

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

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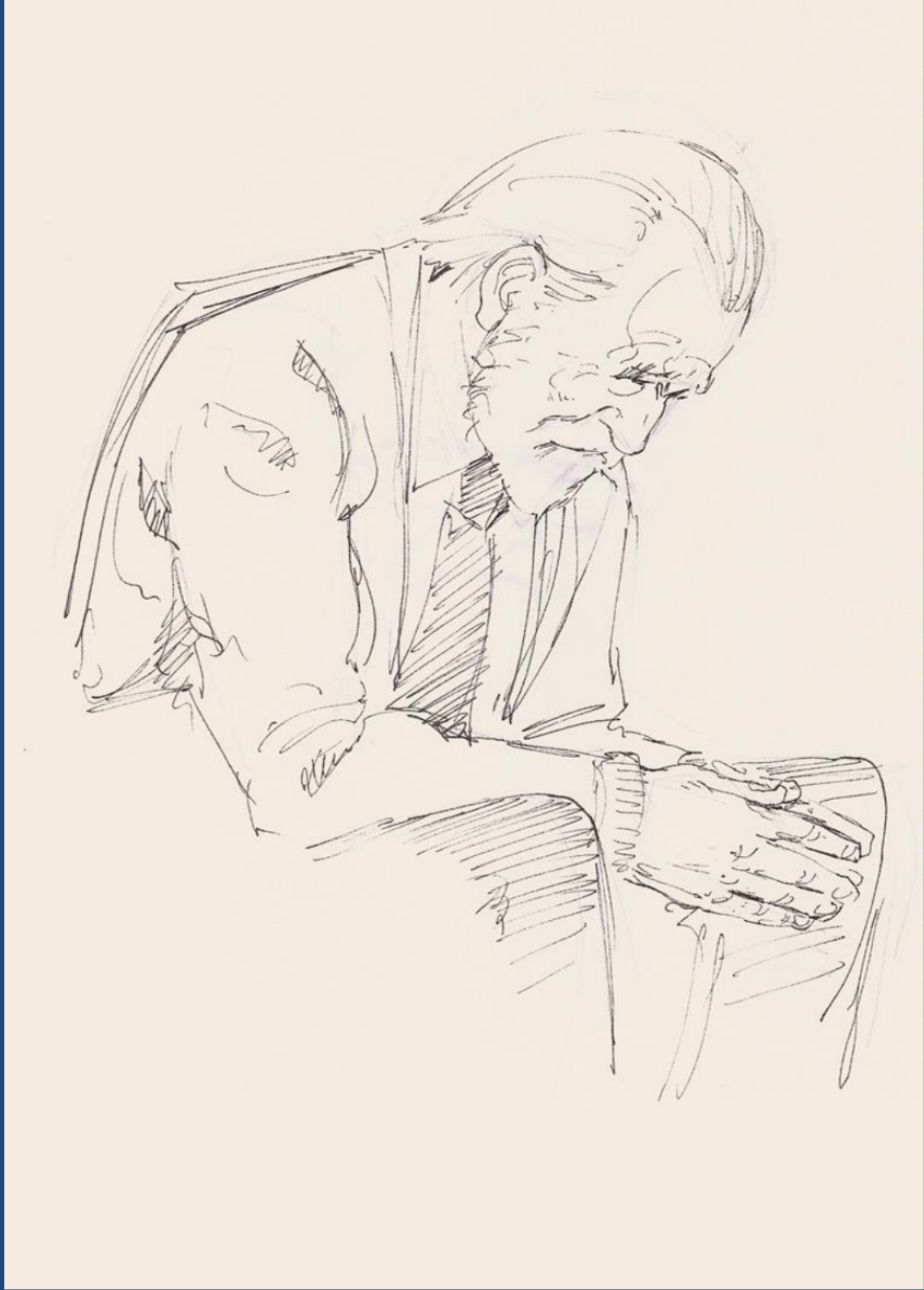
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DAVE VLIAGENTHART

FRANKLIN MERRELL-WOLFF

AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN AMERICA

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university of
 groningen

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

An Intellectual History of Contemporary Anti-Intellectualism in America

PhD Thesis

to obtain the degree of PhD at the
 University of Groningen
 on the authority of the
 Rector Magnificus Prof. E. Sterken
 and in accordance with
 the decision by the College of Deans.

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To my son, Alex

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

“Reason died sometime before 1865”

James Webb

Why have so many western esoteric intellectuals contributed to the anti-intellectual New Age discourse? The exact phrasing escapes me, but this was the gist of a question which historian of modern religion Jeffrey Kripal submitted to me and my fellow panel members, after we had just presented our early stage projects, at a conference on contemporary spirituality. In my reply, I mumbled something about “the subjective turn,” in the wake of Schleiermacher, in modern western religion. When I returned the question, he said, “No idea.” I remember thinking, *that* was the answer I should have given. To my embarrassment, I also shouted this out loud. The embarrassment quickly faded, but the query remained and would actually determine the direction of my dissertation.

For my own research, it hit the nail on the head. One of the things I found so fascinating about Franklin Merrell-Wolff, when I first read his book—after I had come across his name on an obscure website about modern western gurus, which must have been around 2003—was that its very typically eastern-inspired non-dualist message of “realizing a truth or reality beyond the subject-object categories of the mind through self-enquiry” was presented in what I thought was an untypically intellectual manner. Untypical for its genre, that is. Though, deciding what genre that actually is—religion or philosophy or psychology, eastern or western—would later prove a challenge in itself.

I read Merrell-Wolff in college. After studies in Business Communication and Philosophy, I was accepted for a traineeship at a bank and worked in management for a few years. I liked it a lot, but never loved it—not all of it. Four years into my budding business career, academia was beckoning again. I decided to leave and enroll in a full-time religious studies program specialized in alternative spirituality, which I learned to refer to as “western esotericism.” It was a return to university and to Merrell-Wolff.

Looking for an original term paper topic, one day, I scanned my book case and came across him again. I realized his strange work could be more than a guilty pleasure.

Armed with socio-historical concepts like the “religious experiences” or rather special “experiences deemed religious” of “charismatic leaders” and their “new religious movements,” within the “discourse” on “New Age” or “metaphysical” religion, I revisited his books. I say books, plural, because I now discovered that he had written a second one.

My paper turned into my thesis, which turned into my dissertation again. In my research for this dissertation, with the generous assistance of his family and friends, I uncovered more about the life and teaching of Merrell-Wolff than I ever (could have) expected before. For example, that he had participated in a range of religious groups, that he even co-founded such a group of his own and that this group still exists today, albeit with a slightly scattered and altered identity. More than that, I learned that his group and its beliefs have historical and ideological roots that are very important for, but never mentioned in, his two books. And it turned out, those books are only a small part of his entire oeuvre; he prepared dozens of “informal” published and unpublished pamphlets as well as hundreds of public and private talks, before, during and after he penned these two “formal” texts, which, together, give a whole new insight into them.

I noticed his life and teaching were becoming increasingly interesting for others, academically speaking, once I felt confidently informed enough to situate them against the broader socio-historical background of “anti-intellectualism” in American culture. Having read a number of classic studies by celebrated historians such as Richard Hofstadter, James Webb and Susan Jacoby, I knew that there was and still is a commonly perceived anti-intellectual “flight from reason,” in American society, which has often (partly) been ascribed to the evangelical First and Second Great Awakening of the mid-late eighteenth and early-nineteenth century and is said to have reemerged in what can be called the Third Great Awakening of the late-twentieth century New Age movement.

But I had also read enough popular classics by celebrities like Alan Watts, Aldous Huxley, Joseph Campbell and Ken Wilber, not to mention the guru-material of more controversial individuals such as Richard “Ram Dass” Alpert, Franklin “Adi Da” Jones and “Osho” Rajneesh, to know that many “New Age” texts and talks often *do* have an intellectual character, despite the fact that their claims are indeed anti-intellectual.

As we shall see, like Hofstadter, I define intellectualism as a near religious commitment to the life of the mind, while anti-intellectualism constitutes a suspicion and resentment of the life of the mind and those who represent it. In this study, I will use variations of “intellectual(ism)” and “rational(ism)” interchangeably, since they are also used as such in my primary sources, knowing full well they are not precisely the same.

I see the former as an (epistemological) method, the latter as an (ontological) theory or ideology. One can be in favor of (intellectual) or against (anti-intellectual) the need for informed sophistication in claiming whether reality can (rationalism) or cannot (anti-rationalism) be completely explained by or even reduced to reason. But, again, these differences usually tend to blur or fade in the discourses that we are going to focus on.

Regardless of our definitions, the tension remains. Looking at modern western culture in general, contemporary North American culture in particular, the question is why popular anti-intellectual idea(l)s have often been spread through—increasingly—intellectual texts and talks, by and for the intellectual elite and educated middle-class?

My answer to this question could be read as a biography, yet it shirks closer to a micro-history, in which “auto/biography” itself recurs. But that, too, still does not cover it. This study is not *only* about the “normal exception” or “exceptional normal” case of the life and teaching of modern western guru Franklin Merrell-Wolff, but *also* about understanding, nuancing, perhaps even correcting, their larger context of the ongoing grand narrative of “anti-intellectualism” in American culture. It is more than a micro-history of an unfamiliar American intellectual at the social fringe, then; it is a revised intellectual macro-history of a familiar American phenomenon at the cultural center.

I began this **introduction** on an autobiographical note, only to thematize auto/biography itself. Simply put, I first discussed a topic, then topicalized or problematized that discussion itself. The reader will find that I have tried to do this, throughout my narrative, shifting back and forth between “emic” and “etic” contributions to the same discourses, whereby obviously not mine, but the life and teaching of Merrell-Wolff will function as our guideline. Though I have had to take the occasional liberty, for the sake of clarity and readability, his life provides us with a chronology for the four chapters, while his teaching does so for the topics of the three recurrent sections about religion, philosophy and psychology. Given my back-and-forth approach, I request the reader’s patience towards my use of terms and introduction of topics—for instance, regarding “cults,” “eastern” versus “western” traditions, “perennial” philosophy and psychology, but also “esotericism” and “New Age,” not to forget “anti-intellectualism”—which may seem annoyingly superficial and uninformed, at first, but are critically revisited, later, sometimes much later. Generally, related terms and topics will recur under the same heading. This should allow the reader either to focus on a certain historical period by picking one specific chapter or to trace the recent history of a certain topic by jumping to the same section in each chapter, ignoring the overarching story about Merrell-Wolff.

Chapter 1 (1887-1914) dives in the environmental and educational **origination** of the life and teaching of Merrell-Wolff, during his first thirty years, in the wake of larger socio-historical developments throughout the preceding century. This will take us into the emergence of evangelicalism and its impact on his Methodist upbringing, his first encounters with American Transcendentalism and Theosophy and the similar oriental(ist) idealism of modern “Hinduism” and “Buddhism” as well as with (Social) Darwinism, Pragmatism and the closely related introspective turns of New Thought and the New Psychology, at the time of an “academic boom,” during his college years.

Chapter 2 (1914-1936) opens with his break from academia and his subsequent **investigation** of alternative forms of knowledge in post-Theosophical and modern Sufi and Hindu groups. It then turns to his own group and his early worldview, which he developed with his first wife, against the background of the Spinozist and Schleiermacherian colored “cosmic religion” of Einstein and the similarly essentialist eastern-inspired and psychologized “perennial philosophy” of intellectual communities like the Darmstadt School of Wisdom and the Eranos Circle, in the post-WWI “First New Age.”

Chapter 3 (1936-1978) revolves around the turning point in his life of an alleged mystical **realization**. It first offers a detailed description of this “consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject” or “introception,” as he called it. It then goes on to compare the system of introceptive idealism or “Introceptualism,” which he would construct around it, to Indian and German idealism, in congruence with the increasing democratization of spirituality at intellectual communities like the Esalen institute, in the context of the self-conscious “cultic milieu” of the post-WWII “Second New Age.”

Chapter 4 (1978-today) recounts the **routinization** of the material and ideological legacy of his secularized spirituality, in the years before and after his death, at the time of the popular “cult wars” and scholarly “perennialism versus constructivism” debate. It extends his eastern-inspired western esotericism to the “advaitized” New Age “immediatism” of the modern western gurus of the “satsang network,” whose neo-confessional texts and talks appear to have given rise to an “autobiographical” spirituality.

In the **conclusion**, I will do three things. First, I will comment on recent events surrounding the organizations that try to preserve the legacy of Merrell-Wolff and his group. Second, I will summarize the life and teaching of Franklin Merrell-Wolff and his group against their socio-historical background, in simplified terms, much like in this introduction. Third, I will answer the central question about why anti-intellectual “New Age” idea(l)s have been increasingly spread through intellectual texts and talks.

My answer comes down to this: typically, after the crisis of a war, reciprocally reinforcing developments within American society surrounding a search for meaning stimulated a rise (in awareness) of similar spiritual teachers with similar groups based on similar ideologies, which forced the founders and followers of these movements to intellectually rationalize their anti-intellectual idea(l)s, to create and sustain what they deemed their own unique identity. Following Weber, these intellectual rationalizations of religious beliefs could be seen as a form of theology. I conclude that the “anti-intellectual” New Age discourse is not so much about anti-intellectualism, as it is about the changing-yet-continuing relevance of religion and theological reflection, in America.

Finally, a few practical remarks. Though some may feel it alters their (symbolic) meaning, I have left uncapitalized words such as “the self,” “realization” and “wisdom religion,” except when citing sources. Many of the sources by or about Merrell-Wolff were not yet freely accessible at the time of this writing, but most of them are now or will soon be digitally available on the website of the Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, which the reader can retrieve online at www.merrell-wolff.org under “Wolff Archive” and check themselves. An inventory of the books found in the library of his Lone Pine residence is expected to become available on this website as well, but can otherwise be supplied by the author. For biographical facts, I have mainly relied on Merrell-Wolff’s own anecdotes, but also occasionally consulted *Franklin Merrell-Wolff: An American Philosopher and Mystic*, a memoir written by his step-granddaughter Doroethy Leonard—whom I shall refer to by her maiden name, Briggs, to avoid any confusion with her husband, Ron Leonard. Her personal memoir is about to be published by Xlibris.

Before we turn the page and dive into our story, I would like to thank Professor Kocku von Stuckrad, who encouraged me to find and formulate my own methods and theories, without imposing his. After every one of our discussions about one text I had written I always went away confident and motivated to start on the next. As a result, I have thoroughly enjoyed my doctoral project from start to finish. Professor Ann Taves and her Religion, Experience and Mind lab group made me feel welcome during a research visit at the University of California in Santa Barbara (2015). Her comments on an early draft of my first chapter provided valuable pointers for the other chapters as well. The feedback of both of my advisors on the first draft of my entire dissertation has greatly improved the end result. The same goes for the kind words and thoughtful suggestions coming from the members of my Assessment Committee, Professors Courtney Bender, Christoph Jedan and Almut-Barbara Renger. Needless to say, of course,

any errors and omissions are my own. My gratitude, furthermore, extends to the staff and students of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Groningen (2012-2016), who have given me great memories of my time as a doctoral student. I also thank the Religious Studies staff at the University of Amsterdam (2010-2012), whose commitment to their research master students is truly extraordinary.

I want to thank Doroethy Briggs and Ron Leonard of the Great Space Center at Lone Pine, California, for their trust in me and support of my research on Franklin Merrell-Wolff, since its earliest stages in 2011, despite reservations about some of my interpretations of their teacher. I also want to thank them and the other participants of the 2015 FMW Conference for letting me partake in their annual meeting. Similarly, I want to thank the Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship—particularly Robert Holland and Charles Post—for providing me with digital copies of the complete FMW archive, long before it was made available on their website, despite reservations about some of my interpretations of this unpublished source material. I also want to thank the entire FMWF Board and Dorene White in particular for allowing me to attend and discuss my work during one of their quarterly meetings. I greatly appreciate the feedback that I have received on the first draft of my dissertation from Briggs, Leonard and Holland.

Finally, on a more personal note, I want to thank my son Alexandros for being the lovely little rascal he is and the wonderful person he is becoming, and for teaching me how to be a more patient and gentle individual. I want to thank Athena Demertzi for making it possible for me to change careers and to pursue my professional passion, in spite of the personal hardships and sacrifices that came with it. I thank my former manager and colleagues at Rabobank Nederland in Eindhoven for their encouraging support of my career change. I also want to thank those friends that have stuck around over the years, particularly Geoffrey Verheul. I want to thank my father Hennie Vliegthart and my mother Ria Vooijs as well as my younger sister Barbara Vliegthart for being present and absent at the right times. And last but not least, I thank Helene Peereboom for all the love and joy and balance she has brought to my life over the last few years and will hopefully bring me for many more years to come. Her presence has made the long road to a doctorate often feel a lot less strenuous. I also want to thank the rest of the Peereboom family for opening their homes and hearts to me and my son.

Dave Vliegthart

28 December 2016

Maastricht, the Netherlands

CHAPTER 1
ORIGINATION
(1887-1914)

CHAPTER 1

ORIGINATION

It was dark, very dark. He could barely see. But as his eyes adapted to the darkness, he found himself in a theater, dimly lit, with just enough light to make out the grand stage, raised above the orchestra pit, and the rows of empty seats, flanked by aisles running from the front all the way to the back, behind the absent audience and then finding its way to the stage again. Though he could hardly make out their silhouettes, there were others present. A bearded spectator was sitting solemnly in the balcony above, whose composed demeanor struck him as that of a wise master or sage. He oddly identified with this mysterious figure, as if there was some hidden bond between them. Next to the sage sat someone else, man or woman, hard to see, for they never left the shadow.

The scene started. He noticed the bed on the stage with a female lying in it, verging on exhaustion. Enter Mephisto. His masculine presence filled the stage, as he commenced a dance of heroic proportion and inhuman precision, darting around the bed, faster and faster, frantically, but with an eerie sense of control. As if by some magnetic force, the young lady was lifted from her bed. Mesmerized, powerless to resist, she lost herself in the moves, as they made their way down the aisle, across the room, under the balcony and back onto the stage. It was obvious, she was about to be absorbed by him.

At that point, the sage decided to intervene. He broke the spell, saving the lady from Mephisto's clutches. Enraged, the dancer shot anger shaped bullets from his eyes, but his adversary caught them effortlessly in his mouth and spewed them back at him, with an alternating force of love and hate. *And then I awoke with a sense of victory ...*¹

¹ "This may be the most important meeting we have ever had in the history of the Assembly. I'm giving this morning a tape which I designated as not to be released so long as this body was alive, but in a certain sense, I have been passing through a kind of dying without dying, and there are certain things that I feel you should know in connection with what is now transpiring," Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Report of Major Dreams," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 1. More about the Assembly of Man and the dramatic events underlying his "dying without dying," in Chapter 2 and 3, respectively.

Franklin Merrell-Wolff (1887-1985) had had this dream around 1930, but he would not openly share it with others, until much later in life. It was actually the second of two “major dreams,” as he later referred to them, for it had been preceded by another one, in 1927, which had also featured Mephisto. In that first major dream, he had found himself alone in his car, on a collision course with a magnificently powerful vehicle that was racing towards him—Mephisto grinning behind the wheel, in perfect control.²

He could never shake the feeling that these dreams—especially the second one, in the theater—had some hidden symbolic meaning. He even went so far as to speculate that if victory had gone to Mephisto in his dreams, the seminal events of 1936 would not have come to pass in his life.³ Two Jungian therapist friends would later support this idea. Looking back, they agreed the dream characters must have been archetypes. Mephisto symbolized masculine intellection, the woman feminine intuition and the sage pure wisdom or the transcendental component. Simply put, his intellect had become so dominant, they said, that, by middle age, it had all but drained him of intuition.

Regardless if such dream readings hold true, there is no denying the intellectual flavor of Merrell-Wolff’s life and teaching. And Mephisto started dancing, at an early age. Already in his teens, did Franklin start to fit the description of an intellectual, as someone who “lives for ideas ... [who] has a sense of dedication to the life of the mind, which is very much like a religious commitment,” as Richard Hofstadter once defined it.⁴ To an outsider, however, it does seem, at times, as if his “playfulness” struggled to keep up with his “piety,” two characteristics which Hofstadter said should be balanced in order to prevent a dedicated intellectual from becoming an obsessed zealot.⁵ I will return to twice Pulitzer Prize winning historian Hofstadter and his famous reflections on anti-intellectualism in American society. Let me point out from the outset, though, that Franklin was definitely an intellectual, but never turned into a zealot, despite the fact that, in his early days, he would already regularly wander the streets at night, for hours on end, obsessively “thinking, thinking and thinking, most of all upon theological questions.”⁶ The fact that he started contemplating religious matters so early on in life, might not be that surprising, after all, given the environment in which he was raised.

² He regularly referred to them, but for his most detailed description of the dreams, see *ibid.*, 1-3 & 3-5.

³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Jungian Psychology and Personal Correlations (7 of 7),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1977), 6. I return extensively to these seminal events in Chapter 3.

⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963). 27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 28-30.

⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Jungian Psychology and Personal Correlations (4 of 7),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1977), 2.

RELIGION

Childhood: Evangelical Religion

In 1887, Benjamin Franklin Wolff and Grace Boole moved to Pasadena, California. As a Methodist minister, “Brother Wolff” was regularly appointed to different parts of the regional circuit. Together with his pregnant wife, he was following the growing number of families that had been travelling towards the West of the nation, pushing its frontier in their pursuit of happiness.⁷ There, he would attend to different assemblies spread across California.⁸ Not long after they had finally settled, Franklin arrived—the first of three children, for two years later, his sister Carrie was born and five years after that, his brother Kenneth. By then, the family had relocated to San Fernando—the first city in the San Fernando Valley, established just ten years before—where Benjamin taught Greek and Hebrew at Maclay College of Theology, a Methodist seminary named after the town’s founder, missionary, farmer, manufacturer and politician Charles Maclay.⁹

Franklin Fowler Wolff was raised the son of a Methodist minister. “I was a child of my father and I was no critic of what [he] believed. There was no basis for being a critic. I did not choose to go to the Methodist Church. I was born in it.”¹⁰ It would not be until his teens that he began to think for himself. “Being brought up by a clergyman, naturally, the problems that hit me first were theological.”¹¹ He will later recall how the preacher at his local Methodist church insisted on the *literal* physical resurrection of Christ. This did not sit particularly well with him. “I got to thinking,” he reminisces,

... I knew this: that physical bodies disintegrate in the earth; that the matter of which they are composed can be taken up by vegetable organisms, so that you would have molecules, atoms rather, that belonged to that body that would be in plants; that these plants might be eaten by animals and some of these atoms would be in the body of the animal; and that the animal might be eaten by a future man, so that some of those atoms would be in the future man’s body at

⁷ “On American soil ... itinerancy was a strategic asset that made the Methodists particularly adept at winning the mobile American population back to Christianity,” Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*: 96. An important part of this successful strategy was that they “generally followed, sometimes anticipated, population migrations, constantly aware that the religious spoils went to those who were in first,” see e.g. David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). 153.

