man and woman evolved from previous species provided that these two were the first to receive a unique transphysical soul from God, making them in His image. Interestingly, there is established evidence that the whole of humanity today has one common female ancestor—named “Mitochondrial Eve” —whose mitochondrial DNA is integral to the genome of every human being around the world (without exception). We also have a common male ancestor—named “Y chromosome Adam”—who is the origin of the male “Y” chromosome. Mitochondrial Eve and Y chromosome Adam probably lived around the same time (300,000 years ago) and came from a similar region (southwestern coastal Africa). Were these our first parents? It’s an interesting idea, though not definitive (these two might have only been the ancestors of the first man and woman to receive a transphysical soul). Linguistic studies suggest that language first appeared about 70,000 years ago without any obvious cause—this might have been the time that a transphysical soul was infused into our first parents.

The timing is still an open question for scientists to explore, but whenever they lived, we know that the original human couple was the first to receive a unique transphysical soul and were the first ancestors of the entire human race.

III.B Monogenism versus Polygenism

This brings us to our next issue: the question of whether the first generation of human beings was a single couple (“Monogenism”) or more than one couple, perhaps even thousands (“Polygenism”). The encyclical, *Humani Generis*, in which Pope Pius XII allowed Catholics to believe in evolution, implies that Monogenism is probably true, because of difficulties reconciling polygenism with original sin.

Since the encyclical’s phrasing says “it is in no way apparent how such an opinion [polygenism] can be reconciled with what ... the Church teaches about original sin,” it left the door open for a possible resolution of this conflict.

In any case, Monogenism does not present any significant conflict with the current science on evolution, since it merely stipulates that one couple was infused with a transphysical soul and went on to propagate the human race. This is hardly implausible, especially when the scientifically-traced lineage of the human race already passes through the singular paths of “Mitochondrial Eve” and “Y Chromosome Adam.” Furthermore, the contemporary evidence for a transphysical soul is substantial, probative, and mutually corroborative, making this view not only intellectually possible, but probable.

III.C Was there suffering and death before the fall?

The fossil record contains evidence of death throughout the history of life on earth (3.8 billion years)—bacterial death, plant death, and death of all animal species. It also contains evidence of vertebrates that had nervous systems capable of experiencing pain going back millions of years, long before the appearance of humanity. How are we to reconcile this evidence and the idea that death and suffering came into the world because of the sin of Adam? Consider what was said by Pope Pius XII in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* about the purpose of the Bible—to give sacred truths necessary for salvation, but *not* necessarily to give accurate scientific descriptions and explanations of our physical universe. One way we can understand this particular issue is that while physical death and pain existed in the natural life cycle before man, that man’s sin introduced death where it wasn’t present before – in the human species that God intended to make eternal through His creation of humanity’s transphysical soul.

Regarding death, recall from earlier in this chapter that the transphysical soul gave Adam and Eve exemption from bodily death. Human beings had no expectation of death when first created, but through sin, this exemption was lifted and death was introduced into humanity—something that God’s own intervention could relieve us from in the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Regarding suffering, we must distinguish between physical pain and reflective pain. Animals experience physical pain in nature and have the capacity for some emotional pain as well (think of the whimpering of a dog when left home alone). Humans, however, also have capacity for further “reflective” pain—self-consciousness gives us the power to reflect on our own pain while we are aware of it, intensifying the pain through depression and other reactions. Our self-consciousness also intensifies pain by our ability to use conceptual ideas to *anticipate* future pain, which can sometimes be a worse experience than the actual pain when it comes. And our greatest challenge is bearing the anticipation of death.

The potential for such reflective and conceptual suffering only exists due to our transphysical soul which gives us self-consciousness. In our original state, closely united to the goodness of God and free of anticipation of death, such suffering would not exist. It was only with Original Sin that the consequence of partial separation from God and the prospect of death made this potential source of intensified suffering a reality. A new kind of suffering came into the world with Original Sin.