⁸ Doroethy Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff: An American Philosopher and Mystic,” (Phoenix: unpublished, 2012), 1.1.

⁹ Hugh T. Hodges, “Charles Maclay: California Missionary, San Fernando Valley Pioneer (1 of 3),” *Southern California Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (1986).

¹⁰ Merrell-Wolff in Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” 2.1.

¹¹ Merrell-Wolff in *ibid.*

the time when he dies. So, we would have two men that were claiming the same atoms. I took it to my clergyman and said, "To which entity do these atoms belong at the day of the resurrection?" And the clergyman, with a suppressed grin, said, "Leave it to the Lord, my son." Well, the Christian church lost me then.¹²

Entering his teens around the turn to the twentieth century, at the peak of what is known as the Gilded Age and beginning of the so-called Progressive Era, Franklin would have consciously witnessed the succession of technological developments that rapidly carried American society from Victorian into modern times. Although he was somewhat shielded from it within the safe confines of his home, where he worked with his father in the orchard and was home-schooled by his mother, until the age of nine.¹³

In the wake of the First Industrial Revolution in Europe that had been driven by iron production, steam technology and textile fabrication, a Second Industrial or Technical Revolution was taking place in "the New World" that revolved around steel production, electricity and investments in railroads.¹⁴ As the telegraph and telephone together with the rise in railroad mileage were tying the nation together, people began to lose their sense of distance, shifting their cultural identity from regional to national.¹⁵

This national culture consisted of a can-do spirit, created by hard-working men and women who required practicality more than mentality to cope with the harsh reality at the frontier. Inspired by "self-made men" like Carnegie, Vanderbilt and Ford, at the end of the nineteenth-century, the average American was dreaming of a life from rags-to-riches or at least from rags-to-respectability. Their American dream relied on hard earned qualities rather than hereditary ones, with a clear preference for puritan "character" over natural "talent" and practical "intelligence" over abstract "intellect."¹⁶

Ironically, even though the nation was founded by intellectuals, intellectualism has been frowned upon by the American public ever since—always perceived with some measure of suspicion. This could be ascribed to two reciprocal developments. On the one hand, the intellect has typically been resented as an arrogant badge of distinction

¹² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Pseudopodal Theory of Reincarnation," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 5-6.

¹³ Briggs, "Franklin Merrell-Wolff," 2.1.

¹⁴ Theodore W. Eversole, "Introduction," in *The Gilded Age, 1870 to 1900*, ed. Rodney Carlisle (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 5-6.

¹⁵ Bill Kte'pi, "Chapter 1: Introduction," in *The Roaring Twenties, 1920 to 1929*, ed. Rodney Carlisle, *Handbook to Life in America* (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 1-2.

¹⁶ Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*: 255 & 24-25. Others have similarly traced one of the roots of anti-intellectualism in the West back to this "frontier mentality," e.g. Walter E. Houghton, "Victorian Anti-Intellectualism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13, no. 3 (1952): 291-292; John Wellens, "The Anti-Intellectual Tradition in the West," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 8, no. 1 (1959): 22-23 & 25.

that is taken as a tacit challenge to egalitarianism. On the other hand, there has been a recurrent ratification and exaltation of the quotidian, “a celebration of the mean.”¹⁷

In discussing the (spiritual) progression of humanity, Merrell-Wolff will, later, counter such an “enthronement of *consensus gentium*.”¹⁸ Especially when it comes to religion and science the general public is in no position to judge, he will say. The genius often stands alone, before their experiences are shared by society at large.¹⁹ For that reason, reality should not be determined by a majority vote, because that would “drag culture down to the dead level of mediocrity, since the valuation of the majority tends to be that of the medial intelligence, character and taste.”²⁰ Such out-of-context claims come across less nuanced than they really are, though there is no denying the intellectualism in Merrell-Wolff’s life and teaching, with a leaning towards the very kind of ivory tower elitism that has been frowned upon in American society as well as towards individual experience, which has been widely accepted again in American society. The origins of anti-intellectualism and individualism or subjectivism in America, both, can be partly traced to its religious roots—to the influence of evangelicalism, in particular.

Evangelicalism emerged during two religious revivals in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, also called the First and Second Great Awakening. These revivals are best known for the religious experiences of their camp meetings,²¹ whose autobiographical testimonies show that “Grace came in many forms for American evangelicals”—physically, affectively, intellectually—as a surge of divine energy which sharpens the senses, overflows the emotional reservoirs with joy or quickens the cognitive functions, related in terms of a real or allegorical encounter with God or the devil.²² As such, they have often been reduced to a sentimentality that favors heart over head, that is, to an irrational “enthusiasm.” According to this view, unlike the Puritans or even highbrow enthusiasts like the Unitarians and Transcendentalists, on the East Coast, the gospel of

¹⁷ Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*: 255, 24-25, 51; Hans Rosenhaupt, “The Arrogant Intellectual,” *The Journal of General Education* 15, no. 4 (1964): 294-296; Susan Jacoby, *The Age of American Unreason* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008). 5.

¹⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” in *Transformations in Consciousness: The Metaphysics and Epistemology*, ed. Ron Leonard (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975/1995), 78.

¹⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “On the Limits of Psychology,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1951), 5.

²⁰ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 78. This idea would grow widespread among post-WWII thinkers, who were convinced that the egalitarian drive to practicality and to conformity may lower or hold back cultural development, e.g. Ernest Sabler, “The Intellectual and America Today,” *AAUP Bulletin* 43, no. 2 (1957): 330-331; Wellens, “The Anti-Intellectual Tradition in the West,” 26; John Wilson, “De-Intellectualisation and Authority in Education,” *Oxford Review of Education* 15, no. 2 (1989): 112-116.

²¹ Robert H. Krapohl, Charles H. Lippy, *The Evangelicals: A Historical, Thematic and Biographical Guide* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999). 18.

²² Susan Juster, “Forum: Religion and American Autobiographical Writing,” *Religion and American Culture* 9, no. 1 (1999): 2-3.

the dominant evangelical denominations of Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians, on the West Coast, was stripped bare of all intellectual content.²³ This paints a one-sided picture, though. It opposes regular people who claimed to experience religion against the educated elite who claimed to explain (away) these religious experiences, whereas both would find themselves at either side of a much more complex discourse.²⁴ Nevertheless, the perceived anti-intellectualism of dogmatic believers like his local priest is what Franklin disliked about evangelicalism and about organized religion in general.

As the population was outrunning the institutions of settled society in its relentless push westward, the revivalists provided something of “meaning and direction to people suffering in various degrees from the social strains of a nation on the move into new political, economic and geographical areas,”²⁵ particularly after the Revolution. At the turn of the century, the Methodists, by far, experienced the most explosive growth.

“After the War, Methodism boomed.”²⁶ In the early stages, their popular success did come at the price of intellectual atrophy, as they were, initially, “more anxious to preserve a *living* rather than a *learned* ministry.”²⁷ It let their intellect wither away,²⁸ to the point that their clergy, apparently, even discouraged others to indulge in critical independent reflection, like they had done with Franklin. But his local priest seems to have been a remnant of a bygone era, because this anti-intellectual attitude had largely abated, by the time he came of age. As Hofstadter explains, “The passion of some of the leading ministers for a more educated clergy and the growing need to defend their theological position from increasingly subtle critics finally broke through the Methodist suspicion of a learned ministry.”²⁹ Even if it did remain instrumental to their mission, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Methodists of Merrell-Wolff’s generation had established hundreds of schools and seminaries—including his father’s Maclay College. But Franklin would later divulge that “I was [already] lost to the church at that point.”³⁰

²³ Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*: Chapter 3, e.g. 56-57.

²⁴ Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). 4.

²⁵ Donald G. Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis," *American Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (1969): 27.

²⁶ Jon Butler, "Religion in Colonial America," in *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, ed. Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 144.

²⁷ Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*: 97; cf. Krapohl, Lippy, *The Evangelicals: A Historical, Thematic and Biographical Guide*: Chapter 15.

²⁸ Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening," 36.

²⁹ Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*: 100-101.

³⁰ Merrell-Wolff in Briggs, "Franklin Merrell-Wolff," 2.1.

Adolescence: Metaphysical Religion

As I look back at the thinking of the days before adolescence, that thought was not my own, but reflected the influence about me. But when I became a teenager and adolescence broke out, which was the year of 1900, I began to think for myself ... on ecclesiastical questions, for, in as much as my father was a clergyman and I had always automatically attended church and Sunday school, these questions were the ones that most readily arose in my mind. I began to find contradictions, to see there were problems and things that needed to be cleared up.³¹

Merrell-Wolff recalls how his fondness for girls and sports arose together with a fascination for reflection. The power of the intellect mesmerized him. "I reached the point where I regarded no problem as lying beyond the potential of thought research," including those that others deemed beyond the grasp of cognition.³² As time went on, thinking demanded increasing attention and would dominate his life (almost) until the end. So, while the American dream had been draining its culture of intellect, Merrell-Wolff's dream revealed that his intellect had been draining him of intuition. After the turn of the century, his external and internal world moved closer, though, as American society seemed to grow increasingly tolerant of reason and he became more enamored with unreasonable experiences. The two met within the realm of metaphysical religion.

If we take evangelical religion as an anti-intellectual flight from reason, metaphysical religion would be an intellectual *reasoned* flight from reason. It is less about the "heart" than about the "mind"—albeit a mind that embraces both intuition and intellect.³³ According to Catherine Albanese, "metaphysical religion" is not so much a religious movement as a religious vocabulary, discursively correlated with "esotericism," "occultism" and "gnosticism," although she prefers not to use these interchangeably.³⁴

³¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: A Recollection of my Early Life and Influences," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 3-4; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: The Feminine Side of my Experience (1 of 2)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1982), 1.

³² Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Life," 3.

³³ Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). 6.

³⁴ "In our time, metaphysics more easily and clearly signals what its etymology suggests—those preoccupied in some sense with what lies beyond the physical plane. Meanwhile, esotericism, occultism and gnosticism ... bring connotations that are narrower or more negative or both. Even as esotericism is linked to elite speculation, most frequently with European credentials and heavily symbolist, occultism hints of ritual practice connected with negative witchcraft practice and gnosticism offends an Anglo-Protestant theology that privileges the public order and suspects too deep an inward turning," see *ibid.*, 12-13.

It is a vernacular religion, she reckons, shared by people who “speak” more or less the same language³⁵—one that can be recognized by four recurrent themes: first, by its emphasis on the mind, in an absolute sense, as the pure spirit or consciousness from which all is derived and to which all shall return; second, by its embrace of a theory of correspondences between macrocosm and microcosm—“as above, so below”; third, by its notion of a movement or energy between the world within and the world without, which are believed to be of the same fundamental substance; fourth, by its inclination towards a felt and physical salvation, on an individual as well as a collective level.³⁶

Many of these themes were carried over—literally—from continental discourses on Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism and Christian Theosophy,³⁷ all of which also found their way to Merrell-Wolff’s library.³⁸ Though it would be misleading to assign a single source to American metaphysical religion, it is fair to say the influence of scientist and visionary Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was especially strong. In fact, his vitalist interpretations of the correspondences between spirit and matter influenced Emerson and Blavatsky, whose Transcendentalism and Theosophy respectively are (among) *the* most important movements of nineteenth century metaphysical religion in America.³⁹

Transcendentalism

While awakeners were converting hearts in the West, liberals continued to cultivate minds in the East. In a typical post-Enlightenment vein, most of the latter New England elite shunned the emotionalism of their evangelical contemporaries in favor of an

³⁵ Ibid., 9.

³⁶ Ibid., 13-15.

³⁷ Ibid., Chapter 1.

³⁸ e.g. Antoine-Joseph Pernety, *Treatise on the Great Art: A System of Physics according to Hermetic Philosophy and Theory and Practice of the Magisterum* (Boston: Occult Publishing Company, 1898); Ernest Rhys, ed. *The Signature of All Things, with Other Writings by Jacob Boehme* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1912); Franz Hartmann, *An Adventure among the Rosicrucians by a Student of Occultism* (Boston: Occult Publishing Company, 1887); Franz Hartmann, *The Life of Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus and the Substance of his Teachings concerning Cosmology, Anthropology, Pneumatology, Magic and Sorcery, Medicine, Alchemy and Astrology, Philosophy and Theosophy, extracted and translated from his Rare and Extensive Works and some Unpublished Manuscripts*, trans. unknown (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896); George Nicholson, Charles Bolles, eds., *A Dictionary of Correspondences, Representatives and Significatives derived from the Word of the Lord, extracted from the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg* (Boston: New Church Union, 1910); Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, *Man: His True Nature and Ministry*, trans. Edward Burton Penny, 1802 original French ed. (London: Allen, 1864); Arthur Edward Waite, *The Real History of the Rosicrucians: Founded on their own Manifestoes and on Facts and Documents collected from the Writings of Initiated Brethren* (London: George Redway, 1887). This is merely a small selection of relevant sources from his Lone Pine library.

³⁹ But what about Spiritualism or New Thought? Despite its criticism, I consider Theosophy to include Spiritualism in a wider occult paradigm, cf. Mark Bevir, “The West turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 3 (1994): 751. Due to its strong psychological focus, I have reserved New Thought for section three.

educational process focused on the conduct of life.⁴⁰ Their religious “self-cultivation”⁴¹ was much more a matter of the head than of the heart.⁴² Enter the Transcendentalists.

The cultural aristocrats of the Transcendental “Hedge” Club⁴³ explored a middle ground between intuition and intellect. On the one hand, they longed for an immediate experience of the transcendent.⁴⁴ On the other hand, they would express this (longing for) transcendental experience through the rites of reading, writing and conversing.⁴⁵

Though they should still be counted among the early nineteenth century “Boston Brahmins,”⁴⁶ the Transcendentalists were an elite that mediated both high and low culture.⁴⁷ As such, “public scholars” best describes them. This label certainly fits their most famous representative, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), who, according to Lawrence Buell, is remembered as “the first modern American public intellectual.”⁴⁸

For Emerson, the title of “scholar” was not necessarily reserved for academics, but could be applied to independent thinkers in general, that is to say, anyone inclined to critical reflection.⁴⁹ The scholar embodies the “delegated intellect” of humanity. “In the right state, he is *Man Thinking*.”⁵⁰ And though the scholar is regularly ridiculed by so-called practical people, for whom reflection seems to amount to nothing, thinkers are still needed by these doers as well to help them discern facts from appearances.⁵¹

The scholar is necessarily a thinker, but is a thinker necessarily a “philosopher”? Buell observes that “Emerson has had to be rescued several times from the clutches of religion.”⁵² In the last decades, he adds, relatively greater emphasis has been placed on Emerson’s (social) philosophy, but his insistence on intuition trumping formal reason

⁴⁰ Andrea Greenwood, Mark W. Harris, *An Introduction to the Unitarian and Universalist Traditions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). 54.

⁴¹ As a precursor of what is now known as the “self-help” genre, nineteenth-century New England “self-culture” carried a belief in the limitless ability for self-improvement, which, for some, meant humans could turn themselves into embodied Gods, *ibid.*, 59; Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*: 161-162.

⁴² Krapohl, Lippy, *The Evangelicals: A Historical, Thematic and Biographical Guide*: 21.

⁴³ The Transcendental Club would commonly convene when Frederic Henry Hedge (1805-1890) came to visit Boston and was therefore informally referred to by its participants as “Hedge’s Club.” For more details about the “fenced” relationship between Emerson and Hedge, see Matthew Fisher, “Emerson Remembered: Nine Letters by Frederic Henry Hedge,” *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1989).

⁴⁴ Greenwood, Harris, *An Introduction to the Unitarian and Universalist Traditions*: 72.

⁴⁵ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*: 164.

⁴⁶ Greenwood, Harris, *An Introduction to the Unitarian and Universalist Traditions*: 60.

⁴⁷ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*: 176.

⁴⁸ Lawrence Buell, *Emerson* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003). 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1837/1983), 54.

⁵¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature; Addresses, and Lectures,” in *Emerson. Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1849/1983), 63.

⁵² Buell, *Emerson*: 158.

has “caused no end of embarrassment for his [philosophical] advocates.”⁵³ It is safe to say Emersonianism walks a fine line between philosophy and religion, drawing readily from a range of different traditions, but German and Indian metaphysics in particular.

The “epistemological turn” that started with Descartes resounded throughout nineteenth-century American culture.⁵⁴ For Emerson, it was the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), as perceived through the Romantic eyes of British philosopher-poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), that influenced him most. In “The Transcendentalist,” Emerson claims that the new views of New England are really not that new, but “the very oldest of thoughts cast into the mould of these new times.”⁵⁵ He goes on to argue that Transcendentalism is idealism in a modern guise, which has acquired its contemporary name from Immanuel Kant. However, he does not seem to have recognized that American idealism was not very Kantian at all. Buell explains that Emerson seized on the theory of “reason” as immediate knowledge of reality through the faculty of the mind and “understanding” as mediate knowledge of reality through the senses of the body—intuition versus intellect—but says this was a wishful reading of Coleridge’s wishful reading of German post-Kantian wishful readings of Kant.⁵⁶ In fact, for Kant, direct contact with reality was merely a *hypothetical* possibility. “That Kant denies Reason can know the thing-in-itself, whereas Emerson granted Reason that knowledge invoking Kantian authority, is one of the ironies of intellectual history.”⁵⁷ In other words, Emerson unwittingly resorted to Kant to warrant an un-Kantian metaphysics. And much the same could be said about his take on Indian metaphysics.

The Transcendentalists were among the first in America to take eastern philosophy seriously.⁵⁸ Building on a prior study by Arthur Christy,⁵⁹ Arthur Versluis agrees that they were pioneers in the West in their attempts to assimilate teachings from the East.⁶⁰ Of course, these religious reformers did commit a kind of “intellectual colonialism,” he says, since they were rummaging through the sacred scriptures of the world religions to find those few hidden gems that would fit their own metaphysical agenda.

⁵³ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁴ Evan Carton, “American Scholars: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Joseph Smith, John Brown, and the Springs of Intellectual Schism,” *The New England Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2012): 9.

⁵⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Transcendentalist,” in *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Random House, 1837/1940), 87.

⁵⁶ Buell, *Emerson*: 61.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 172.

⁵⁹ Arthur Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism: A Study of Emerson, Thoreau and Alcott* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

⁶⁰ Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). 318.

This agenda revolved around a perennial religion. Following Buell, Versluis describes it as “a belief that Truth can be intuitively perceived by higher Reason, that this intuition precedes and invigorates all religious awareness and that it can penetrate the various forms of world religions, extracting from them their essence.”⁶¹ As we will see, this perennialism recurs throughout modern metaphysical religion. Another recurrent feature is that the Transcendentalists firmly believed they were standing on the brink of a spiritual revolution, which would lead to a unification of traditions. Emerson not merely anticipated this unification, but actually wanted to lay the groundwork for it in America. His “literary religion” weaves eastern and western texts into a single strand.⁶²

That single strand is significantly tied to “Hinduism”—more accurately, “Neo-Hinduism,” which I will come back to below—its Advaita “non-dual” Vedānta variant in particular. Indeed, “Besides being highly receptive to [this] Vedānta view of deity,” Dale Riepe elaborates, “Emerson was greatly influenced by the notions of *māyā* and *karma*, although transmigration seems to have left him a trifle chilled.”⁶³ These influences come across clearly in telling titles such as “the Over-Soul,”⁶⁴ “Illusions”⁶⁵ and “Compensation.”⁶⁶ Relying primarily on “History,”⁶⁷ John Corrigan has suggested that Emerson *did* also take transmigration or metempsychosis—reincarnation—seriously, albeit from what appears a Hegelian perspective, in which (collective) history becomes aware of itself in (individual) consciousness.⁶⁸ Suffice it to say, Emerson saw key ideas of his modern American metaphysics reflected in the sacred texts of ancient India.⁶⁹

“It was from a western Romantic viewpoint, informed by the ‘esoteric’ belief in a perennial wisdom tradition, that Emerson understood those oriental religions which he found congenial, ignorant of how they actually functioned in their own cultural context.”⁷⁰ The point is that Merrell-Wolff would come to interpret German and Indian idealism in much the same way Emerson did, as parts of a perennial “literary religion.”

⁶¹ Ibid., 12.

⁶² Ibid., 78.

⁶³ Dale Riepe, “Emerson and Indian Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28, no. 1 (1967): 118.

⁶⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Over-Soul,” in *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Random House, 1841/1950).

⁶⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Illusions,” in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1860/1983).

⁶⁶ Emerson, “Compensation.”

⁶⁷ Emerson, “History.”

⁶⁸ John Michael Corrigan, “The Metempsychotic Mind: Emerson and Consciousness,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71, no. 3 (2010): 442-445 in particular.

⁶⁹ Russell B. Goodman, “East-West Philosophy in Nineteenth-Century America: Emerson and Hinduism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51, no. 4 (1990): 641.

⁷⁰ Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996/1998). 460 & 462.

Theosophy

One day, when I was in the post office of Palo Alto, I saw a sign of meetings of a Theosophical group. My curiosity was piqued. I [had] heard my father once speak disparagingly of Theosophy and I was immediately interested. So I undertook to go to a meeting of this group ... known as the Temple of the People ... ⁷¹

As Merrell-Wolff started to think for himself—on his way to become a true Emersonian “scholar”—he left behind the evangelicalism of his childhood, to search elsewhere for answers to existential questions that were increasingly demanding his attention. Thirty years later, he will recall how, in his words, “I had been through the orthodox church and found it utterly barren, so far as cognitive values were concerned and puny in what it offered for feeling,”⁷² falling short intellectually as well as intuitively. By then, he will also have discovered that “Thought and feeling constitute the bases of two distinct sub-paths [to realization],”⁷³ but that everyone prefers one or the other, depending on their psychological make-up. “For my own part, I have always found that cognition, when highly purified, could fly higher than feeling.”⁷⁴ However, his experience of *transcendental* cognition would prove not merely “beyond feeling and sensation,” but “beyond thought” as well.⁷⁵ This shows he will come to lay claim to something that includes or surpasses both intuition and intellect. But I am running ahead of myself. At this point, in college, Merrell-Wolff is still decades away from realizing that “higher knowledge.”

Merrell-Wolff started university at the age of twenty. He was among the first to reap the intellectual fruits from a reformed—rather, reforming—educational climate. In the half-century prior to 1920, a group of sixteen universities had taken charge of changing their American academies into critical research institutes on par with European standards. Among them were Harvard and Stanford—the then oldest and one of the newest universities in the United States—both of which Merrell-Wolff attended.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Merrell-Wolff, “A Recollection of my Early Life,” 4.

⁷² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” in *Experience and Philosophy: A Personal Record of Transformation and a Discussion of Transcendental Consciousness*, ed. Eliott Eisenberg (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1944/1994), 90.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ The educational vanguard of reformers included the universities of California, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Princeton, Stanford, Wisconsin, Yale, Illinois, Minnesota, Caltech and MIT. Particularly the foundation of the Johns Hopkins University, in 1876—modelling its research-based graduate training on the system of German universities—gave a significant push to the educational reform, see Roger L. Geiger, *To Advance Knowledge: The Growth of American Research Universities, 1900-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). v, 1 & 8.

He belonged to a growing number of middle-class families that were able to spare their adolescent sons from labor,⁷⁷ which contributed to an academic boom.⁷⁸ Around 1910, graduate students still made up less than ten percent of the total student population, though.⁷⁹ So, it is safe to say, Merrell-Wolff was initiated into a small intellectual elite.

During his studies, from 1907 to 1913, his interests swayed from Plato to Kant, Titchener to James and Cantor to Einstein, he listened to guest lectures by Bergson and Tagore and, in his spare time, rubbed minds and shoulders with geniuses like Norbert Wiener or hiked across New England to visit the Concord of Emerson and Thoreau.⁸⁰

Merrell-Wolff spent the first years at Stanford, where his academic distinction did not go unnoticed. Referring to the rising prominence of his intellect, he mentions that “The capacity of that mind won Phi Beta Kappa at the end of four years in college [Mathematics, BA], and at the end of the fifth, a scholarship to Harvard [Philosophy, MA].”⁸¹ During his studies at both universities, Merrell-Wolff embarked on a course of learning built around “mathematics as a central interest, supplemented by philosophy and psychology.” This uncommon combination of hard and soft science yielded for him “the values the church was wholly incapable of supplying.” He distinctly recalls how the abstract science of mathematics brought him what religion usually does, to which philosophy and psychology would later lend further “reflecting and focusing power.”⁸²

In other words, the lacuna left behind by the break with his Methodist past was initially filled by mathematics. Looking back, he notes that “in my mathematical orientation, there was not merely an academic interest—there was something that might be called religious in it. Here, I was studying truth ... With me truth was God and still is.”⁸³ Eventually, though, another route would prove to be even more religiously rewarding.

This route started at the post office of Palo Alto, in 1909. There, Merrell-Wolff noticed a pamphlet of the Temple of the People, a local post-Theosophical community, which, as he himself emphasized, should not be confused with the People’s Temple.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁰ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Autobiographical Material: My Academic Life and Embarking upon my Spiritual Quest,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1982). I will elaborate on these influences, some more extensively than others, as I move along in the subsequent sections and chapters.

⁸¹ Merrell-Wolff, “A Recollection of my Early Life,” 4.

⁸² Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 90.

⁸³ Merrell-Wolff, “Jungian Psychology (4 of 7),” 5.

⁸⁴ “The Temple of the People is quite a different entity from that of the People’s Temple which has been in the news,” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Contrast between Philosophy and Psychology,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 6. I return to the gruesome events surrounding the People’s Temple and their impact on the image of “cults” in Chapter 3, 177-178 and Chapter 4, 187-190 & 203.

In 1898, a small group separated from the American branch of the Theosophical Society, a religious movement that I will return to below. Five years later, this splinter cell moved from Syracuse, New York, to a coastal valley near Santa Barbara, California, where its members set up a cooperative colony—the Temple Home Association, better known as “Halcyon.”⁸⁵ Reminiscent of Blavatsky and Olcott—to whom I will return later—the community was led by Francia “Blue Star” LaDue (1849-1922) and William “Red Star” Bower (1866-1937), the “inner head” and the “outer head” of the Temple.⁸⁶

LaDue claimed to be in contact with “master Hilarion,” one of the “adepts” of “the Great White Brotherhood.”⁸⁷ Though apprehensive of the intellectual soundness of her unusually mediated teachings, LaDue’s claim to an intuitive knowledge struck a chord with Merrell-Wolff.⁸⁸ He would attend more and more meetings and even go to consult “Hilarion,” on a few occasions, sensing that Theosophy was pointing him to the goal and the academy was providing him with the means. “[S]ince then, I have held to these two aspects”—intuition and intellect—“I have not rejected one for the sake of the other, but dealt with the problem of reconciliation.”⁸⁹ Reconciling intuition and intellect had also been the prime objective behind the creation of the Theosophical Society.

In 1875, in a small New York apartment, Russian cosmopolitan Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), military officer turned journalist Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) and Irish-born barrister William Quan Judge (1851-1896) founded the Theosophical Society, which is now considered the fountainhead of modern esoteric discourse in general⁹⁰ and the grandparent of the so-called New Age movement in particular.⁹¹

Guided by their creed “there is no religion higher than truth,” the society settled on three objectives. In *The Key to Theosophy* these are formulated as follows: “One, to form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, color or creed. Two, to promote the study of Aryan and other Scriptures of the world’s

⁸⁵ Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). 158-160.

⁸⁶ Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy and Psychology,” 6.

⁸⁷ LaDue claimed she had a vision of “a being in human form clothed in a dazzling white garment and holding in his hand a staff with a small coiled serpent for its head,” who would later visit her at home to give instructions for correcting and continuing the work of the Theosophical Society, Lucia A. LaDue, William H. Dower, “Private Communication,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (695)* (Halcyon: Temple Home Association, 1913). This revised message was published as Francia A. LaDue, William H. Dower, *From the Mountain Top* (Halcyon: Halcyon Book Concern, 1914). Merrell-Wolff owned a copy.

⁸⁸ These were “people in whom the intuitive function was very substantially developed and their way of thinking involved something strange compared to the rationally disciplined and organized thinking of a logical sort characteristic of university teaching,” Merrell-Wolff, “A Recollection of my Early Life,” 5.

⁸⁹ Merrell-Wolff, “My Academic Life,” 1.

⁹⁰ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005). 122.

⁹¹ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*: 518.

religion and sciences and to vindicate the importance of old Asiatic literature, namely of the Brahmanical, Buddhist and Zoroastrian philosophies. Three, to investigate the hidden mysteries of Nature under every aspect possible, and the psychic and spiritual powers latent in man especially.”⁹² The Far Eastern focus—in particular on Hinduism and Buddhism—is actually a later development, after the society had moved to India, in 1879. I will come back to this below. But first, a bit more about Blavatsky or “HPB.”

HPB proved to be the society’s leading lady. She is remembered as “one of the most fascinating, controversial and influential women in the nineteenth century,”⁹³ “involved in some of the most influential secret societies in the West and the East,”⁹⁴ whose whole life was a “provocation to the guardians of Victorian etiquette,”⁹⁵ due to her uncompromising independence, “extraordinary for a single woman at this time.”⁹⁶

Blavatsky entered the alternative religious scene in America as “an esoteric undercover agent,” as biographer Gary Lachman puts it, tongue-in-cheek, “an occultist in Spiritualist clothing.”⁹⁷ Though its origins can be traced further back,⁹⁸ Spiritualism had been on the rise since 1847, when it changed from a marginal phenomenon into a widespread movement, after Kate and Maggie Fox claimed to have made contact with the ghost of a murdered peddler who had been buried in their basement. Their séances achieved national fame as well as commercial success. Decades later, they admitted to have staged the whole thing.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, apart from satisfying a search for cheap thrills, the Fox sisters had tapped into an increasing tension within American culture.

As Robert Fuller elaborates,¹⁰⁰ the majority of middle-class Americans lauded the successes of science, but, at the same time, deplored the loss of religion that came with it. The scientific focus on physical realities that can be measured and quantified undercut religious claims about metaphysical realities that cannot be proven as such.

⁹² Helena Petrova Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy. Being a Clear Exposition, in the form of Question and Answer, of the Ethics, Science and Philosophy for the Study of which the Theosophical Society has been Founded* (New York: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1889/2007). 30.

⁹³ James Anthony Santucci, “Helena Petrovna Blavatsky,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 177.

⁹⁴ Daniël van Egmond, “Western Esoteric Schools in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *Gnosis and Hermeticism: From Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff and Roelof van den Broek (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 313.

⁹⁵ Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*: 124.

⁹⁶ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). 213.

⁹⁷ Gary Lachman, *Madame Blavatsky: The Mother of Modern Spirituality* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2012). 94.

⁹⁸ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*: Chapter 4.

⁹⁹ Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*: 124-125.

¹⁰⁰ Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). 41-42.

The appeal of Spiritualism lay in its apparent ability to reconcile the two. Because its phenomena were said to be susceptible to empirical verification, it could potentially stretch the scope of science as well as strengthen the foundation of religion. Blavatsky recognized this potential. “[B]y combining science with religion, the existence of God and immortality of man’s spirit may be demonstrated like a problem of Euclid,” she writes, whereby blind faith will be supplanted with knowledge. In the battle between science and religion, only the “strange creed of the so-called Spiritualists” provides “a possible last refuge of compromise between the two.” But the problem was that most of their phenomena seemed trivial or vulgar. Even the channeled spirit of a Byron or Shakespeare sounded like an illiterate. “[This] huckstering about of pompous names attached to idiotic communications has given the scientific stomach such an indigestion that it cannot assimilate even the great truth which lies on the telegraphic plateau of this ocean of psychological phenomena.” No wonder the gap between science and religion was growing, she lamented. According to Blavatsky, the solution to their reconciliation lay hidden in “the anciently universal Wisdom Religion,” as she called it.¹⁰¹

The Theosophical Society steered western religious discourse in a direction that would be further developed in the following decades, which, as Mark Morrisson says, did not entail a detachment of the disenchantment of reality brought on by modern science, but a re-enchantment of science instead,¹⁰² by combining religion, philosophy and science or psychology into a new worldview. As such, Blavatsky used Spiritualism as a stepping stone for her Theosophy.¹⁰³ Delving into the details of her occult polemic would carry too far. Suffice it to say that she ran with the idea of making empirically verifiable contact with metaphysical or physically remote beings,¹⁰⁴ through a medium that would eventually come to be known as “channeling.” And just like Spiritualism before it, Michael Brown tells us, channeling gave women a refuge from mainstream religions and access to the religious authority that had been denied them elsewhere.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Technology: Volume 1* (New York: Bouton, 1877). vi-vii, x, 41.

¹⁰² Mark S. Morrisson, *Modern Alchemy: Occultism and the Emergence of Atomic Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). 69.

¹⁰³ “Blavatsky saw Spiritualism ... as a useful vehicle to prove the validity of non-materialist ideas,” Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, ed. *Helena Blavatsky*, Western Esoteric Master Series (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004), 7.

¹⁰⁴ “Blavatsky’s major innovation was to claim that the messages she received came not from the dead, but from living spiritual masters of Oriental origin ... in this sense Theosophy can be said to be a post-Spiritualist movement,” see Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). 60 & 61.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Brown, *The Channeling Zone: American Spirituality in an Anxious Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). 11.

The “wisdom religion” introduced in *Isis Unveiled*, revised in *The Mahatma Letters* and refined in *The Secret Doctrine*—all of which are in Merrell-Wolff’s library¹⁰⁶—was said to convey the channeled message of Morya and Koot Hoomi, two Mahatmas or “great souls” who were allegedly living among the Lama’s in Tibet. Masters “M” and “KH” were again alleged to belong to the Great White Brotherhood that had supposedly been steering humanity to higher stages of spiritual development throughout history.

As Joy Dixon explains, by voicing or ventriloquizing enlightened masters from the East—employing clever but complicated narrative maneuvers, such as having them undermine her own intelligence and reliability—Blavatsky, at once, accessed and challenged different sources of authority. At the end of the nineteenth century, authority was considered the property of male European scientists, scholars and clergy, not non-academic orientals and females, let alone from an occult fold. Therefore, to call on the exotic members of an obscure secret brotherhood was a bold move, to say the least.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ The editions found at Lone Pine are: Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology: Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: J.W. Bouton, 1877/1884); Elizabeth Preston, Christmas Humphreys, eds., *An Abridgement of The Secret Doctrine of H.P. Blavatsky*, 1888 original full ed. (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1969); Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy: Volume I Cosmogogenesis* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1888); Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Index to The Secret Doctrine* (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company, 1888/1939); Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology: Science*, vol. 1 (New York: J.W. Bouton, 1877/1884); A.T. Barker, *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett from the Mahatmas M. & K.H.* (New York: Rider & Co., 1923/1948). References in his early work indicate that he must have read a first edition of *The Mahatma Letters* as well, e.g. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Death and After,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, no date, before 1936), 110. This also goes for an early version of the second volume of *The Secret Doctrine*, e.g. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Special Course of Instruction: Occult Mathematics,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, no date, before 1936), 3. Merrell-Wolff further quoted minor works, like Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence and Other Chosen Fragments from the "Book of the Golden Precepts" for the Daily Use of Lanoos (Disciples)* (Point Loma: The Aryan Theosophical Press, 1889/1909); Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy: Ethics, Science and Philosophy for the Study of which the Theosophical Society has been Founded, with Copious Glossary of General Theosophical Terms* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893/1910). Though I have not come across references to them, his library also contains a copy of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Studies in Occultism* (Covina: Theosophical University Press, 1887-1891/1946); Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Practical Occultism and Occultism versus the Occult Arts* (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1888/1923). It is also likely he read about Blavatsky. The biographical books that were found at his home include Alfred Percy Sinnett, *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky: Compiled from Information supplied by her Relatives and Friends* (London: George Redway, 1886); Katherine Tingley, *Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: Foundress of the original Theosophical Society in New York, 1875, the International Headquarters of which are now at Point Loma, California* (Point Loma: The Woman’s International Theosophical League, 1921); Alice Leighton Cleather, *H.P. Blavatsky: Her Life and Work for Humanity* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1922); Alice Leighton Cleather, *H.P. Blavatsky as I knew Her* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1923); Mary K. Neff, *Personal Memoirs of H.P. Blavatsky* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1937/1971); Manly Palmer Hall, *Special Class in Secret Doctrine: In Appreciation of H.P.B. (Madam Blavatsky)*, Manuscript Series (unknown: unknown, no date). I elaborate on these Theosophical influences in the following chapters.

¹⁰⁷ Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). 19 & 27-28.

But it worked.¹⁰⁸ As the alleged medium of these mysterious masters, Blavatsky managed to convert the scattered esoteric landscape around her into a single coherent worldview,¹⁰⁹ rephrasing a western metaphysical ideology in an eastern philosophical vocabulary,¹¹⁰ which lent it an air of sophistication that it lacked before.¹¹¹ She did so, by rendering Hinduism and Buddhism in such a way as to suggest they could reconcile the tension that had risen between science and religion in the West.¹¹² She revived western esotericism by relating it to oriental religion.¹¹³ Indeed, if Transcendentalism was one major factor in the western reception of eastern traditions, Theosophy was another.¹¹⁴

In 1878, Blavatsky and Olcott even set off for India, leaving Judge behind to tend to the American branch of the society. Their subsequent decisions to base their headquarters in Adyar, to participate in the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka and to (re)affirm their personal Buddhist persuasion,¹¹⁵ together with their copious references to eastern traditions in their writings—in sum, their oriental(ist) inclination—instigated a schism within the society, the first of many. But their orientalism *did* appeal to Merrell-Wolff.

Adulthood: Oriental(ist) Religion

[A]t Harvard, I had become interested in Indian sources—namely East Indian sources—and I laid my plans to get to India. I succeeded in getting an offer of a teaching position at a missionary school, in the field of mathematics. But I wrote to headquarters at Halcyon and received another message [from master Hilarion, via La Due] to the effect: “The Child of the East will find his call to action in the West wind. It would seem that if you return to India, you may be taken up by Indian quietism.” I interpreted this as to mean that I should not so return.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ That is, until the Society for Psychical Research branded Blavatsky a fraud, J. Barton Scott, "Miracle Publics: Theosophy, Christianity, and the Coulomb Affair," *History of Religions* 49, no. 2 (2009).

¹⁰⁹ Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*: 61 & 81.

¹¹⁰ Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions*: 226.

¹¹¹ Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*: 62.

¹¹² Bevir, "The West turns Eastward," 748.

¹¹³ Goodrick-Clarke, *Helena Blavatsky*, 2.

¹¹⁴ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*: 456.

¹¹⁵ Olcott—"the white Buddhist," as the Sri Lankans called him—played a particularly active role in this, though he was as much a converter as a convert, whose Buddhism was a "creolization" of liberal Protestantism and Theravada Buddhism. His outward embrace of Buddhism and Hinduism, according to Prothero, was a concealed attempt to convert his Asian correspondents into anonymous Theosophists, that is to say, "adherents of a new ideology that was not self-consciously their own," Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). 5, 7 & 69. See also Stephen Prothero, "Henry Steel Olcott and 'Protestant Buddhism,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 2 (1995): for a summarized version of this study.

¹¹⁶ Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Life," 5. "I've never been in India in this lifetime, so there is an interesting suggestion in the use of that word [i.e. return]," Merrell-Wolff, "My Academic Life," 5.

Granted, it is contrived to confine metaphysical religion to Merrell-Wolff's adolescent and oriental(ist) religion to his adult years. Consider it an analytical strategy, for the sake of clarity. The metaphysical(ist) and oriental(ist) features of his life and teaching *cannot* actually be separated from each other. Nor can they be restricted to one period.

Nevertheless, his first "direct" encounter with oriental traditions *can* be roughly dated around 1912. I apply quotations marks, because even though we should take care not to reduce them to ahistorical entities, Merrell-Wolff never engaged in a Hinduism or a Buddhism which had not already been significantly altered by and for the western mind—if there is such a thing, but that is precisely the point: every one of the sources which Merrell-Wolff consulted would make this distinction, differentiating the secular "rational" mentality of the West from the religious "mystical" mentality of the East.¹¹⁷

This is, of course, what Edward Said defined as "orientalism": an othering style of thought that establishes and sustains an imaginative geography which separates Occident from Orient.¹¹⁸ Regardless of which particular "West" and "East" we are talking about, occidentalism and orientalism are part of the same intellectual discourse that is constructed around an epistemology of power that employs a polemical strategy of contrasting cultures based on essentialized traits—often rooted in texts—which creates a false sense of difference, whereby difference itself seems its most defining feature.¹¹⁹

I will not delve into the ontological, epistemological or ethical issues surrounding this discourse, but only the historical ones. This will help to understand the origins of the Hindu and Buddhist methods and theories Merrell-Wolff would come to adopt.

¹¹⁷ One of his go-to sources, which he would later repeatedly invoke to support this orientalist opposition, is Filmer Stuart Cuckow Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West* (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

¹¹⁸ Strictly speaking, Said submits a threefold definition: firstly, orientalism concerns an academic discipline, including anyone who teaches, writes about or researches the Orient, which, for him, meant the French and the British in particular; secondly, it entails a "style of thought" based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between "the Orient" and "the Occident"; and thirdly, it constitutes all institutionalized dealings with the Orient, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978/1979). 2-4. Elsewhere, he says that their common denominator is the imaginary line separating Occident from Orient, Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique*, no. 1 (1985): 90. Given the direct (Paul Deussen) and indirect (Max Müller, through Theosophy) impact of German scholarship on Merrell-Wolff, it is pertinent to point out that Said left out their type of orientalism. He deemed it justified, since the Germans were solely literary, not colonial, orientalists, Said, *Orientalism*: 18-19. It remains an awkward omission, since they were "indisputably the most important orientalist scholars between about 1830 and 1930, despite having virtually no colonies in the East," Suzanne L. Marchand, "German Orientalism and the Decline of the West," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145, no. 4 (2001): 465; as well as Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹¹⁹ Arif Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism," *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 (1996): 97 & 99; James G. Carrier, "Occidentalism: The World Turned Upside-Down," *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 2 (1992): 203; Michael Beard, "Review of Said's *Orientalism*: Between West and World," *Dia-critics* 9, no. 4 (1979): 4.

Neo-Hinduism

There was another critically important episode. This occurred in the academic year of 1912-1913, when I was a student in the Graduate School of Philosophy at Harvard University ... On one occasion, a very brilliant student from Scotland gave a paper on the Vedānta ... I do not remember which form was brought up, but the thinking in this form of religious philosophy has marked similarities to that which I had found in the thinking of the Theosophical group in Palo Alto.¹²⁰

After he had been advised *not* to visit India literally, Merrell-Wolff *did* decide to do so literally. Many of the books and articles in his library, which I take him to have read during or around this time, constitute Theosophical renditions of oriental traditions.¹²¹ Other works worth mentioning are western translations or interpretations of eastern scriptures¹²² and the odd title that appears to have actually come out of the pen of an Indian author, like Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) or Ramacharaka (1862-1931).¹²³

¹²⁰ Merrell-Wolff, "My Academic Life," 1-2.

¹²¹ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, "A Yoga Philosophy," *The Theosophist* 5, no. 9 (1882); Rama Prasad, *The Science of Breath and the Philosophy of the Tatwas, with Fifteen Introductory and Explanatory Essays on Nature's Finer Forces* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1891/1897); T. Subba Row, *Lectures on the Study of the Bhagavat Gita, being a Help to Students of Its Philosophy* (Bombay: The Bombay Theosophical Publication Fund, 1897); T. Subba Row, "Sri Sankaracharya's Date and Doctrine," *The Theosophist* 4, no. 12 (1883); Annie Besant, *Sanatana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book of Hindu Religion and Ethics* (Benares: Central Hindu College, 1904/1906); William Quan Judge, *Echoes from the Orient: A Broad Outline of Theosophical Doctrines* (New York: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1890/1896). However, his most cited Theosophical sources for oriental(ist) ideas were always *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Mahatma Letters* and *The Voice of the Silence*.

¹²² Edwin Arnold, *The Song Celestial or Bhagavad-Gita (from the Mahabharata), being a Discourse between Arjuna, Prince of India, and the Supreme Being under the Form of Krishna*, ca. 4th century BCE original Sanskrit ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1885/1908); Manilal N. Dvivedi, *Mandukyopanishad with Gaudapa's Karikas and the Bhasya of Sankara*, 8th century CE original Sanskrit ed. (Tookaram Tatya F.T.S., 1894); Johann Georg Bühler, "The Sacred Laws of the Aryas as Taught in the Schools of Apastamba, Gautama, Vasishtha and Baudhayana, Part I and II," in *The Sacred Books of the East translated by Various Oriental Scholars: American Edition*, ed. Friedrich Max Müller (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898). For Buddhism, see below.

¹²³ Rabindranath Tagore, *Sadhana: The Realisation of Life* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913/1914); Ramacharaka, *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism* (Oak Park: The Yogi Publication Society, 1903-4); Ramacharaka, *Hatha Yoga or the Yogi Philosophy of Physical Well-Being* (Chicago: The Yogi Publication Society, 1904/1905); Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Raja Yoga* (Chicago: The Yogi Publication Society, 1905/1906); Ramacharaka, *The Spirit of the Upanishads or the Aphorisms of the Wise: a Collection of Texts, Aphorisms, Sayings, Proverbs, etc. from "the Upanishads" or Sacred Writings of India, compiled and adapted from over Fifty Authorities, expressing the Cream of the Hindu Philosophical Thought* (Chicago: The Yogi Publication Society, 1907); Ramacharaka, *The Bhagavad Gita or the Message of the Master* (Chicago: The Yogi Publication Society, 1907); Rabindranath Tagore, *Sadhana: The Realisation of Life* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913/1929); Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali (Song Offerings): A Collection of Prose Translations made by the Author from the Original Bengali*, 1910 original Bengali ed. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1914); Rabindranath Tagore, *The Gardener: Translated by the Author from the Original Bengali*, 1913 original Bengali ed. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1914). I will have more to say on Ramacharaka, in section three, when I come back to the New Thought movement.

According to Merrell-Wolff, one of the reasons why Indian traditions appeal so strongly to the western mind is because “the East Indian ... is ... part and parcel of the same racial group to which we of the West belong, namely the Indo-European race.”¹²⁴ But they also do so, he said, because of traits that are *not* part and parcel of the West, like their pragmatic approach and religious tolerance.¹²⁵ Explaining why Merrell-Wolff saw Indian thought this way requires some insight into the history behind its western reception. He was heavily influenced by Hinduism—the question is: *which* Hinduism?

Hinduism can be the iconoclastic epitome of the mystic East or the crowded pantheon of Indian henotheism and everything in between. Klaus Klostermaier considers it “the oldest living major tradition on Earth, with roots reaching back into pre-historic times,”¹²⁶ while Raymond Schwab, Richard King and Brian Pennington perceive it as a creation of the European imagination.¹²⁷ It all comes down to one’s perspective. And the perspective Merrell-Wolff took seems like a remnant of the “Hindu Renaissance.”

When late-eighteenth-century western philologists discovered parallels between Sanskrit and European languages, it was rather disconcerting for Christians at the time to discover that they might not be descendants of Noah, like the Bible had told them, but of a much older people from India.¹²⁸ However, the thought that Indian civilization could have soared to such great heights as to constitute or contribute to something as sophisticated as the Vedic corpus—more than a thousand years before the compilation of their own Book—did not sit well with them. After an initial infatuation with India—as part of a Romantic response to the perceived religious staleness of the West, which had flirted with the East in search of spiritual inspiration¹²⁹—the Europeans in general and the British in particular had grown increasingly reluctant “to acknowledge any potential cultural indebtedness to the forefathers of the rickshaw pullers of Calcutta.”¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Tantra and Zen Buddhism (3 of 6),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1974), 4.

¹²⁵ Merrell-Wolff, “Death and After,” 20.

¹²⁶ Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994/2007). 1.

¹²⁷ Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking, 1950 original German ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (Oxon: Routledge, 1999).

¹²⁸ Edwin F. Bryant, *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture: The Indo-Aryan Migration Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Chapter 1.

¹²⁹ Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988). 69-83.

¹³⁰ “The concern of the British colonialists during this period was not so much where the Aryans had come from ... provided they had not come from India and ... [they] did not need to acknowledge any embarrassing kinship with their Indian subjects,” Bryant, *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture*: 28.

To circumvent the awkward implications of their discovery, it was just assumed that the ancient ancestors of the Indians—the Aryan authors of the Vedas—could not have come from India, but had to have arrived there through invasion or migration.¹³¹ In their historical as well as politically charged narrative, the early-nineteenth century architects of this Aryan invasion or migration theory imposed the western dominance in modern times onto the origins of Indian civilization.¹³² Doing so, they projected their colonial enterprise back into the past, lending further credence to the supposed superiority of western culture. The colonial presence of the British in India was tacitly seen as a reiteration of what had transpired millennia before: “a second wave of Aryans, again bringing a superior language and civilization to the racial descendants of the same natives their forefathers had attempted to elevate.”¹³³ In this orientalist retelling of Indian history, the first Aryan wave had been absorbed by the indigenous population long ago, leaving behind only a faint trace of its superiority in Indian society. The second Aryan wave, embodied by the British, was to reestablish the advanced culture of the West in the East. However, Indian intellectuals began to protest against this colonial abduction of their heritage, as they started to see it for what it was—a struggle for power.¹³⁴

This brought them to reinterpret their socio-religious tradition from within. The origin of this “Hindu Renaissance”¹³⁵ is usually traced to Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), founder of the Brahmo Samaj or “Society for Worshipers of the Absolute” and father of modern India. Faced with a widespread ritualism and idolatry among his fellow Indians and the awkward misperceptions these left behind in the eyes of the Europeans, Roy took it upon himself to retrieve what he believed to be the true spirit of Hinduism.

For him, this meant Śāṅkara’s highly intellectual take on the concluding parts of the Vedas—Veda-anta—that is, the *Upaniṣads*. A sweeping modernization of the latter’s Advaita Vedānta philosophy ensued.¹³⁶ Because of his idiosyncratic reinterpretations,

¹³¹ Edwin F. Bryant, Laurie L. Patton, eds., *The Indo-Aryan Controversy: Evidence and Inference in Indian History* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Julius Lipner, *Hinduism: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 1994/2005). Chapter 2; Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*: 23-27.

¹³² Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*: 20.

¹³³ Bryant, *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture*: 25-26.

¹³⁴ Torkel Brekke, *Makers of Modern Indian Religion in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002/2007). 17.

¹³⁵ “The impact of the West ... is perhaps the most important challenge and stimulus it has encountered ... many contemporary forms of Hinduism can only be understood in the light of this historic encounter ... referred to as the Indian Renaissance,” Anantanand Rambachan, “Swami Vivekananda’s Use of Science as an Analogy for the Attainment of moksha,” *Philosophy East and West* 40, no. 3 (1990): 331.

¹³⁶ See, for instance, Rammohan Roy, “Translation of an Abridgment of the Vedant or the Resolution of All the Veds, the Most Celebrated and Revered Work of Brahmanical Theology, establishing the Unity of the Supreme Being and that He Alone is the Object of Propitiation and Worship,” in *The English Works of Raja Ram Mohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chunder Ghose (Calcutta: Srikanta Roy, 1902), 1-24.

some felt that Roy placed himself outside the Hindu tradition,¹³⁷ despite the fact that he still considered himself a Hindu, albeit a Hindu reforming Hinduism from within.¹³⁸

Roy was succeeded by Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905) and Keshubchandra Sen (1838-1884), whose eclecticism and subjectivism further removed Vedānta from “traditional” Hinduism. But the most influential Neo-Hindu would have to be Narendranath Datta (1863-1902)—better known as Vivekananda—even if he really did little more than convert the intellectual complexity of Vedānta into simple catch phrases.¹³⁹

Swami Vivekananda is probably best known for his self-invited appearance at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, in 1893, where—under the banner of Hinduism—he introduced its western audience to his brand of “Practical Vedānta.”¹⁴⁰

The seventeen-day Parliament was part of the World Columbian Exposition, a fair in celebration of the four-hundred year anniversary of Columbus’s “discovery” of America. Although intercultural and interdenominational exchanges have always occurred, this was really the first time Americans became aware of religious pluralism on a global scale. Richard Seager explains that the event was meant to bolster mainstream Gilded Age America’s image of itself as the evolutionary pinnacle of the civilized world—the New Jerusalem, New Athens or New Rome.¹⁴¹ It failed, however, since its liberal Anglo-Protestant ideology would be seized by Asian delegates such as Vivekananda, who cleverly turned its myth of progress towards tolerance and rationality upon itself.

Already during the opening ceremony of the Parliament, Vivekananda gestured at the inclusivist message he had come to convey. After addressing the listeners as his American “brothers and sisters”—received with a cheer—he boldly claimed “to belong to a tradition which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance.”¹⁴²

¹³⁷ John Nicol Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915). 38.

¹³⁸ Lipner, *Hinduism*: 53.

¹³⁹ Halbfass, *India and Europe*: 228.

¹⁴⁰ Vivekananda, *Jnana Yoga* (New York: The Vedanta Society, 1902). 201-282.

¹⁴¹ Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893 Religion in North America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). especially Chapter 1. This bloated self-image was part of the Puritan narrative underlying America’s optimistic belief that it was the chosen country of God, which would make it a religious exception. But by drawing the divine into secular history, the status of both the sacred and America were vulnerable to the emerging (awareness of) religious pluralism, which crushed the monistic Protestant paradigm, since it made the entire myth about exceptionalism doubtful, William Dean, “Religion and the American Public Philosophy,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 1, no. 1 (1991): 47-50. In sum, the rapidly growing religious pluralism “put America’s limping civil religion of exceptionalism into bed,” *ibid.*, 54.

¹⁴² Vivekananda in L.P. Mercer, ed. *Review of the World's Religious Congresses of the World's Congress Auxiliary of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1893), 45. Vivekananda used key themes that circulated at the Parliament to make Hinduism seem exemplary, Kay Koppedrayar, “Hybrid Constructions: Swami Vivekananda's Presentation of Hinduism at the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893,” *Religious Studies and Theology* 23, no. 1 (2004): 16-17.

After all, he would later elaborate in his speech, according to Hinduism, there is no right or wrong religion—only lower and higher truth. Picking up on the “spiritual crisis” of his western audience, which was struggling to reconcile its religious sentiment with its scientific conviction about evolution,¹⁴³ Vivekananda went on to say that different religions are different attempts of human consciousness to realize the same eternal truth, *sanātana dharma*, as they move along the path of spiritual development. As a matter of fact, “the whole religion of the Hindu is centered in [this] realization.”¹⁴⁴

Vivekananda claimed the idea of “realization” as the “common core of religions” came from his master Ramakrishna (1836-1886)¹⁴⁵—a Bengali sage, “lauded as holy by his followers and declared a lunatic by many outside of his Hindu tradition.”¹⁴⁶ But it is more likely that he projected this perennialism back onto his master, influenced by the rising “science of religion,” which he encountered at the Parliament.¹⁴⁷ Especially after his contact with Max Müller—whom he helped to write his biography of Ramakrishna¹⁴⁸—Vivekananda would stress the need for making religion scientific. But, at the same time, he also warned against its degradation into “intellectual gymnastics.”¹⁴⁹

Such cautionary remarks were not uncommon. Though the Hindu Reformation hailed the harmonization of science and religion,¹⁵⁰ it was highly anti-intellectual, in the Hofstadterian sense of the term.¹⁵¹ I am sure the irony is not lost on the reader that the most influential reformers were intellectuals whose anti-intellectual rhetoric—for that is what it was—entailed an intellectual gymnastics of its own. They invoked science as a thinly veiled cover for a reasoned flight beyond reason towards pure experience.

Indeed, Vivekananda held that “All our knowledge is based upon experience.”¹⁵²

¹⁴³ Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*: 9.

¹⁴⁴ Vivekananda in Mercer, *Review of the World's Religious Congresses*, 62-63.

¹⁴⁵ “[M]y Master's message to mankind is, ‘Be spiritual and realize truth for yourself’ ... To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my Master ... he left every religion undisturbed because he had realized that, in reality, they are all part and parcel of one Eternal Religion,” Vivekananda, *My Master* (New York: The Baker & Taylor Company, 1901). 68-69.

¹⁴⁶ See Kelley Ann Raab, “Is there anything Transcendent about Transcendence? A Philosophical and Psychological Study of Sri Ramakrishna,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 2 (1995): 321. Sil argues Vivekananda mythologized Ramakrishna as “a unique prophet of modern India” to support his Hindu missionary enterprise, Narasingha P. Sil, “Vivekananda's Ramakrishna: an Untold Story of Mythmaking and Propaganda,” *Numen* 40, no. 1 (1993). More sympathetically, one might say he spread “what he believed [or wanted to believe] to be his Master's teaching,” Lipner, *Hinduism*: 53.

¹⁴⁷ Brekke, *Makers of Modern Indian Religion*: 24.

¹⁴⁸ Friedrich Max Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1898/1916).

¹⁴⁹ Vivekananda, *Jnana Yoga*: 246-247 & 201.

¹⁵⁰ Rambachan, “Swami Vivekananda's Use of Science,” 331.

¹⁵¹ Agehananda Bharati, “The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29, no. 2 (1970): 272.

¹⁵² Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga* (New York: Brantano's, 1897/1920). 1.

He felt it was the task of both science and religion to find our fundamental common experiences, by differentiating fact from fiction and deducing the general from the particular, in order to discern unity amidst diversity.¹⁵³ And when they do so, they will find that this unity always has been and will be best preserved in the East—particularly in Advaita Vedānta, which is “the most scientific religion,” because, like science, it has done away with superstition and dogmatism.¹⁵⁴ This scientific rhetoric is repeatedly used to bring us to conclude that Hinduism is the “universal religion of the future.”¹⁵⁵

Despite their popularity, Roy and Neo-Hindu descendants such as Vivekananda were not without their critics. In anticipation of the “advaitized” western esotericism of later generations, one critic is particularly worth mentioning. René Jean Marie Joseph Guénon (1886-1951) professed an easternized perennialism similar to the westernized Vedānta of the Brahma Samaj, whom he rebuked for distorting the original “tradition.”

On the one hand, as the founder of so-called Traditionalism,¹⁵⁶ Guénon believed the modern West to be in a crisis that could only be resolved with the aid of the East, since the crucial difference between them was that the latter had preserved “tradition,” whereas the former had first neglected and finally lost it. And so, the West had to turn East, he argued, in order to be saved from spiritual poverty. India being the “representative par excellence of the Eastern spirit,” Hinduism had to provide the answers. “For Guénon, Hinduism was [*the*] repository of spiritual truth,” Mark Sedgwick confirms.¹⁵⁷

Tradition is metaphysics, said Guénon, “the knowledge of the Universal,” which is always the same, “for its object is one ... or ‘without duality,’ as the Hindus put it.”¹⁵⁸ In India, they will also refer to it as the *sanatana dharma* or “primordial tradition,”

¹⁵³ Vivekananda, *Jnana Yoga*: 246 & 315.

¹⁵⁴ Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga*: 346.

¹⁵⁵ At the Parliament, easterners picked up on the western focus on “the rational religion of the future, when superstition and dogmatism would have been cut away by the razor-blade of reason,” Brekke, *Makers of Modern Indian Religion*: 26. “[This] ‘reverse-colonialism’ of the West at work in the essentialism of Neo-Vedānta is clearly an attempt to establish a modern form of Advaita not only as the central philosophy of Hinduism but also as the primary candidate for the ‘Universal Religion’ of the future,” King, *Orientalism and Religion*: 140. The Neo-Hindu intelligentsia cleverly reversed western concepts of tolerance and rationality, as to replace the colonial imperialism of the West with a spiritual expansionism of the East, Halbfass, *India and Europe*: 238. For instance, “The star arose in the East; it traveled steadily toward the West, sometimes dimmed and sometimes effulgent, till it made a circuit of the world and now it is again rising on the very horizon of the East ... a thousand fold more effulgent than it ever was before,” Vivekananda in Mercer, *Review of the World's Religious Congresses*, 64.

¹⁵⁶ The Traditionalists were “united by their common debt to the work of René Guénon,” in seeing core beliefs and practices that have been or *should* have been transmitted from one generation to the next, which have been lost to the West, Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). 21.

¹⁵⁷ René Guénon, *Studies in Hinduism*, trans. Henry D. Fohr and Cecil Bethell, 1966 original French ed. (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004). e.g. 9, 12, 86, 101. cf. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*: 22.

¹⁵⁸ René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, trans. Marco Pallis, 1921 original French ed. (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004). 71 & 73.

which survives unchanged in the “*advaita-vada* or ‘doctrine of non-duality.’”¹⁵⁹ This intellectual doctrine is based on an anti-intellectual “Deliverance,” his word for *mokṣa* or *mukti*, which is the state of “final liberation” or “realization of Supreme Identity” that differs from every other state one may have passed through to reach the supreme, “no matter how exalted,” because it is ineffable. Thus, Guénon explained, one can only resort to negation and call it “non-duality.”¹⁶⁰ Given that non-dual Vedānta is “purely metaphysical doctrine,” then, it cannot be confined within the “narrow framework of any system.” As such, he concluded, it underlies all genuine metaphysical doctrines.¹⁶¹

On the other hand, the East was also at risk of losing tradition, at the hands of reformers. Unlike a traditional Hindu sage such as Ramana Maharshi (Venkataraman Iyer, 1879-1950), whose introspective *vichāra mārṅa* or “path of enquiry” leads one to something “beyond the mind,”¹⁶² modern Hindus like philosopher-politician Sarvepalli Radharishnan (1888-1975) were playing mind games that diluted and corrupted their tradition. Railing against the “science of religions” of “Theosophism” and “westernized Vedānta,” Guénon feared that Hinduism was also being removed from metaphysics.¹⁶³

Despite his trenchant criticism, though, the “traditional” Hinduism of Guénon was really not much different from the “modern” Hinduism of the Indian reformers. Like them, in a typically modern western vein, he, too, reduced Hinduism to Vedānta, Vedānta to Advaita and Advaita to a perennial philosophy that was itself reduced to an experience of liberation or realization. Later, we will see Merrell-Wolff did the same.

Interestingly, throughout his life, Merrell-Wolff would unwittingly entertain an orientalist invasion theory that denied India any indigenous high culture¹⁶⁴ as well as its reverse orientalist retort that presented Indian high culture as both the past and the future of global civilization¹⁶⁵—oblivious, it seems, of their opposing political polemics.

¹⁵⁹ Guénon, *Studies in Hinduism*: 81; Guénon, *The Hindu Doctrines*: 201.

¹⁶⁰ René Guénon, *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta*, trans. Richard C. Nicholson, 1925 original French ed. (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004). 153, 156, 157.

¹⁶¹ Guénon, *The Hindu Doctrines*: 198; Guénon, *Man and his Becoming*: 8.

¹⁶² Guénon, *Studies in Hinduism*: 147-153.

¹⁶³ Guénon, *The Hindu Doctrines*: Part 4. After reading a popular book of his, Guénon—who had never even been to India—said that the Indian “scarcely seems to know what the traditional spirit [of Hinduism] is,” Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu view of Life: Upton Lectures delivered at Manchester College Oxford 1926* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927/1954); Guénon, *Studies in Hinduism*: 189.

¹⁶⁴ He speaks of an “Aryan invasion of Dravidian India by an Indo-European race from central Asia,” in several lectures, for instance, in Merrell-Wolff, “Death and After,” 2; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Purpose, Method and Policy of this Work (3 of 15),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1976), 9.

¹⁶⁵ “... India [is] the very Fount of Spiritual Wisdom, so far as it is embodied more in one race than another,” see Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 82-3. At the same time, the authors of the oldest extant literature of the Vedas are “great Sages, far wiser than any of the Sages in historic times,” whose evolutionary development is far ahead of that of any contemporary individual, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Gupta Vidya,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, no date, before 1936), 6.

Nevertheless, the “universal wisdom of the mystic East” myth prevailed in his work.¹⁶⁶

Neo-Buddhism

In *An Introduction to Mahāyāna Buddhism* W. M. McGovern has given us a quotation from the Buddhist writer Kaiten Nukariya, which reveals quite clearly the intelligent Buddhist’s objectivity with respect to the objective Dharma. In part, the quotation runs: “Has then the divine nature of the Universal Spirit been completely and exhaustively revealed in our Enlightened Consciousness? To this question we would answer in the negative, for so far as our limited experience is concerned Universal Spirit reveals itself as a being with profound wisdom and boundless mercy; this nevertheless does not imply that this conception is the only possible and complete one. It goes on to disclose a new phase, to add a new truth.” The implication is clear. The historic Buddhism, though grounded in Enlightenment, does not claim for its formulated Dharma exclusive validity.¹⁶⁷

Especially during this early period, Merrell-Wolff’s hold on Buddhism relied on similar sources as that of Hinduism, that is, Theosophical renditions,¹⁶⁸ western translations or interpretations¹⁶⁹ and very few, if any, books authored by actual oriental practitioners.

In fact, briefly jumping forward in time, he will eventually confirm what, for us,

¹⁶⁶ Judging from his library and references in his texts and talks, this view was based on Vivekananda, *Jnana-Yoga* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1902/1972); Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga, being Lectures by the Swami Vivekananda, with Patanjali's Aphorisms, Commentaries and a Glossary of Terms* (New York: Brentano's, 1897/1920); Christopher Isherwood, ed. *Vedanta for the Western World: Essays by Gerald Heard, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Swami Prabhavananda, Swami Vivekananda and Others* (Hollywood Los Angeles: Vedanta Press, 1945). He would have further acquainted himself with Ramakrishna, through Ramakrishna, *Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings*, vol. 2 (Mayati: The Advaita Ashrama, 1920); Madhavananda, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna: Compiled from various Authentic Sources* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1925); Ramakrishna, *Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings*, vol. 1 (Mayati: The Advaita Ashrama, 1916). In addition, Merrell-Wolff owned over fifty books written by or about Aurobindo, the most cited one being Aurobindo Ghose, *The Life Divine* (New York: Creystone Press, 1949).

¹⁶⁷ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "The Four Pillard Arch," (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, unknown), 6. He refers to William Montgomery McGovern, *An Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism with especial Reference to Chinese and Japanese Phases* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1922). 46; who refers to Kaiten Nukariya, *The Religion of the Samurai: A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China and Japan* (London: Luzac & Co., 1913). 95-96. I will briefly elaborate about Nukariya below.

¹⁶⁸ Henry Steel Olcott, *The Golden Rules of Buddhism* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1887/1902); Alfred Percy Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1884/1887). I have not come across references to it in his early work, but Merrell-Wolff also owned a copy of Henry Steel Olcott, *The Buddhist Catechism* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1881/1947).

¹⁶⁹ Samuel Beal, *A Catena of Buddhist Scriptures from the Chinese* (London: Trübner, 1871); Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia or The Great Renunciation (Mahaabhinishkramana), being the Life and Teaching of Gautama, Prince of India and Founder of Buddhism (as told in Verse by an Indian Buddhist)* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1879/1890); Paul Carus, *Amitabha: A Story of Buddhist Theology* (Chicago: The Open Court, 1906). Given references to it in his early work, Merrell-Wolff also once owned an early edition of Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha* (Chicago: Open Court, 1894/1909).

is already clear from the start, that his ideas about Buddhism are unwittingly based on western sources,¹⁷⁰ save the odd classic by someone like D.T. Suzuki (1870-1966).¹⁷¹

Around the turn of the century, the most popular western sources included the lyrical *Light of Asia* by Edwin Arnold, the Theosophical *Buddhist Catechism* by Henry Steel Olcott and the intellectually promiscuous *Gospel of Buddha* by Paul Carus.¹⁷² So, it is no surprise that every one of these titles made their way onto Merrell-Wolff's book shelves. Since Merrell-Wolff often cites it to support seminal ideas, I focus on the third.

Paul Carus (1852-1919) was born in Germany. As the son of a Reformed minister, he was raised in a conservative Christian environment. After studying philosophy and natural sciences at the universities of Greifswald, Strassburg and Tübingen, receiving a PhD and teaching for a while, he first moved to England and then migrated to America.

Several years before leaving Germany, Carus suffered a religious crisis. As Carl Jackson contends, "Unable to subscribe to his father's stern tenets, he undertook a life search for a religious view compatible with his rationalistic and scientific commitment," which ultimately brought him to Buddhism.¹⁷³ More than that, for Carus, as for nearly all of his educated contemporaries in the West, intellectual forces such as Darwinism, biblical criticism and comparative religion and social forces such as industrialization, urbanization and immigration, together, had created a widespread "spiritual crisis."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ That is, Arthur Avalon, ed. *Tantra of the Great Liberation (Mahanirvana Tantra)* (London: Luzac & Co, 1913); Arthur Avalon, Ellen Avalon, *Hymns to the Goddess: Compiled from Tantras, Puranas, the Epics and Poems ascribed to Sankara* (London: Luzac & Co., 1913); Arthur Avalon, ed. *Principles of Tantra, Part 1: the Tantratattva of Shriyukta Shiva Chandra Vidyarnava Bhattacharyya Mahodaya* (London: Luzac & Co, 1914); Arthur Avalon, ed. *The Serpent Power being the Shat-Chakra-Nirupana and Paduka-Panchaka* (Madras: Ganesh & Co, 1924); Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1927/1977); Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935); Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954); Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation: The Method of Realizing Nirvana through Knowing the Mind, preceded by an Epitome of Padmasambhava's Biography and followed by Guru Phadampa Sangay's Teachings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954); John Blofeld, *The Tantric Mysticism of Tibet: A Practical Guide* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1970).

¹⁷¹ He had (read) Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1934/1964); Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* (New York: Grove Press, 1949/1961). More than Suzuki's Zen itself, Jung's introduction to his *Introduction* most interested him.

¹⁷² Gurinder Singh Mann et al., *Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs in America: A Short History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). 4. It is surprising that Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864-1933)—just as influential as Olcott and Carus—did not land in his library, David L. McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72, no. 4 (2004).

¹⁷³ Carl T. Jackson, "The Meeting of East and West: The Case of Paul Carus," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29, no. 1 (1968): 74.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992/2000). 26. In a nutshell, this crisis was, on the one hand, a result of increasing scientific explanations for phenomena that had been previously explained by religion and, on the other hand, a reaction against a surge of evangelicalism in Britain and also America, McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 918.

One could argue that the earlier mentioned World Parliament of Religions both added to and detracted from this crisis. It contributed to it, since its religious pluralism relativized the absolute truth claims of single traditions,¹⁷⁵ thereby further contesting the authority of Christianity. But it also assuaged some of it, since it presented other—equally or even more appealing—religious alternatives¹⁷⁶ that seemed better equipped to grapple with the challenges of the modern age, in particular those posed by science.

Suffice it to say that Carus had found the answer to what was both a personal as well as a cultural crisis of faith at the World Parliament. Though he never converted to another religion, he was impressed with the Buddhism presented there by Shaku Soēn (1860-1919) and Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864-1933). So much so that he wrote a score of books and articles about it, the most significant one being *The Gospel of Buddha*.¹⁷⁷

In line with the rise of comparative religion and evolutionism, Carus argued that progress towards the religion of the future would be hastened by bringing protagonists into greater proximity, which, for him, really just meant Christianity and Buddhism.¹⁷⁸

Since his contemporaries considered its views contrary to their values,¹⁷⁹ Carus showed them a Buddhism perfectly compatible with their growing scientific proclivity: karma was the ethical counterpart of natural law, reincarnation implied evolution on a metaphysical scale, its introspections of the mind anticipated modern psychology and its injunction of being “a lamp unto yourself”—never fare on blind faith, always rely on personal experience—befitted the scientific spirit.¹⁸⁰ Buddha was a religious scientist.

Needless to say that the *Gospel* is “an archetypical example of orientalism.”¹⁸¹ It was also read as such. Larry Fader thinks the book was received as “an authoritative text among easterners and westerners alike” and its writer as “one to whom Buddhists

¹⁷⁵ McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 921.

¹⁷⁶ “Vedānta Hinduism and Buddhism, especially after the Parliament of Religions ... seem to have been the most serious alternatives ...” Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912*: 95.

¹⁷⁷ He wrote a thousand articles and fifty books, in service of the reconciliation of religion and science, Judith Snodgrass, "Budda no Fukuin: The Deployment of Paul Carus's Gospel of Buddha in Meiji Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25, no. 3-4 (1998): 321; see also Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Chapter 10 & 11. His writings on oriental traditions—Buddhism in particular—peaked between 1893 and 1906, Jackson, "The Meeting of East and West," 75. Buddhism was also gaining popularity in general in America, around this time, Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912*: 26.

¹⁷⁸ Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism*: 223.

¹⁷⁹ Thomas Tweed finds that the following four values were deemed particularly important in Victorian culture: *theism* or a belief in a personal creator and sustainer of the universe; *individualism* or a reliance on what is seen as a substantial or immortal soul or self; *optimism* or a feeling of a benevolent and positively evolving universe; and *activism* or an emphasis on the religious significance of a moral engagement with the world, Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912*: xxxv-xxxvi.

¹⁸⁰ McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 914.

¹⁸¹ Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism*: 222.

throughout the world looked for ... instruction in their own religion.”¹⁸² Of course, they were not. Eastern and western experts alike were aware of their flaws.¹⁸³ But Fader is right that “amateur” scholars like Merrell-Wolff *did* see them as such, if only due to the powerful endorsement in the preface of the book, that its warm reception across the Buddhist world vouched for its content.¹⁸⁴ The most striking “voucher” was the Japanese translation, issued by Soën and Suzuki, months after its English release. But why would Japanese intellectuals knowingly back a flawed book about their own religion?

In the mid-nineteenth century, following a long time of *sakoku* or self-imposed isolation, Japan was “opened” to the world. After several failed attempts, this began with the arrival of the black ships of U.S. Commodore Perry, at Edo Bay. Having witnessed the British successfully deploy their “gunboat diplomacy” in China to enforce a treaty port system, the Americans followed suit in Japan. In 1854, a decade prior to the Meiji Restoration—which would restore sole imperial rule¹⁸⁵—Perry signed a deal with the *bakufu* or shogunate government, which would allow American ships to access Japanese trade ports—the Treaty of Kanagawa. For Japan, this practically entailed a “semi-colonial” relationship with America, having to grant rare privileges to their self-invited guests. Similar “unequal treaties” followed with several other western forces.¹⁸⁶

As long as it was considered backward by America and Europe, Japan would be unable to negotiate revisions of these arrangements.¹⁸⁷ And so “catching up with the West” became the motto of the Meiji government, throughout the 1880s and the early 1890s.¹⁸⁸ This socio-economic rush to modernity had big consequences for Buddhism.

¹⁸² Larry A. Fader, “Zen in the West: Historical and Philosophical Implications of the 1893 Chicago World’s Parliament of Religions,” *Eastern Buddhist* 15, no. 1 (1982): 41.

¹⁸³ Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism*: 246; Jackson, “The Meeting of East and West,” 84, 92.

¹⁸⁴ Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha*: vi.

¹⁸⁵ See, for instance, Marius B. Jansen, “The Meiji Restoration,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989/2007).

¹⁸⁶ William G. Beasley, “The Foreign Threat and the Opening of the Ports,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989/2007).

¹⁸⁷ Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1973/2000). 240.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 249. These fast developments made the elite weary of losing their national identity. “As Japan modernized under the Meiji Restoration, it enjoyed a sudden and massive influx of western science and technology. For many intellectuals, it was as though traditional worldviews dissolved on contact,” Andrew Feenberg, “Experience and Culture: Nishida’s Path ‘To the Things Themselves,’” *Philosophy East and West* 49, no. 1 (1999). Feenberg goes on to argue that enthusiasm gave way to anxiety, in the face of change. Military and intellectual leaders responded to the perceived threat to their heritage by aggrandizing their national values and imposing them onto other cultures, like their Asian neighbors. Religious and political motives became entangled, in a *nihonjinron* rhetoric of “Japanese uniqueness,” as they started to use (Zen) Buddhism to stress their solidarity with as well as enforce their superiority to others in the region, Robert H. Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” *History of Religions* 33, no. 1 (1993): 5. This shows the ambiguous status Japan has, as both colonized and colonizer, Daisuke Nishihara, “Said, Orientalism, and Japan,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 25 (2005): 245.

During this time of economic hardship—because the foreign trade following the (enforced) opening of the ports contributed to a cluster of developments that brought on a “galloping inflation”¹⁸⁹—Buddhism came to be resented for the burden its support placed on the people. This anti-Buddhist sentiment led to a policy of *haibutsu kishaku*, literally, to “destroy Buddhism.”¹⁹⁰ As Robert Sharf says, “Government propagandists ... condemned Buddhism as a corrupt, decadent, anti-social, parasitic and superstitious creed inimical to Japan’s need for scientific and technological advancement.”¹⁹¹ In response, a vanguard of intellectuals arose to save their religious heritage. Among them were Soēn, Suzuki and less famous but influential thinkers like Kitarō Nishida (1870-1945).¹⁹² This elite reduced Buddhism to Japanese Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism to Zen and—inspired by the nineteenth-century European *zeitgeist*, which imbued college campuses in Meiji Japan¹⁹³—reduced Zen to a religious realization experience of *satori*.

Taking a peek into the future, Suzuki, for instance, will come to say that “There is no Zen without *satori*” and that “Zen professes itself to be the spirit of Buddhism, but, in fact, it is the spirit of all religions and philosophies.”¹⁹⁴ Once we arrive in the fifties and sixties, I will have a more to say about this “Suzuki Zen.” For now, it suffices to know that Suzuki was a typical member of the Meiji lay Buddhist elite who, I agree with Jackson, professed a *philosophy* of the *experience* of Zen, despite his repeated claims to the contrary.¹⁹⁵ Strictly speaking, he would not discard its intellectual parts

¹⁸⁹ Beasley, “The Foreign Threat,” 338-342.

¹⁹⁰ Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism*: 117.

¹⁹¹ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 3. Concretely, “Focal issues of the anti-Buddhist rhetoric were that it was a foreign religion, that it was not taught by the Buddha, that its cosmology and sacred texts were irrational and inconsistent with the findings of science and that it was an anachronistic vestige of the past, of no benefit to modern society,” Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism*: 117-118.

¹⁹² Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “My Friend Nishida Kitarō,” *Eastern Buddhist* 28, no. 2 (1946/1995). This life-long friend of Suzuki’s was the founder of the Kyoto School of Philosophy, whose thinkers merged continental and oriental philosophy and religion. His first and most famous book is Kitarō Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 1911 original Japanese ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). For a great introduction, see James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001); for a shorter version, James W. Heisig, “The Religious Philosophy of the Kyoto School: An Overview,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 17, no. 1 (1990).

¹⁹³ “Japanese intellectuals, seeking to bring their nation into the ‘modern world,’ were ... drawn to the European critique of institutional religion ... the anti-clericalism and anti-ritualism of the Reformation, the rationalism and empiricism of the Enlightenment, the romanticism of figures such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey and the existentialism of Nietzsche,” Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 4.

¹⁹⁴ The first citation is from Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* (New York: Grove Press, 1927/1961). 229-230. The other one from Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (London: Rider & Company, 1949/1969). 44. Copies of both works—from 1961 and 1964, respectively—are in Merrell-Wolff’s library. It is unclear whether he had read Suzuki before the 1960s.

¹⁹⁵ “[I]n Zen all the philosophy of the East crystallized, but this ought not to be taken as meaning that Zen is a philosophy in the ordinary application of the term,” Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*: 38. “Though steadfastly denying that he was a philosopher, [Suzuki’s] writings on Zen clearly offer a philosophical presentation of Zen. Knowing his background, one should not be surprised by this philosophical bent ... his American mentor [Carus] had been trained as a philosopher, while his close friend

so much as assume an ambiguous stance. “Zen is not to be conceptualized ... if it is to be experientially grasped.” But in communicating it to others, “The conceptualization of Zen is inevitable: Zen must have its philosophy.”¹⁹⁶ It is *not* intellectual, but it *does* require the intellect to get that across. The intellect is not used to assert, but to desert and transcend itself.¹⁹⁷ In sum, Zen was remade into a reasoned flight beyond reason.

The turn towards Zen began with Nukariya’s *Religion of the Samurai*¹⁹⁸—which Merrell-Wolff cited above—whose *shin bukkyō* or Neo-Buddhist flavor westerners had already tasted in Suzuki’s *Outlines*,¹⁹⁹ Soēn’s *Sermons*²⁰⁰ and Carus’s *Gospel*. And this answers our question about why Soēn and Suzuki, despite likely misgivings about its content, were so eager to issue a translation of the *Gospel* in Japan: it bolstered their cause of convincing the elite back home that *their* Buddhism was not a stumbling block but a stepping stone to modernity. The book served neither as a source of information nor a source of inspiration, therefore, but solely as a source of western legitimation.²⁰¹

In turn, Carus used this translation to legitimate the content of his book, which further added to its popularity in the West. History has an ironic sense of humor. The irony is that the Neo-Buddhism Carus presented with the blessing of Japanese intellectuals probably only appealed so much to European and American intellectuals like Merrell-Wolff, since it served easternized versions of western values. “Like Narcissus, [they] failed to recognize their own reflection in the mirror being held out to them.”²⁰²

Nevertheless, I would hesitate to talk about a “westernization of the East” or an “easternization of the West,” though, like Colin Campbell does.²⁰³ I concur with Peter Clarke that all religions today are exposed to the “porous pluralism of late modernity,” which has given rise to complex hybrids that cease to be fixed geographical “facts.”²⁰⁴

Nishida ranks as Japan’s greatest twentieth-century philosopher,” Carl T. Jackson, “D. T. Suzuki, ‘Suzuki Zen’ and the American Reception of Zen Buddhism,” in *American Buddhism as a Way of Life*, ed. Gary Storhoff and John Whalen-Bridge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 49. Walking a middle ground in his interpretation of Suzuki Zen, Ueda claims that “Zen is not philosophy,” but to share it with others, “in the world, it must become philosophy,” Shizuteru Ueda, “Outwardly, be Open: Inwardly, be Deep’: D.T. Suzuki’s ‘Eastern Outlook,’” *Eastern Buddhist* 38, no. 1-2 (2007): 16.

¹⁹⁶ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “The Philosophy of Zen,” *Philosophy East and West* 1, no. 2 (1951): 4.

¹⁹⁷ Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*: 60.

¹⁹⁸ Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism*: 270.

¹⁹⁹ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Co., 1907).

²⁰⁰ Shaku Soen, *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1906).

²⁰¹ Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism*: Chapter 11.

²⁰² Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 39.

²⁰³ Colin Campbell, “The Easternisation of the West,” in *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, ed. Bryan Wilson and Jamie Cresswell (London: Routledge, 2001).

²⁰⁴ Peter B. Clarke, *New Religions in Global Perspective: A Study of Religious Change in the Modern World* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006). 309.

This also makes debates about “orientalism” and “occidentalism” less clear-cut. But as analytical tools, they remain useful. So, before moving to the next section, let me say a few words about *reverse* orientalism. Because even though we cannot blame him for not identifying them as such, both the Hinduism and the Buddhism that Merrell-Wolff adopted were, partly, the product of a reversed orientalism. But what does that mean?

As I see it, reverse orientalism is neither a chauvinism²⁰⁵ or nationalism²⁰⁶ nor a self-orientalism²⁰⁷ of the East, let alone a condemnation²⁰⁸ of or an admiration²⁰⁹ for the West, but rather an eastern re-evaluation of western orientalism.²¹⁰ In seeming paradoxical terms, reverse orientalism redefines the same difference. The East remains “mystical” and the West no less “rational,” but the values attributed to mysticism and rationalism are changed, without changing the underlying modern secular ideals. This last part is crucial, since that could account for its western appeal. Take the concept of religious experience. The secular ideal of obtaining scientific objectivity about reality is still endorsed, but “realization”—*mokṣa* or *satori*—is now made out to be even more objective than reason, for it is said to access reality directly through intuition instead of indirectly through intellection. In sum, the reverse orientalist Neo-Hindus and Neo-Buddhists took an onto-theological investigation onto epistemological grounds. Meanwhile, onto-theology was similarly being epistemologized by the American pragmatists.

²⁰⁵ e.g. John Timothy Wixted, "Reverse Orientalism: Presidential Address delivered to the American Oriental Society," (1989). I believe Wixted confuses a chauvinistic denial for a reversal of orientalism.

²⁰⁶ e.g. Bernard Fauré, "The Kyoto School and Reverse Orientalism," in *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Charles Wei-Hsun Fu and Steven Heine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). Fauré studies a nationalist *ideology* rather than its reverse orientalist *strategy*.

²⁰⁷ e.g. Lisa Lau, "Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 2 (2009). Lau looks at the appropriation and not reversal of orientalism.

²⁰⁸ e.g. Xiaomei Chen, "Occidentalism as Counterdiscourse: 'He Shang' in Post-Mao China," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (1992); Meltem Ahiska, "Occidentalism: The Historical Fantasy of the Modern," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2-3 (2003). More accurately, Chen and Ahiska tell us that in China and in Turkey contradicting images of the West circulate in society to serve both opposites of the same polemic, which is either to distance from (condemnation) or to identify with (admiration) the Occident.

²⁰⁹ e.g. Diana Lary, "Edward Said: Orientalism and Occidentalism," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 17, no. 2 (2006). Lary sees reverse occidentalism as an unqualified admiration of the West in the East and this would make reverse orientalism an unqualified admiration of the East in the West.

²¹⁰ e.g. Michael Hill, "'Asian values' as Reverse Orientalism: Singapore," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 41, no. 2 (2000); Shimona Kanwar, "Orientalism-in-Reverse: Indian Nationalism in the Works of M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru," *Panjab University Research Journal: Arts* (2005); Ryoko Nakano, "Beyond Orientalism and 'Reverse Orientalism': Through the Looking Glass of Japanese Humanism," in *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity*, ed. Robbie Shilliam (London: Routledge, 2011). Perhaps the clearest example is the study of the *Mingei* or “Folkcrafts” theory of Yanagi in Yuko Kikuchi, *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004). Kikuchi sees four consecutive stages: “regular” *Orientalism*; *appropriation of Orientalism*, as a self-orientalism; *oriental Orientalism*, as an orientalism within the orient, which maybe only applies to Japan; and *Reverse Orientalism*, a cultural hybrid of a western polemic that is reconceived in an eastern context and then projected back onto the West.

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[Pragmatism] is generally recognized as the great or principal philosophical contribution made by America, for it generalizes, on the basis of practicality, the use of the cognitive and administrative faculties or functions that bear upon practical problems—perhaps a reflection of what was necessary for the actual conquest of a new country and adapting it to the support of human life in quantities far vaster than was true in the case of the [most particularly metaphysically inclined] Indian cultures. Pragmatism is most particularly non-metaphysical. It speaks of the various functions or faculties in their normal, ordinary usage. It is a philosophical acceptance of the basic orientation of the man in the street, but raising that kind of thinking to a position worthy of academic consideration.²¹¹

In 1859, Charles Darwin (1809-1882) challenged a long-held western conviction about the exclusive origin of the human species.²¹² Humanity was simply a successful result in a long series of natural struggles for survival. His scientific revelation did not receive the amount of attention in America as it did in England, since the former was about to suffer a serious struggle of its own. But things would soon change, after the Civil War.

“[T]he United States during the last three decades of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century was *the* Darwinian country.”²¹³ Hofstadter claims the birth of liberal faith, biblical criticism as well as comparative religion had readied the American mind for Darwinism.²¹⁴ Though, it was not actually Darwin, but his fellow Brit Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who rose to fame across the Atlantic. In the final years of the nineteenth century, no self-respecting intellectual could ignore his ideas. Though he outlived his own popularity—considering the influence of his work faded after the turn of the century²¹⁵—Spencer could be seen as *the* philosopher of his time.

In his multiple volume *Synthetic Philosophy*, an ambitious attempt to integrate the complete range of human knowledge, Spencer combined the principles of natural

²¹¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Philosophy and the New Left (1 of 5)," (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 2.

²¹² Actually, he first only introduced the notion of natural selection, Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray, 1859). Only later would he apply it to the human race, in Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1871/1981).

²¹³ Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944/1955). 8.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹⁵ Alberto Mingardi, *Herbert Spencer* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011). 2. Mingardi suggests that the steady waning of his popularity may have been due to the fact that intellectuals who dared to conceive all-encompassing systems came to be seen as dilettantes, *ibid.*, 135.

selection from biology with the conservation of energy from thermodynamics.²¹⁶ He suggested that anything homogenous inevitably grows into something heterogeneous—from simplicity to increasing complexity—since the energy or “persistent force” in a closed system would cause variations in the development of its parts, until it reached a state of equilibrium.²¹⁷ This takes place on an individual and a collective scale, he said.

In other words, societies also naturally evolve. His theory set the tone for what would come to be known as “Social Darwinism”—though, “Social Spencerism” might be a better term.²¹⁸ According to a typical definition, “the convention is to present Social Darwinism as an ideology defending free-market economics and opposing the interventionist state ... a synonym for *laissez-faire* and an antonym of state socialism or collectivism.” As a matter of fact, it is still being described as such, in recent studies.²¹⁹

However, this description conflates content with function. According to Mike Hawkins, Social Darwinism itself is not ideological, even if it can be used as such. The underlying theory could be a descriptive worldview and a prescriptive ideology.²²⁰ One entails a set of assumptions about the place of humanity in the order of nature and the changes that take place with the passage of time, while the other is an interpretation of human interactions and their mediation by social institutions. Now, when historians such as Hofstadter deprecate Spencer and his philosophy as “products of English Industrialism,” born and raised in an era of competition, exploitation and struggle,²²¹ it is their ideological streak they criticize—their function, not necessarily their content.

Other historians have criticized Hofstadter again,²²² claiming that he concocted “Social Darwinism” as a straw man to debunk capitalism and individualism for his own

²¹⁶ In total, they cover ten volumes, including Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Longmans, 1855); Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1862); Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864); Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882-1898); Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1892).

²¹⁷ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*: 36-37.

²¹⁸ Kevin N. Laland, Gillian R. Brown, *Sense and Nonsense: Evolutionary Perspectives in Human Behaviour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). 42. Indeed, for many people, the name of Herbert Spencer is virtually synonymous with Social Darwinism. Nevertheless, according to Hawkins, a switch to “Social Spencerism” would indicate that Darwinism as such was not already social, which, he thinks, it essentially (also) is, Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 82 & 14.

²¹⁹ R. J. Halliday, “Social Darwinism: A Definition,” *Victorian Studies* 14, no. 4 (1971): 390. A recent example of it can be seen in Mingardi, *Herbert Spencer*: 124; Laland, Brown, *Sense and Nonsense*: 42.

²²⁰ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought*: 21-24. I believe this is a helpful distinction, if we interpret them as Weberian ideal-types, neither of which ever occurs in its pure form.

²²¹ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*: 35.

²²² For instance, one of the most recent critiques on Hofstadter’s Social Darwinism is Thomas Leonard, “Origins of the Myth of Social Darwinism: the Ambiguous Legacy of Richard Hofstadter’s Social Darwinism in American Thought,” *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 71, no. 1 (2009).

ideological purposes.²²³ Nevertheless, I will use this term when we come across socio-political statements by Merrell-Wolff reminiscent of a *laissez-faire* Spencerianism, in the next chapters. But here, I now shift from Social Darwinism to Mental Darwinism.

Pragmatism

In the early stages of the twentieth century—during Merrell-Wolff’s university years—Pragmatism was all around. Emerson and his fellow Transcendentalists are sometimes portrayed as proto-pragmatists, but Pragmatism proper is believed to have started in a short-lived discussion group from the 1870s, the Cambridge Metaphysical Club.²²⁴ Inspired by the evolutionary theory of Chauncey Wright (1830-1875), whom Hofstadter calls its intellectual leader, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) introduced and William James (1842-1910) developed this theory—or should I say methodology?²²⁵ Together with John Dewey (1859-1952)—who would push its philosophy in a more socio-political direction—they gave shape to “classical” American Pragmatism. In addition, German-British “humanist” Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller (1864-1937) and French “vitalist” Henri Bergson (1859-1941) also contributed to the rise of Pragmatism. These five are the only pragmatists mentioned by Merrell-Wolff.²²⁶ Below, I mostly focus on James.

Following Wright’s dismissal of the “useless absolutism” of evolutionist Herbert Spencer,²²⁷ James contended that we can only ascertain abstract convictions by way of concrete practices. Especially habitual practices show which beliefs “work best,” when it comes to adapting human beings to their environment. Pragmatism, then, considers habits the result of a sort of evolutionary litmus test for beliefs—a “Mental Darwinism,”

²²³ Apart from Hofstadter, using “Social Darwinism” as a label for Spencerian philosophy has been discouraged, since it sustains “a huge distortion of both the relationship between [Darwin and Spencer] and the relationship of their ideas that it should no longer be regarded as an available option,” see, for instance, John Offer, *Herbert Spencer and Social Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010). 18.

²²⁴ Sami Pihlström, “Introduction,” in *The Continuum Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. Sami Pihlström (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 5. As Kuklick tells us, the Metaphysical Club was arguably the most influential among a range of speculative societies that emerged after the Civil War, in an attempt, he thinks, to revitalize American intellectual life in quasi-institutional forms, Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). 129.

²²⁵ William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907). 45 & 51. For James, Pragmatism offers a tool for tackling metaphysical problems, which “does not stand for any special results,” but lends “a method only.” Even if Peirce and James agreed on this matter, on many others they did not. At some point, this would bring Peirce to distance himself, not necessarily from James, but from the general application of “Pragmatism,” claiming that it had fallen prey to literary clutches and was being (ab)used for things it had precisely been designed to exclude. And so, he replaced it with his own “Pragmaticism,” which was “ugly enough to be safe from kidnapers,” Charles S. Peirce, “What Pragmatism is,” *The Monist* 15, no. 2 (1905): 165-166.

²²⁶ Merrell-Wolff, “New Left (1 of 5),” 2.

²²⁷ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*: 126.

if you will. From cognition and evolution²²⁸ originated the pragmatic progeny of Kant and Darwin: our mind constructs reality, but reality remains open to change, whereby change depends on a constant competition of beliefs.²²⁹ And this evolutionary competition is not something that occurs (only) mechanistically, as Darwin and Spencer were assumed to suggest, but (also) intentionally. To define the mind solely in terms of an adaptation of the inner world to outer relations, for James, downplays the adaptation of the outer world to inner intentions—the essential role of desire, purpose, interest.²³⁰

In Jamesian Pragmatism, beliefs happen to be true—literally.²³¹ Truth is acquired through and equated with their practical consequences. By affixing verity to praxis, James wanted to provide a method for settling metaphysical disputes that may otherwise remain unresolved.²³² Take God. “[I]f the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true.”²³³ And despite the fact that he abhorred the—what he believed to be—moral and intellectual vacuity of absolute principles, James admits that even “the One” of Vivekananda’s Vedānta, “emotionally considered, has a high pragmatic value,” because it bestows on us “a perfect sumptuousness of security.”²³⁴ Reducing rational metaphysical principles to the empirical psychological consequences of epistemological facts makes sense, in the context of his overall view of philosophy.

Like Emerson, James looked upon philosophy as “man thinking,” which means “an intellectualized attitude towards life.”²³⁵ Its subject matter concerns those ultimate existential questions which science suggests but does not solve—“questions left over as it were.”²³⁶ He divided the answers to these questions into two categories: “rationalist” versus “empiricist.” In the history of western philosophy, one has been promoted by monistic lovers of principles and the other by pluralistic lovers of facts.²³⁷ Clearly, the pragmatists belong to the last group, for they feel “uncomfortable away from facts”—and the fact is that they deplore the excessive transcendentalism of the rationalists.²³⁸

²²⁸ Ibid., 124.

²²⁹ Pihlström, “Introduction,” 5.

²³⁰ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*: 131.

²³¹ “The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event ... its *validation*,” James, *Pragmatism*: 201.

²³² “It is astonishing to see,” so he asserts, “how many philosophical disputes collapse into insignificance the moment you subject them to this simple test of tracing a concrete consequence,” *ibid.*, 45 & 49.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 299.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 151-155.

²³⁵ William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1917). 15 & 6.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

²³⁷ James, *Pragmatism*: 9-11.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 67 & 54.

James argued that “intellectualism” is our glorious ability to translate the flux of feeling-experience into thoughts, but that “vicious intellectualism” confuses thoughts for things.²³⁹ It forgets that “the map is not the territory,” as J.Z. Smith would say.²⁴⁰

Under the influence of Bergson²⁴¹—by far the “most radical anti-intellectualist” among them²⁴²—James felt that the flow of life is arbitrarily constrained in concepts by the intellect. The problem is that “When we conceptualize, we cut out and fix, and exclude everything but what we have fixed.”²⁴³ Emboldened by his fellow pragmatist, he confessed to feeling compelled “to *give up the logic*, fairly, squarely and irrevocably”—the logic of identity that is, which equates thoughts with things—reminding us that “Reality, life, experience, concreteness, immediacy, use what word you will, exceeds our logic.”²⁴⁴ Life obeys a higher logic and employs a deeper rationality, which makes it if not irrational than at least non-rational, he reckoned.²⁴⁵ As Perry puts it, James the empiricist “vitalizes the intellect,” whereas his rationalist rival “intellectualizes life.”²⁴⁶

In his *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, Ralph Barton Perry (1876-1957)—a dedicated student and celebrated biographer of James, who would become a thinker of some repute himself—clarifies that “the pragmatist polemic against intellectualism is insistence on a non-intellectual variety of knowledge, which is more fundamental and more comprehensive than intellection [and] which affords, as James expresses it, real ‘insight’ ...”²⁴⁷ This non-intellectual knowledge recurs as “pure experience” throughout James’s oeuvre. It is the radical empiricist premise underlying his pragmatist philosophy, which strikes the same anti-intellectualist chord that we encountered earlier in evangelicalism, on the one hand, and Theosophy, Neo-Hinduism and Neo-Buddhism, on the other, but in a more reflective manner than the former and a less monistic manner than the latter. This anti-intellectual element may well explain the popular appeal of Pragmatism in America. However, James resented its characterization or caricaturization as “a philosophical acceptance of the basic orientation of the man in the street”

²³⁹ William James, *A Pluralistic Universe: Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909). 217 & 218.

²⁴⁰ Jonathan Zittel Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1978/1993). Chapter 13.

²⁴¹ “[T]he essential contribution of Bergson to philosophy is his criticism of intellectualism. In my opinion he has killed intellectualism ... without hope of recovery,” James, *A Pluralistic Universe*: 214-215.

²⁴² Ralph Barton Perry, *Present Philosophical Tendencies: A Critical Survey of Naturalism, Idealism, Pragmatism and Realism together with a Synopsis of the Philosophy of William James* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1912). 229.

²⁴³ James, *A Pluralistic Universe*: 253.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.

²⁴⁶ Perry, *Present Philosophical Tendencies*: 222.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 224 & 227.

—like Merrell-Wolff did above—because that sounded too anti-intellectual.²⁴⁸ Nevertheless, in the eyes of many of his academic peers, he, too, like Bergson,²⁴⁹ intellectually supported an anti-intellectualism,²⁵⁰ thereby taking a reasoned flight beyond reason.

Despite its ubiquitous presence throughout the university system at the time—including Stanford and Harvard—Pragmatism never charmed Merrell-Wolff. During his studies, he read primary works by James, Dewey and Bergson.²⁵¹ But it seems he mainly relied on secondary sources, such as Carus's critical *Truth on Trial*,²⁵² Moore's biased *Pragmatism and its Critics*²⁵³ and above all Perry's intermediate *Tendencies*.²⁵⁴

Merrell-Wolff was in every way confronted but in no way convinced by American Pragmatism. He did briefly flirt with European alternatives like the vitalism of Bergson

²⁴⁸ Rather, he talks about anti-theoreticism. “[Pragmatism] is usually described as a characteristically American movement ... excellently fitted for the man on the street, who naturally hates theory and wants cash returns immediately,” William James, *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to "Pragmatism"* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909). 185. My point remains unchanged, though. James has the same anti-intellectualist inclination as “the man in the street,” but unlike the man in the street, he tries to support it theoretically. Some contemporary scholars have contended that even though Pragmatism is perceived as “a practical new philosophy for the New World,” it should not be mistaken for “popular anti-intellectualism,” see, for instance, James Campbell, “A History of Pragmatism,” in *The Continuum Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. Sami Pihlström (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 69. Popular and intellectual anti-intellectualism might not be the same, but, for me, they only differ in degree, not in kind—both reflect a recurrent proclivity to practicality in American society.

²⁴⁹ e.g. John E. Russell, “Bergson's Anti-Intellectualism,” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 9, no. 5 (1912).

²⁵⁰ e.g. Paul Carus, “The Anti-Intellectual Movement of To-Day,” *The Monist* 22, no. 3 (1912): 399; Morris R. Cohen, “The Insurgence Against Reason,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 22, no. 5 (1925): 113.

²⁵¹ The pragmatist literature in his own library includes William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911); James, *A Pluralistic Universe*. Based on his references, we know that he also read William James, *The Meaning of Truth* (New York: Greenwood, 1909). The same goes for John Dewey, James H. Tufts, *Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1908). Furthermore, among his papers was found a hand-written summary of Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell, 1907 original French ed. (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1911); see Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Notes on Bergson's *Creative Evolution*,” (after 1944). However, most of his (later) interpretations of Peirce's and James's Pragmatism relied predominantly on James Mark Baldwin, ed. *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (New York: Macmillan 1925).

²⁵² Carus critiqued the “slipshod method” of equating utility with verity, because it lifts belief to the level of truth, Paul Carus, *Truth on Trial: An Exposition on the Nature of Truth, preceded by a Critique of Pragmatism and an Appreciation of Its Leader* (Chicago: The Open Court, 1911). e.g. 10-12 & 24-25.

²⁵³ Addison Webster Moore, *Pragmatism and Its Critics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1910). ix.

²⁵⁴ The *Tendencies* influenced Merrell-Wolff a lot—not just in his views on Pragmatism, but on western philosophy in general—for the one book that he encountered during his studies which would be a go-to source throughout his life was not the reader of key texts by Rand nor the companion to key thinkers by Rogers or the guide to key themes by Russell, not even the Neo-Hegelian entry into metaphysics by Taylor—all of which remained in his library after college—but Perry's textbook. Merrell-Wolff's general knowledge of the ideas of his philosophical idols, including Hegel, who is strangely absent in his library, were very probably based on Benjamin Rand, *Modern Classical Philosophers: Selections Illustrating Modern Philosophy from Bruno to Spencer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908); Arthur Kenyon Rogers, *A Student's History of Philosophy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901/1908); Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1912). The fact that he defended Taylor against the pragmatist attack of his Stanford professor is an early sign of his idealist inclination, Merrell-Wolff, “New Left (1 of 5),” 4-5. Even Taylor—like his mentor, Josiah Royce—still shows the influence of the desire driven epistemology of Pragmatism, though, in his emphasis on individual purpose and in his recurrent defense of the significance of an epistemologized metaphysics, Alfred E. Taylor, *Elements of Metaphysics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909).

—to the extent that he even defended its ideas in class²⁵⁵—but the infatuation was not to last. Besides a “temperamental” preference for reflection over action, which made him more susceptible to rationalism than to empiricism, there were three motives behind his rejection of Pragmatism. He developed them early in life, though did not elaborate them until later. They have to do with mathematics, morality and immediatism.

The first reason is that he mistakenly assumed Pragmatism cannot explain pure mathematics, because it is not based on empirical experience.²⁵⁶ However, Pragmatism does not look to empirical causes but empirical consequences. Like “God” or “the One,” if the belief in “pure mathematics” has verifiable results—if it “works”—then it is true.

The second reason is that he saw Pragmatism as morally objectionable, because it legitimates effective results instead of ethical reasons.²⁵⁷ At the end of a handwritten summary of Moore’s above mentioned book, he ends with an epistemological question: “how can we tell truth from error?”²⁵⁸ That is, how can we ethically tell good from evil and how can we practically distinguish a Jesus Christ from a Dzjengis Khan? The irony here is that James had submitted Pragmatism in response to the very type of monism that Merrell-Wolff, already at this early age, was headed towards, precisely *because*, to him, its holism denied or diminished the practical existence and significance of evil.²⁵⁹

The third reason is that he disliked Bergsonian anti-intellectualism. Based on a discussion of “immediatism versus intellectualism” in Perry,²⁶⁰ Merrell-Wolff paints a fairly accurate picture of Bergsonianism in which the intellect is perceived as “a partial aspect of life, [which], therefore, cannot comprehend life, since the part cannot comprehend the whole.” This is where Darwinian evolution comes into play, he says, which has been extended by others on a cosmic scale. I take it, he is referring to Spencer. The general tendency in the West is to draw a cosmic image of life as a blind mechanism, he elaborates, whereby higher forms and functions arise out of lower ones, which they cannot comprehend. But this is not the *only* version of evolution. Think of Blavatsky, he says. She provided an entirely different perspective. According to her, evolution is a purposeful unfoldment of the divine, whereby the mind that emerges from life is a more comprehensive principle than life itself. Details aside, this just goes to show that “the bare conception of evolution does not of itself support the thesis of Bergson; it

²⁵⁵ Merrell-Wolff, “New Left (1 of 5),” 1.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁵⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Notes on Moore’s *Pragmatism and Its Critics*,” (after 1910), 22.

²⁵⁹ Timothy L. S. Sprigge, “James, Empiricism and Absolute Idealism,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. John R. Shook and Joseph Margolis (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 166.

²⁶⁰ Perry, *Present Philosophical Tendencies*: Chapter 10, especially 222-225.

depends upon how evolution is conceived.”²⁶¹ Even if this is true, Merrell-Wolff failed to either notice or mention that the anti-intellectualism in the “creative evolution” of Bergson was itself a critical reaction to the vicious intellectualism in the “mechanistic evolution” of Spencer, which he still seemed to take as its underlying paradigm. Nonetheless, *the* reason for his opposition to Pragmatism would ensue from a life-changing experience, which we shall work towards in the coming chapters. He puts it as follows.

[L]et me make perfectly clear that I do not have any basic quarrel with the idea that “immediatism,” in at least some forms, takes primacy over “mediate” knowledge. My quarrel is with the idea that this immediatism is merely a function of life. There are other forms of immediatism—with which I am acquainted—that are not functions of life. This is the crux of the matter. That there is an immediatism connected with life, there can be no doubt ... But the immediatism that opens the Door to the higher knowledge, namely that of Fundamental Realization, is of a very different sort. This is the immediatism, and the only immediatism, that answers the ultimate questions—the metaphysical type of questions.²⁶²

PSYCHOLOGY

Most of the material of science is based on external observation of empirical fact and is submitted to various controls that are essentially simple, but psychological process depends on internal observation, which has been called “introspection.” Here, there is one difficulty: the introspective observation is private to the individual and not at all easily correctable by any other person ... This renders psychological research in this sort of field less capable of objective control than the material of the more objective sciences ... Some have even gone so far as to try to deal with facts of consciousness by the observation of objective behavior.²⁶³

Towards the close of the eighteenth century, Viennese physician Franz Anton Mesmer

²⁶¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy and the New Left (2 of 5),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 3-5. See also Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell, 1911 original French ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 1944). 167-193. Surprisingly, even though he kept elaborate notes on this book, Merrell-Wolff does not mention a single word about Bergson’s own criticism of Spencerian evolution, *ibid.*, 395-402; Merrell-Wolff, “Notes on Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*.”

²⁶² Merrell-Wolff, “New Left (2 of 5),” 6. I will elaborate on “immediatism,” at the end of the Chapter 4.

²⁶³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Three Fundamentals of Introceptive Philosophy (3 of 16),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1973), 2-3.

(1734-1815) claimed to have made an epoch-making discovery.²⁶⁴ He had supposedly stumbled on a subtle fluid-like substance that permeated the physical universe, which he called “animal magnetism.” Mesmer was certain his discovery would alter our understanding of science in general and medicine in particular. He reckoned all maladies could be remedied by removing distortions in the body’s supply of animal magnetism.

Mesmer created specific techniques in which a patient or group of patients who suffered from physical or mental ailments were brought to “sleep”—a somnabulic or hypnotic trance state. Sitting in a circle around a tub filled with magnetized iron bars and mesmerized water, they were submerged in an environment “designed to produce a crisis in the patient”—drawn curtains, heavy carpets, weird decorations on the walls, glints of light bouncing off strategically placed mirrors shimmering across the ceiling and soothing music merging with the rippling of the water in the background—often inducing epileptic-fit-like convulsions, which were reported to restore their health.²⁶⁵

Even more spectacular, Robert Darnton says, were the experiments of induced hypnosis by French aristocrat Armand Marie Jacques de Chastenet, Marquis de Puységur (1751-1825). He was supposedly able to have mesmerized patients diagnose the cause of their own sickness and predict the date of their recovery as well as have them perform uncanny feats of telepathy, clairvoyance and communication with the dead.²⁶⁶ Mesmer and Puységur showed “the existence of a stratum of mental life just below the threshold of ordinary consciousness,” revolutionizing the study of the mind.²⁶⁷ Their pioneering work paved the road for New Thought and New Psychology in America.²⁶⁸

New Thought

[My] friend was opposed to the idea of killing any creatures, but she wanted to get rid of the ants [in her kitchen], so she proceeded to use a method which she called “new thought” ... She affirmed, so she said, the ants away ... What she had succeeded in doing by her affirmation was simply this: she destroyed her power to see ants in the cooler ... She was living ... in a *maya* which she had created.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ Fuller, *Spiritual, but not Religious*: 30-31.

²⁶⁵ Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968). 3-10.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁶⁷ Fuller, *Spiritual, but not Religious*: 32.

²⁶⁸ Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*: Part 2.

²⁶⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "The Three Fundamentals of Introceptive Philosophy (9 of 16)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1974), 4-5.

In 1836, Mesmerism was carried from Europe to America by Charles Poyen (d. 1844), who had studied under Puységur. For three years, he gave lectures and demonstrations on “the phenomena of somnambulism,”²⁷⁰ throughout New England, before returning to his native France. Poyen learned that the Americans, much like the French,²⁷¹ were committed to the intellectual ideals of the Enlightenment, which made a retreat into the established church religions impossible, but still struggled to cope with the loss of meaning that followed in the wake of its disenchanting rationalism.²⁷² They, too, were yearning for a science that would shade into an unchurched religion and straddle the borders between intellect and intuition. Mesmerism seemed to offer them just that.²⁷³

Word of this promising new metaphysical “science” quickly spread across New England, where it inspired a host of “magnetic healers.” Among them was British physician Robert Hanham Collyer (1814-1865), who mixed his phrenological past with his mesmeric present, as Albanese puts it, and then took to the popular lecture circuit.²⁷⁴

This is how Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-1866) first encountered “nervous congestion,” as hypnosis was sometimes called. According to New Thought historian and Boston Metaphysical Club²⁷⁵ founder Horatio Dresser (1866-1954), Quimby began to experiment with Mesmerism, after he had attended one of Collyer’s demonstrations, in 1838.²⁷⁶ “Quimby’s manner of operating with his subject was to sit opposite to him, holding both his hands in his and looking him intently in the eye, for a short time, when the subject would go into that state known as the mesmeric sleep ...”²⁷⁷ Initially, he used the intuitive vision of Lucius Burkmarr to diagnose patients—the young man had proven highly susceptible to hypnosis, during which he had remarkable clairvoyant insights—

²⁷⁰ “Suspension, more or less complete, of the external sensibility; intimate connection with the magnetizer and with no other one; influence of the will; communication of thought; clairvoyance or the faculty of seeing through various parts of the body, the eyes remaining closed; unusual development of sympathy, memory and of the power of imagination; faculty of appreciating and keeping time; faculty for seizing the symptoms of diseases and prescribing proper remedies for them; entire forgetting, after awakening, of what has transpired during the state of somnambulism,” Charles Poyen, *Progress of Animal Magnetism in New England: Being a Collection of Experiments, Reports and Certificates from the Most Respectable Sources, Preceded by a Dissertation on the Proof of Animal Magnetism* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan & Co., 1837). 63. For him, these constituted the phenomena of somnambulism.

²⁷¹ Darnton, *Mesmerism*: 165.

²⁷² Fuller, *Spiritual, but not Religious*: 36 & 45.

²⁷³ Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*: 103; Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*: 190.

²⁷⁴ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*: 197 & 199.

²⁷⁵, Horatio W. Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1919). 82-83. Not to be confused with the Cambridge Metaphysical Club of the pragmatists.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 29. Maybe an inconsequential detail, but based on Collyer’s own account, this must have been one or two years later, considering he had been skeptical of Mesmerism until he experienced it himself, in October 1839, Robert Hanham Collyer, *Mysteries of the Vital Element in Connection with Dreams, Somnambulism, Trance, Vital Photography, Faith and Will, Anaesthesia, Nervous Congestion and Creative Function: Modern Spiritualism Explained* (London: Henry Renshaw, 1871). Chapter 5, 48.

²⁷⁷ Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement*: 30. Collyer, *Mysteries of the Vital Element*: 48.

but soon found to have such abilities of his own. Eventually, though, he would discard Mesmerism, after it had dawned on him that the secret did not reside in the power of somnambulism, but in the power of suggestion.²⁷⁸ It was not he who was curing others; they were curing themselves through the power of thought. In fact, he reckoned, their beliefs were both the *cure* and the *cause* of their sickness. “Quimby claimed that the real source of human health is the magnetic fluid or vital force that enters the human nervous system through the deepest levels of the mind [the unconscious],” whereby “Beliefs function like control valves or flood gates ...”²⁷⁹ Although Quimby had never heard of a Swedenborg or Emerson,²⁸⁰ his “mind cure” was effectively translating their abstract metaphysics of spiritual self-cultivation into practical psychological terms.²⁸¹

This “mental science” was taken up by former Methodist minister Warren Felt Evans (1817-1889). In his first book *The New Age and its Messenger*,²⁸² Evans suggested there to be three grand dispensations, corresponding to the three ways in which God supposedly manifested himself to the world. The Age of the Father had been one of sensation, the Age of the Son one of intellection and the impending Age of the Holy Spirit would be one of intuition. This third “millennial age” had been long anticipated by Emanuel Swedenborg, he said, “the most remarkable man in modern ecclesiastical history.” It was not until his second book *The Mental Cure*²⁸³ that Evans thematized “the subject of Mental Hygiene,” probing the untapped psychological potential said to lay hidden in the recesses of our mind—albeit still in Swedenborgian terms. According to Dresser,²⁸⁴ it was the “applied idealism” of *The Divine Law of Cure*²⁸⁵ that set the stage for New Thought. In *Esoteric Christianity and Mental Therapeutics*,²⁸⁶ he stuck these topics together: mental science is identical with the true teaching of Jesus Christ,

²⁷⁸ Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement*: Chapters 2 & 3, in particular 30-31, 45 & 36.

²⁷⁹ Fuller, *Spiritual, but not Religious*: 46.

²⁸⁰ Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement*: 22.

²⁸¹ Fuller, *Spiritual, but not Religious*: 47; Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement*: 8 & 135.

²⁸² Warren Felt Evans, *The New Age and Its Messenger* (Boston: T.H. Carter & Company, 1864). 5-8.

²⁸³ Warren Felt Evans, *The Mental Cure: Illustrating the Influence of the Mind on the Body, both in Health and Disease, and the Psychological Method of Treatment* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1869/1886). iii-iv.

²⁸⁴ Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement*: 75 & 89.

²⁸⁵ “No intelligent observer of the signs of the times can fail to notice among philosophical minds a marked reaction against the dominant scientific materialism of the past century, and a tendency to return to a more spiritual view of human nature and the world at large. Idealism, which has always had a strong hold upon the deepest thinkers of the world from Plato downward, is again coming into prominence ... [I] attempt to construct a theoretical and practical system of phrenopathy or mental-cure, on the basis of the idealistic philosophy of Berkeley, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel,” Warren Felt Evans, *The Divine Law of Cure* (Boston: H.H. Carter & Co., 1884). 9.

²⁸⁶ Warren Felt Evans, *Esoteric Christianity and Mental Therapeutics* (Boston: H.H. Carter & Karrick Publishers, 1886). 4, 6-7.

whose “prenopathic method of cure” is based on intercommunion of mind with mind, which he also describes as the divine law of “mental sympathy” or “mental induction.”

Meanwhile, others like Mary Baker Eddy (Mary Morse Baker, 1821-1910) were also moving away from the animal magnetism of Poyen. Like Evans, Eddy had been a student of Quimby who used his ideas for a psychologized take on the New Testament, starting with *Science and Health*.²⁸⁷ Yet, she says, “the Science of divine metaphysical healing which I afterwards named Christian Science” resulted from a “great discovery” of her own, after the death of the “magnetic doctor.”²⁸⁸ In tacitly Newtonian terms, she recalls her immediate (willed) recovery of an accident as “the falling apple that led me to the discovery how to be well myself and how to make others so.”²⁸⁹ Many, including Dresser, accused her of plagiarizing Quimby.²⁹⁰ It would go too far to delve into these polemics. Important to take away from it for us is that a rise (in awareness) of similar mental healers and mind cure movements with similar quasi-therapeutic ideologies—reminiscent of Transcendentalism, consonant with Theosophy and anticipant of New Thought²⁹¹—increasingly stimulated those involved to intellectualize their largely anti-intellectual methods and theories, to create and sustain their own “unique” identity.

After 1890, the most recent mind cure incarnation of “New Thought” presented itself as a practical psychological application of the ageless idealism of Indian Vedānta, Greek Platonism and German and American Transcendentalism, which deem the soul or self to be one with the absolute reality of mind over and above the relative reality of matter.²⁹² By the end of the nineteenth century, their perennialist and orientalist bent

²⁸⁷ Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1875/2006). For her criticism on “animal magnetism,” see in particular Chapter 5.

²⁸⁸ Mary Baker Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* (Boston: Allison V. Stewart, 1891/1915). Chapter 10. Stephen Stein says that some deem this chapter the dividing line between the retrospective and the introspective portion of Eddy’s autobiography, while he believes these to cover the first twenty and the last ten chapters, Stephen J. Stein, ““Retrospection and Introspection”: The Gospel According to Mary Baker Eddy,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 75, no. 1 (1982): 97, 99-100. His close reading further shows that Eddy’s autobiography is replete with subtle Biblical references, which he considers unlikely *not* to have been part of a conscious design, given her recurrent preoccupation with the Bible.

²⁸⁹ Baker Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection*: 24.

²⁹⁰ Though claiming impartiality, “without any desire to enter into a controversy regarding the indebtedness of one leader to another,” his views about Eddy’s discarding of Quimby and ignoring Evans are obviously negatively biased, Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement*: Chapter 5, 97 & 119.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 128, 129, 135-6, 141-2.

²⁹² See e.g. Anonymous, “The Metaphysical Movement: From a Statement by the Metaphysical Club issued in *The Higher Law*, in 1901,” in *The Spirit of the New Thought: Essays and Addresses by Representative Authors and Leaders*, ed. Horatio Dresser (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1917); Nannie S. Bond, “The New Thought,” in *The Spirit of the New Thought: Essays and Addresses by Representative Authors and Leaders*, ed. Horatio Dresser (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1917); Egbert Morse Chesley, “The Significance of the New Metaphysical Movement,” in *The Spirit of the New Thought: Essays and Addresses by Representative Authors and Leaders*, ed. Horatio Dresser (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1917), all in the same anthology by Dresser.

spawned hybrids of western philosophical and psychological principles with eastern religious practices,²⁹³ which further fueled their introspective tendency: “If the soul is one with God ... it must look within for Truth.”²⁹⁴ A belief in the power of “suggestion” or “affirmation” went hand in hand with a desire for the “realization” or “recognition” of the essence of these affirmations, by means of silent reflection and meditation.²⁹⁵

At the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the most prolific writers on the realization of affirmation in meditation was William Walker Atkinson (1862-1932), yet many readers would have only known him by one of his pseudonyms. Maybe his most successful double-role was that of Yogi Ramacharaka,²⁹⁶ who combined the celebration of will and control of New Thought with the oriental(ist) quest for inner quietude of Theosophy and Neo-Vedānta²⁹⁷—typically, in “a series of lessons” for a healthy body, mind and soul.²⁹⁸ This “embodied spirituality,” if you will, always had a strong anti-intellectual ring to it. For “Despite frequent philosophizing, most New Thought people seem to have been searching for practical and concrete methods of coping with their daily physical, psychological and spiritual problems.”²⁹⁹ Thus, Ramacharaka provided rational guides for practical exercises that would lead them beyond reason. With the religious authority of an Indian Yogi, he claimed the occidental student of oriental occultism need not learn more about the intellect, but about those faculties or functions of mind which textbooks on psychology pass by or deny, in a word, about intuition.³⁰⁰

²⁹³ Carl T. Jackson, “The New Thought Movement and the Nineteenth-Century Discovery of Oriental Philosophy,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 3 (1975).

²⁹⁴ Bond, “The New Thought,” 136.

²⁹⁵ Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement*: 158 & 162-163. Christian inclined members like Charles (1854-1948) and Myrtle Fillmore (1881-1931)—founders of the Unity School of Christianity—would also speak of “silent prayer.” e.g. Glenn R. Mosley, *New Thought, Ancient Wisdom: The History and Future of the New Thought Movement* (Philladelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006). 12-14.

²⁹⁶ Jackson, “New Thought and Oriental Philosophy,” 538. Jackson believes Atkinson was not the only, but probably the most successful, western writer who posed as an eastern teacher, since he managed to mislead even Dresser, “one of the most knowledgeable observers in the movement,” who would refer to Atkinson and Ramacharaka as separate individuals. Ironically, in mentioning *other* examples, Jackson names Swami Bhakta Vishita, which is actually likely to have been yet another pseudonym of Atkinson.

²⁹⁷ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*: 58-62. Catherine L. Albanese, “Sacred (and Secular) Self-Fashioning: Esalen and the American Transformation of Yoga,” in *On the Edge of the Future: Esalen and the Evolution of American Culture*, ed. Jeffrey J. Kripal and Glenn W. Shuck (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 55-60.

²⁹⁸ Among others, Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Gnani Yoga: The Yoga of Wisdom* (Hollister: YOGebooks, 1907/2010); Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Mystic Christianity: The Inner Teachings of The Master* (Hollister: YOGebooks, 1908/2010); Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons on the Inner Teachings of the Philosophies and Religions of India* (Hollister: YOGebooks, 1909/2010); Ramacharaka, *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism*; Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Raja Yoga* (Hollister: YOGebooks, 1906/2010). Merrell-Wolff had several of these titles.

²⁹⁹ Jackson, “New Thought and Oriental Philosophy,” 534.

³⁰⁰ “Intuition is just as real a mental faculty as is Intellect, though its processes are hidden.” This “core claim” can be found in every one of his books, e.g. Ramacharaka, *Advanced Course in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism* (Hollister: YOGebooks, 1905/2010). 252; Ramacharaka, *Raja Yoga*: 159-160.

At this point, Merrell-Wolff had read one or two New Thought books, but over half a dozen by Panchadasi and Ramacharaka—that is to say, Atkinson.³⁰¹ Despite his sharp criticism of what he regarded as their self-delusional ideology, New Thought thinkers in general and Atkinson in particular would influence him a lot more than he realized. These influences will become apparent in the following chapters. For now, it suffices to know that their shared interest in self-reflection and meditation paralleled the inward turn of the “New Psychology.” In fact, relying on a Jamesian Pragmatism, Atkinson believed that the New Psychology was similar to New Thought, in the sense that they were much more interested in the practical “how” than the intellectual “why” of things.³⁰² Echoing Emersonian “self-cultivation,” he explained that they were both practical and useful for “character-building.”³⁰³ And Merrell-Wolff would have further agreed with him that the secret to character-building lies in the turn of consciousness towards itself, whereby the introspection of modern psychology supposedly serves the same purpose as the meditation of religion and the reflection of philosophy, which is to realize or recognize that one is not the body or mind, but that “I am.”³⁰⁴ This shows that metaphysical movements like New Thought created a “psychological sensibility” in American society,³⁰⁵ whose origins preceded or paralleled the rise of the New Psychology.³⁰⁶ In fact, outside the university their practical introspection *was* psychology.

³⁰¹ The only explicit New Thought books in his library are Frank Channing Haddock, *Power of Will: A Practical Companion Book for Unfoldment of the Powers of Mind, in Three Parts embracing: The Theory and Practice of Growing Will; Direct Control of the Personal Faculties; and Success in the Conduct of Affairs* (Meriden: The Delton Publishing Company, 1918); Fenwicke L. Holmes, *The Law of Mind in Action: Daily Lessons and Treatments in Mental and Spiritual Science* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1919); Uriel Buchanan, *The Mind's Attainment: A Study of Laws and Methods for Obtaining Individual Happiness, Success and Power through the Silent Force of Thought* (Chicago: The Psychic Research Company, 1902). Implicit titles are Ramacharaka, *The Spirit of the Upanishads*; Swami Panchadasi, *The Human Aura: Astral Colors and Thought Forms* (Chicago: Advanced Thought Publishing, 1912/1915); Ramacharaka, *The Bhagavad Gita*; Ramacharaka, *Raja Yoga*; Ramacharaka, *Hatha Yoga*; Ramacharaka, *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism*; Ramacharaka, *Advanced Course in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism* (Chicago: The Yogi Publication Society, 1904/1905). Note, there is not a single book by Atkinson under his real name.

³⁰² William Walker Atkinson, *The New Psychology: Its Message, Principles and Practice* (Hollister: YOGebooks, 1909/2010). vii, 4, 7-8 & 128; cf. Jackson, “New Thought and Oriental Philosophy,” 534.

³⁰³ Atkinson, *The New Psychology*: 6.

³⁰⁴ “The New Psychology is bound up with this recognition of the ‘I’—that it revolves around this ‘I’ as a wheel around its center. We regard all of the mental faculties, powers, organs, qualities and modes of expression, as merely instruments, tools, or channels of expression of this wonderful Something—the Self, the pure Ego—the ‘I.’ You are something more than body or senses or mind—you are that wonderful Something, master of all these things, but of which you can say but one thing: ‘I am,’” *ibid.*, 14.

³⁰⁵ Wade E. Pickren, Alexandra Rutherford, *A History of Modern Psychology in Context* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2010). Chapter 4, in particular 75, 79-80.

³⁰⁶ New Thought thinker Nannie Bond even suggests that “The new psychology, if not an outcome, is a co-ordinate factor with the New Thought: the one helps the other,” see Bond, “The New Thought,” 140.

New Psychology

It must be remembered, [these] were the days of experimental psychology, before depth psychology had come forth and was recognized. The big name of the time worldwide was Wundt. The leading name in this country was Titchener. It was subsequent to the days when James was the big name in America. The work of Freud was not yet recognized, and Jung had not yet emerged. In fact, I found that many in the Stanford faculty felt that psychology was a false science and should not have been dignified by being established as a department.³⁰⁷

Merrell-Wolff went to college at the peak of “experimental psychology.”³⁰⁸ During the preceding decades, the budding discipline had been slowly but steadily on the rise. In 1888, James McKeen Cattell (1860-1944)—the very first professor of psychology in America—ended his survey of recent studies in his field with the hope that they would, *some day*, lead to an “as accurate and complete knowledge of mind as of the physical world.”³⁰⁹ Five years later, in a follow-up article, Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927) predicted that, *in the near future*, there would be “a body of knowledge sufficient to justify the claim of the science to independence.”³¹⁰ Ten years later, several of their peers did just that. After a quarter-century of research, they claimed that “*Then*, one’s psychology ... was dependent upon his philosophy. *Now*, one’s philosophy depends upon his psychology ...”³¹¹ Because of this, “Psychology is now a science.”³¹² However, its status as a separate scientific discipline was not yet as undisputed as they made it seem.

Around 1912, when the field already existed for thirty years, Merrell-Wolff still found that it was being attacked, on both sides, by scientists and philosophers alike. For scientists, psychology was too similar to popular self-help practices, too subjective and too often stuck in a reflexive circle—too much like philosophy. And if it did belong to their natural sciences, they wondered why it was not branched under physiology.³¹³

³⁰⁷ Merrell-Wolff, “Jungian Psychology (4 of 7),” 6.

³⁰⁸ Roughly, between 1903 and 1913, Kurt Danziger, *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990/1998), 42. At Stanford, he also worked as a student assistant within the psychology department, Merrell-Wolff, “My Academic Life,” 2.

³⁰⁹ James McKeen Cattell, “The Psychological Laboratory at Leipsic,” *Mind* 13, no. 49 (1888): 51.

³¹⁰ Edward Bradford Titchener, “The Leipsic School of Experimental Psychology,” *Mind* 1, no. 2 (1892): 234. At this time, though, he was still fencing off critics like Jowett and Ward, Edward Bradford Titchener, “Two Recent Criticisms of ‘Modern’ Psychology,” *The Philosophical Review* 2, no. 4 (1893).

³¹¹ Edward Franklin Buchner, “A Quarter Century of Psychology in America: 1878-1903,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 14, no. 3/4 (1903): 410, italics mine.

³¹² F. C. French, “The Relation of Psychology to the Philosophy of Religion,” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 2, no. 26 (1905): 701.

³¹³ Roger Smith, *Between Mind and Nature: A History of Psychology* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 14-16 & 93.

For philosophers, its physiological focus was precisely their biggest concern, because they feared a materialist psychology was sure to lose sight of immaterial values.³¹⁴ As Kurt Danziger explains, the gap between the natural and the humanistic sciences had become an unbridgeable chasm, with psychology caught in the middle.³¹⁵ This schizophrenic predicament can be partly ascribed to the ambiguous agenda of its “founder.”

Although there never was a single event or a single hero that started it all,³¹⁶ the origin of “scientific psychology” is often traced to the creation of the Leipzig laboratory by Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt (1832-1920), in 1879. The laboratory put his *Principles of Physiological Psychology*³¹⁷ into practice, which would indeed determine “the very fabric and texture of modern psychology.”³¹⁸ But, as Danziger points out, Wundt’s fate proved similar to that of the sorcerer’s apprentice. He set forces in motion that passed beyond his control and weakened the very cause for which he had put them to work.³¹⁹

Taking his cue from Franz Brentano (1838-1917),³²⁰ Wundt distinguished between inner observation and inner perception—introspection versus introception,³²¹ if you will. One is to be merely aware of internal events, while the other is to study them systematically. “Experimental psychology” entailed the latter, gathering data through methodical inner perception within a controlled environment. During these early days, the subject of those experiments would often be one of the experimenters—sometimes even Wundt himself—because they judged themselves best equipped for the job.³²² By adopting the observational approach of the natural sciences, psychology was meant to bring renewed zeal to the humanities. At least, that is the way Wundt had envisioned it.

³¹⁴ Their concerns increased by their “crisis in confidence.” The natural sciences were challenging them in three ways, at once: *metaphysically*, they threatened value-oriented worldviews; *methodologically*, they seemed more practically successful; *sociologically*, they were gaining ground within the academy or even the intellectual community at large, Daniel J. Wilson, “Science and the Crisis of Confidence in American Philosophy, 1870-1930,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 23, no. 2 (1987): 237.

³¹⁵ Danziger, *Constructing the Subject*: 41.

³¹⁶ Smith, *Between Mind and Nature*: 17. It is safe to say that scholars working at German universities in the mid-late 1800s were its pioneers, Pickren, Rutherford, *Modern Psychology in Context*: 42.

³¹⁷ The first textbook in its field, Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt, *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, trans. Edward Bradford Titchener, 1874 original German ed. (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1904).

³¹⁸ Edward Bradford Titchener, “Wilhelm Wundt,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 32, no. 2 (1921): 173 & 177. Titchener deemed Wundt the founder not just of experimental but of all psychology.

³¹⁹ Danziger, *Constructing the Subject*: 28 & 34.

³²⁰ “Psychology, like the natural sciences, has its basis in perception and experience ... [I]ts source is to be found in the *inner perception* of our own mental phenomena ... Note, however, that we said that *inner perception* [*Wahrnehmung*] and not *introspection*, i.e. *inner observation* [*Beobachtung*], constitutes this primary and essential source of psychology ... In observation, we direct our full attention to a phenomenon in order to apprehend it accurately. But with objects of inner perception this is absolutely impossible,” Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. Antos C. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell, and Linda L. McAlister, 1874 original German ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009). 22-26.

³²¹ Simons, Introduction to Brentano, *ibid.*, xvi.

³²² Danziger, *Constructing the Subject*: Chapter 4, in particular 51-52.

He viewed psychology as a new *method* for solving *philosophical* questions.³²³ But to his dismay, it became a new *discipline* of its own for solving *physiological* questions.³²⁴

This change gained momentum after its transition to America. There, the new psychologists switched their allegiance. They now tried to convince their peers, as well as themselves, that their niche was really more of a science than a philosophy.³²⁵ “More firmly than anyone else in North America, [Titchener] promulgated psychology as a disciplined training in natural science.”³²⁶ As a onetime student of Wundt and longtime professor of Psychology at Cornell University, his words carried considerable weight. So, when he claimed that Wundt had intended experimental psychology to be its own scientific discipline, similar to experimental physiology, it was accepted as a fact.³²⁷ A whole generation of academic students of psychology, then, including Merrell-Wolff, was actually taught Titchener’s interpretation of Wundt’s experimental psychology.³²⁸

For Titchener, psychology was never the method, introspection was. In his own words, “Introspection presupposes a particular scientific standpoint, that of descriptive psychology. It is not, however, adequate of itself to furnish a psychological system; like other scientific methods, it supplies materials which, by the aid of [added] explanatory principles, may be worked up into a system.”³²⁹ It will help to keep this theory about the method of introspection in mind, when we look at Merrell-Wolff’s ideology, later.

³²³ Smith, *Between Mind and Nature*: 84; Pickren, Rutherford, *Modern Psychology in Context*: 52.

³²⁴ Wundt even deliberately hindered this development, Danziger, *Constructing the Subject*: 39-42.

³²⁵ “Much experimental research was undertaken specifically to make psychology a science by giving it an observable and quantifiable subject-matter, knowable in the way physical objects are known,” during the identity crisis, when “psychologists desired to be objective like natural scientists, but feared they were not,” which explains their concern for methods, Smith, *Between Mind and Nature*: 138-139.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

³²⁷ Edward Bradford Titchener, “Brentano and Wundt: Empirical and Experimental Psychology,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 32, no. 1 (1921): 120; Edward Bradford Titchener, “Experimental Psychology: A Retrospect,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 36, no. 3 (1925): 313-4. Titchener even claimed that “Wundt does not discuss method at all,” *ibid.*, 319. But this obviously misses or misrepresents the whole point, that for Wundt psychology itself *was* the method (in service of philosophy).

³²⁸ As Evans informs us, Titchener’s *Experimental Psychology* was the standard textbook at American universities, for more than thirty years, Rand B. Evans, “Edward Bradford Titchener,” in *Encyclopedia of the History of Psychological Theories*, ed. Robert W. Rieber (New York: Springer, 2012), 1134; Edward Bradford Titchener, *Experimental Psychology: A Manual of Laboratory Practice, Volume 2: Quantitative Experiments, Part 1: Student’s Manual*, vol. 2 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905); Edward Bradford Titchener, *Experimental Psychology: A Manual of Laboratory Practice, Volume 1: Qualitative Experiments, Part 1: Student’s Manual*, vol. 1 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902). No surprise that Merrell-Wolff’s psychology courses at Stanford used these manuals.

³²⁹ “The method of introspection is still generally regarded as the most important means of psychological knowledge. The introspection of the laboratory must, however, be distinguished from that either of a moralizing common sense or of a rationalizing philosophy ... Introspection implies self-consciousness only in the sense and to the degree in which all scientific observation implies self-consciousness. And its employment need not be conscious; for time and experience reduce it to a habit,” Edward Bradford Titchener, “Prolegomena to a Study of Introspection,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 23, no. 3 (1912): 448. See Edward Bradford Titchener, “The Schema of Introspection,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 23, no. 4 (1912). for a detailed description of his interpretation of introspection.

Titchener's "Structuralism" or "Introspectionism" is still commonly seen as the typical Anglo-American product of experimental psychology at the turn of the century, said to "outwundt Wundt." Christian Beenfeldt has convincingly shown that this is a distorted image, for several reasons.³³⁰ Titchener never referred to his psychology as *Structuralism* or *Introspectionism*, for instance. Both are polemical terms coined by his critics.³³¹ More significant, though, is that Titchener implicitly projected his own Mill-inspired associationist premises back onto Wundt's experimental psychology.³³²

The British Empiricism that originated with Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hume (1711-1776) and later continued with James (1773-1836) and John Stuart (1806-1873) Mill is also called "Associationism." Their theories of mind are based on the principle of the association of ideas—whereby every idea can ultimately be traced to a sensory experience.³³³ Unlike Wundt, but like the associationists, Titchener set out to dissect complex mental phenomena into simple sensations. His method entailed descriptive records of inner events, which could be worked into a system by adding explanatory principles not found in the "rough data" itself.³³⁴ Ironically, this "systematic experimental introspection"³³⁵ resorted to the very method that Wundt had rejected for studying complex psychological processes: inner observation.

One could argue that this inner observation of the New Psychology was a more sophisticated form of the meditative self-reflection of New Thought. The four rules of introspection—impartiality, attentiveness, comfort, freshness—for instance, also apply to the "mental drill" of Atkinson.³³⁶ However, Titchener emphasized that the scientific introspection of experts differs from the popular introspection of amateurs. The latter lack proper training, he said, which makes them (more) prone to confuse interpretation

³³⁰ Christian Beenfeldt, *The Philosophical Background and Scientific Legacy of E. B. Titchener's Psychology: Understanding Introspectionism* (London: Springer, 2013). I primarily rely on his study.

³³¹ These labels were first used by James Rowland Angell and John Watson, respectively, *ibid.*, x, 33.

³³² This is the central claim of Beenfeldt's book, e.g. *ibid.*, 41-2 & 72. James Mill (1773-1836) was "the accepted oracle of associationism," Brett in *ibid.*, 17. Titchener himself does actually inform us that "it was a paragraph in James Mill, most unpsychological of psychologists, that set me on the introspective track," Edward Bradford Titchener, *A Beginner's Psychology* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1915/1916). vii. Later, he perceived—better yet, projected—this influence in the work of his mentor, in suggesting that "I have no doubt to Wundt's indebtedness to Mill ..." Titchener, "Wilhelm Wundt," 165.

³³³ Beenfeldt, *E.B. Titchener's Psychology*: Chapter 1 & 2.

³³⁴ Titchener, "The Schema of Introspection," 486 & 488-9.

³³⁵ Titchener, "Prolegomena to a Study of Introspection," 426.

³³⁶ Edward Bradford Titchener, *A Primer of Psychology* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1898). 34. cf. "Place yourself in a calm, restful condition, that you may be able to meditate upon the matters that we shall place before you for consideration ... We wish to call your attention to several mental impressions or conditions, one after another, in order that you may realize that they are merely something incident to you and not YOU yourself ... Let us begin by considering the thoughts more closely connected with the body and work up to the higher mental states," Yogi Ramacharaka, *Raja Yoga*: 30.

with inspection—so-called “stimulus errors.”³³⁷ Significant for us is that “expert” and “amateur” psychology were both concerned with the inner observation of experiences.

Psychology in general, then, was rightly viewed as being very experiential. This image posed a serious problem within a modern western academic setting where most were losing faith in the reliability of human “subjective” observation, as it was increasingly trumped by the accuracy of mechanical “objective” registration—exemplified by the recent invention of photography.³³⁸ In response, Titchener simply argued that the objects of the physical and psychological sciences are different, but that the method of observation is the same and that the *trained* psychologist, like the trained scientist, is able to produce records of its subject-matter that are “photographically accurate.”³³⁹

Titchener was fighting a losing battle, though, which culminated in the “imageless thought” controversy. This debate started when psychologists from the Würzburg School of Oswald Külpe (1862-1915)—another dissenting student of Wundt—reported to have observed thoughts without any mental pictures or sensations,³⁴⁰ which flew in the face of Titchener’s associationist convictions. One of his functionalist opponents, James Rowland Angell (1869-1949), even backed him on this. He, too, was unable to find such meaningless images or imageless meanings.³⁴¹ But others did confirm their existence. Robert Sessions Woodworth (1869-1962), for instance, defended imageless thought as an undeniable fact of introspection.³⁴² In itself, this was not a problem. The problem was that the method of introspection had incurred a stalemate, because of irreconcilable results, which strongly suggested that psychologists were *not* the human cameras Titchener made them out to be.³⁴³ Introspectionism was cancelling itself out.

In 1913, some found it a “curious fact” that it was still subject to controversy,³⁴⁴

³³⁷ Titchener, “Prolegomena to a Study of Introspection,” 433-4.

³³⁸ Christopher D. Green, “Scientific Objectivity and E. B. Titchener’s Experimental Psychology,” *Isis* 101, no. 4 (2010): 699.

³³⁹ Edward Bradford Titchener, *A Textbook of Psychology* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1909-10/1917). 24. This *Textbook* was a revised version of his earlier *Outline of Psychology* from 1896.

³⁴⁰ It appears Bühler played a big part in this, see Robert Morris Ogden, “Imageless Thought: Resume and Critique,” *Psychological Bulletin* 8, no. 6 (1911): 183. Ogden is referring to the publication of the three-part Karl Ludwig Bühler, “Tatsachen und Probleme zu einer Psychologie der Denkvorgänge I: Über Gedanken,” *Archiv für die Gesamte Psychologie* 9(1907); Karl Ludwig Bühler, “Tatsachen und Probleme zu einer Psychologie der Denkvorgänge II: Über Gedankenzusammenhänge,” *Archiv für die Gesamte Psychologie* 12(1907); Karl Ludwig Bühler, “Tatsachen und Probleme zu einer Psychologie der Denkvorgänge III: Über Gedankenerinnerungen,” *Archiv für die Gesamte Psychologie* 12(1907).

³⁴¹ James Rowland Angell, “Imageless Thought,” *Psychological Review* 18, no. 5 (1911): 316.

³⁴² R. S. Woodworth, “Imageless Thought,” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 3, no. 26 (1906): 702.

³⁴³ Green, “Scientific Objectivity,” 717.

³⁴⁴ B. H. Bode, “The Method of Introspection,” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 10, no. 4 (1913): 85.

but most had already started to turn their back on introspection, when John Boardus Watson (1878-1958) put it to bed. With a single stroke, his “Behaviorist Manifesto” rejected Introspectionism and introduced Behaviorism. “Psychology as the behaviorist views it is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior. Introspection forms no essential part of its methods nor is the scientific value of its data dependent upon the readiness with which they lend themselves to interpretation in terms of consciousness.”³⁴⁵ In other words, he felt that internal observation of consciousness had led psychology to a dead end and should be replaced by an external perception of behavior. Titchener tried to salvage what he could, arguing that it was too soon to do away with introspection,³⁴⁶ but the damage had been done. Puritan, pragmatic, anti-intellectual Behaviorism simply better suited the American mind³⁴⁷—naturally pushing Introspectionism to the fringe.³⁴⁸

However, before the full-blown academic coupe of Behaviorism, Merrell-Wolff lost touch with scholarly developments, as we shall see, shortly. But before we turn to this next chapter in his life, one more development in the field of psychology must be mentioned: the rise of the psychology of religion. In this context, two of its “founders” play an important role, because Merrell-Wolff will either quote or question them in his (later) work, namely William James (1842-1910) and James Henry Leuba (1867-1946).

Though it is almost certain that he had read the “James” and the “Jimmy,”³⁴⁹ Merrell-Wolff would rarely refer to James’s primers in general psychology—possibly, because he was, then, no longer perceived as “the big name in America,” as he himself puts it. But he will regularly resort to his landmark study in the psychology of religion.

³⁴⁵ John Boardus Watson, “Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It,” *Psychological Review* 20, no. 2 (1913): 158. In addition, see John Boardus Watson, “Image and Affection in Behavior,” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 10, no. 16 (1913). which is part two of the “Manifesto.”

³⁴⁶ “Neither logically nor materially can behaviorism ‘replace’ psychology,” Edward Bradford Titchener, “On ‘Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It,’” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 53, no. 213 (1914). Introspectionism and Behaviorism do not cancel each other out, he said, but can each contribute to psychology, in their own way. Although he made a valid point, history decided otherwise.

³⁴⁷ George Mandler, *A History of Modern Experimental Psychology: From James and Wundt to Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007). 99 & 100.

³⁴⁸ If Laird—who compares “introspection” to Bergsonian “intuition”—is anyone to go by, introspection found refuge in “popular” metaphysical philosophy again, John Laird, “Introspection and Intuition,” *The Philosophical Review* 26, no. 5 (1917). Recently, introspection has gained renewed attention. Two examples of both sides of the debate are Schwitzgebel and Locke. Briefly, one reckons Descartes “had it backwards,” when he said the objects of the internal world are better known than those of the external world, Eric Schwitzgebel, “The Unreliability of Naive Introspection,” *The Philosophical Review* 117, no. 2 (2008). The other does not refute him, but points out that an awareness of our mental contents and processes—including that awareness itself—is fundamental to psychology, Edwin A. Locke, “It’s Time we Brought Introspection Out of the Closet,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 4, no. 1 (2009). In Chapter 4, we will see other efforts to rehabilitate introspection by scholars and religious practitioners.

³⁴⁹ i.e. William James, *Principles of Psychology* (New York: Holt, 1890); William James, *Psychology: Briefer Course* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1892/1920).

James wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,³⁵⁰ after struggling to negotiate between the Swedenborgianism of his father Henry James and the Transcendentalism of his godfather Emerson, on the one hand, and the reductionist naturalism of his Harvard professor Chauncey Wright, on the other,³⁵¹ before combining them in a “naturalistic theism” of his own.³⁵² He had meant to split his study into a descriptive and an interpretative part, but poor health thwarted his ambition. He never got past a discussion of his “*documents humains*,” autobiographical reports of religious experiences. It still gives a good insight into his thoughts on the essence of religion. First of all, he thinks “the word ‘religion’ cannot stand for any single principle or essence.” He does offer a working definition of “religion pure and simple.” Religion entails ecclesiastical organizations nor systematic theologies, but “the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.”³⁵³ Our understanding of and relation to this “unseen order” is the central theme of the book,

³⁵⁰ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 1902/2004).

³⁵¹ Eugene Taylor, "First Introduction: The Spiritual Roots of James's 'Varieties of Religious Experience'," in *William James. The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature. Centenary Edition*, ed. Eugene Taylor and Jeremy R. Carrette (London: Routledge, 2004), xxiii.

³⁵² To summarize, his “naturalistic theism” means “God exists as a belief in people’s minds and hearts and this belief has definite consequences in shaping a person’s response to the environment,” Eugene Taylor, *Williams James on Consciousness beyond the Margin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). 88. It is the positivistic feature of his overall philosophy, which he already designates as “radical empiricism,” several years before the *Varieties*, and further elaborates, several years after, in a series of posthumously published essays, respectively *William James, "The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy,"* in *William James. Writings 1878-1999 (New York: The Library of America, 1896/1992)*, 447; *William James, Essays in Radical Empiricism (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1912)*. Together, the latter series express a philosophy of “pure experience.” In the first essay, James says there is no consciousness, in the sense of subjective spirit over and against objective matter. Consciousness is not an entity, but a function. And that function is *knowing*. We speak of “consciousness” to refer to the fact that things not only are, but are also known. On closer examination, consciousness proves an empty phrase, though. There is only one basic “stuff” of which everything is composed. That is, pure experience. Depending on the context, it assumes the part of the subject (knower) or the object (known). But pure experience is not actual stuff, as if reality is made up of some underlying substance. It is stuff only in a matter of speaking; “there are as many stuffs as there are ‘natures’ in the things experienced,” William James, "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?," in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, ed. Ralph Barton Perry (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1904/1912), 2-3, 5 & 14. Despite its plural incarnations as subject and object, pure experience is singular unqualified actuality—*that*—not yet differentiated into thoughts and things, William James, "A World of Pure Experience," in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, ed. Ralph Barton Perry (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1905/1912), 39. This entails six claims: (1) there is no consciousness, as typically understood; (2) there is only the susceptibility of experiences of being known; (3) this susceptibility can be explained by the fact that experiences lead to other experiences, whereby some play the role of knower and others of the known; (4) we can define these roles without invoking something over and above the experiences themselves; (5) the duality of knower and known is functional, not ontological; (6) things and thoughts entail the same stuff of pure experience, William James, "The Notion of Consciousness," in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, ed. Ralph Barton Perry (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1905/1912), 122. Therefore, the mosaic philosophy of radical empiricism could be seen as a formally monistic, but essentially pluralistic panpsychism, based on “the claim that all objects of the universe have an inner, psychical aspect or disposition,” David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). 58 & 187.

³⁵³ James, *The Varieties*: 26, 28, 46-47.

Wayne Proudfoot confirms.³⁵⁴ Reminiscent of a Schleiermacherian “feeling” and “intuition,” which I explain, in the next chapter, this concretely pertains to “*the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine,*” any “God-like” object that compels them to respond “solemnly and gravely.”³⁵⁵ This explains his exclusive focus on “immediate personal experiences” that have their “root and center in mystical states of consciousness.”³⁵⁶ For James, religion springs from “the mystical experiences of the individual,” which “have no proper intellectual deliverance of their own, but belong to a region deeper and more vital and practical than that which the intellect inhabits.”³⁵⁷ His religion is about mystical experiences that go beyond reason.

Building on Grace Jantzen,³⁵⁸ Richard Niebuhr³⁵⁹ and Richard King,³⁶⁰ among others, Jeremy Carrette explains that James may be rightly criticized for his “excessive individualism, privatism and elitism, his Protestant bias, his attempt to get round the Kantian strictures by focusing on extreme experiences, his privatization and historically misinformed account of mysticism, his avoidance of institutional religion, his use of discursive mediating strategies [and] the selective ordering of women’s religious experience.”³⁶¹ Roughly summarized, this is a criticism on his threefold reductionism, which reduces religion to religious experiences, religious experiences to mystical states of consciousness and the value of these mystical states, including their related beliefs and behaviors, to their pragmatic merit,³⁶² what he would call their “*fruits for life.*”³⁶³

One of William James’s earliest critics was his fellow psychologist of religion James Leuba. He, too, focused on “the facts of *immediate religious experience,*” but not to “fasten [them] to a transcendental hypothesis,” but to explain them in natural terms.

³⁵⁴ Wayne Proudfoot, “Pragmatism and ‘an Unseen Order’ in *Varieties*,” in *William James and Science of Religions: Reexperiencing the Varieties of Religious Experience*, ed. Wayne Proudfoot (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 32.

³⁵⁵ James, *The Varieties*: 29-30, 32, 35.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 30, 294.

³⁵⁷ Letter to Henry Rankin, William James, *The Letters of William James*, vol. 2 (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920). 149.

³⁵⁸ Grace M. Jantzen, “Mysticism and Experience,” *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989); Grace M. Jantzen, “Feminists, Philosophers, and Mystics,” *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994).

³⁵⁹ Richard R. Niebuhr, “William James on Religious Experience,” in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

³⁶⁰ King, *Orientalism and Religion*: Chapter 1, e.g. 21-23.

³⁶¹ Jeremy R. Carrette, “Second Introduction: The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience,” in *William James. The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. centenary ed. Eugene Taylor and Jeremy R. Carrette (London: Routledge, 2004), xlv.

³⁶² Ralph W. Hood et al., *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2009). 24.

³⁶³ James, *The Varieties*: 30, 294, 186.

That is, Leuba set out to account for what he considered the three functionally related constituents of religion—thinking, feeling, conation—in psycho-physiological terms.³⁶⁴

With James, he recognized that the mind cure systems of “psychotherap[eu]tic cults” such as Christian Science and New Thought³⁶⁵ and similar “eastern systems of mental concentration” like Yoga³⁶⁶ centered on claims to mystical experiences, which he defined as any “experience taken to mean contact (not through the senses, but ‘immediately’) or union of the self with a larger-than-self, be it called the spirit world, God or the Absolute ...”³⁶⁷ But against James, he would not reduce religion to such mystical experiences, though, but saw them as “one type of religious relation,” among others.³⁶⁸

It appears that Merrell-Wolff never laid eyes on his articles. But he did read *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism*,³⁶⁹ which combines and elaborates most of Leuba’s ideas. It is the “antinoetic argument” of this *Psychology* that he will come to attack, in favor of his own “noetic thesis,” which he will legitimate again based on the *Varieties*.

But this would not be for another twenty years. After he successfully completed his education at Harvard, in 1913, Merrell-Wolff wanted to continue on the academic path, yet struggled to come up with the money for even one more semester.³⁷⁰ He had had the odd job, but it was not enough to afford further studies. He decided to apply for a scholarship in Germany, which passed to his brilliant pal Norbert Wiener. And though the head of the philosophy department had told him he may be employed as a student assistant, there was no real guarantee. So, when Stanford offered a temporary position as a lecturer in geometry and trigonometry, with the promising prospect of a PhD in either mathematics or philosophy afterwards, he grabbed it with both hands.³⁷¹

After his first year of teaching, Merrell-Wolff took some time to reflect. He had studied the critical philosophy of Kant, at Stanford and Harvard, and was very much drawn to the transcendental idealism which it had inspired in Germany and America.

³⁶⁴ Respectively, James Henry Leuba, "Introduction to a Psychological Study of Religion," *The Monist* 11, no. 2 (1901): 196; James Henry Leuba, "Professor William James' Interpretation of Religious Experience," *International Journal of Ethics* 14, no. 3 (1904): 326, 336-338; and James Henry Leuba, "The Psychological Origin of Religion," *The Monist* 19, no. 1 (1909): 31; cf. James Henry Leuba, "The Psychological Nature of Religion," *The American Journal of Theology* 13, no. 1 (1909): 80. Contrary to popular opinion, he did not reject the possibility of a transcendent reality, Leuba, "William James," 339.

³⁶⁵ James Henry Leuba, "Psychotherapeutic Cults: Christian Science, Mind Cure, New Thought," *The Monist* 22, no. 3 (1912).

³⁶⁶ James Henry Leuba, "The Yoga System of Mental Concentration and Religious Mysticism," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 16, no. 8 (1919).

³⁶⁷ James Henry Leuba, "The Meaning of 'Religion' and the Place of Mysticism in Religious Life," *The Journal of Philosophy* 18, no. 3 (1921): 60.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁶⁹ James H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (New York: Harcourt, 1925).

³⁷⁰ Merrell-Wolff, "My Academic Life," 5.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6-8.

But he had been equally fascinated by the metaphysical wisdom religion of Blavatsky, whose Theosophical teachings he first discovered at the Temple and later found to coincide with the ancient wisdom of the mystic East. And despite a lack of affinity with pragmatist philosophy as a whole, its experiential emphasis on an inward turn to consciousness—a precursor of the introspection that was now scientifically recognized by the psychologists—also struck a chord with him. Yet, all of these intellectual encounters were pointing towards something *beyond* the intellect—some “other way of thought.”

I had been meditating and thinking about this other way of thought ... that is not recognized in the academy ... I faced this problem: shall I return to the academic path, complete my doctorate and become a professional teacher in either mathematics or philosophy, or shall I start the search for that other something that I had learned of through Theosophical and ... other sources. I finally made the choice to abandon the academic career ... then, I went into the wilderness.³⁷²

³⁷² Ibid., 8. cf. Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Life," 6-7.

CHAPTER 2
INVESTIGATION
(1914-1936)

CHAPTER 2

INVESTIGATION

*Those who seek realization or enlightenment go into the wilderness.*¹ After six years of studying and one year of lecturing, Franklin Merrell-Wolff decided to leave the academy behind and seek out the solitude of the Ventana Wilderness. It had not been an easy choice. Over the next twenty years, he would often wonder whether he had made the right decision.² The prospect of an academic career in mathematics or philosophy had been a particularly tempting one. But, for him, both fields pointed to some “other way of thought,”³ which was not being addressed *inside* the academy and all the more *outside* it, it seemed, by the likes of Blavatsky and Ramacharaka. Given that ordinary perception and conception cannot touch this metaphysical thought, he reckoned there must be a third faculty or function of cognition that can.⁴ And so—maybe for the first time in his life—he managed to resist Mephisto’s intellectual call and to listen to the voice of intuition instead, as he began his investigation into this “higher knowledge.”

In late 1914, Merrell-Wolff started his search “by proceeding ... into the Santa Lucia mountains, south of Carmel”—a patch of rugged land along the Big Sur coast of California in what was once the Native American country of the Esselen. Together with a few others who were joining him on his “spiritual quest,” he secured a hundred-sixty acre plot of land from the government for the purpose of establishing a commune-like “colony.”⁵ Additional horse-drawn instruments were acquired for working the land.⁶

¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: My Academic Life and Embarking upon my Spiritual Quest," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1982), 8.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: A Recollection of my Early Life and Influences," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 6-7.

⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Is Metaphysical Knowledge Possible?," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 2.

⁵ Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Life," 7.

⁶ Merrell-Wolff, "My Academic Life," 10.

However, Merrell-Wolff realized their efforts towards a self-sustaining settlement were not working out. “[I]t soon became evident that the purpose which I had in mind was not here being furthered.” So, he loaded his horse and carriage and left for Halcyon.⁷

RELIGION

The Temple of the People

[W]hy are there groups or entities such as the Temple of the People ... ? In our ordinary approach to the subject of knowledge, as given in our exoteric schools and universities, we think of knowledge as a common inheritance and that the problem is simply the training of individuals in the beginning, so that they may acquire and understand this knowledge. But the mystic tradition that is handed down from the past involves something more, namely that there is a kind of knowledge in the world which is not available to everybody, that indeed candidates for this knowledge may be subjected to many tests and trials and prove themselves as worthy, and usually the knowledge is given upon the basis of a pledge of secrecy. And one may ask why? ... [Because] much of this knowledge is of a sort that involves real power—and power that can be misused—and that therefore the custodians of this knowledge should be well-proven individuals ...⁸

In 1915, Merrell-Wolff became a resident at the Temple of the People.⁹ He had learned of the movement in college, but only recently made a “tentative association,” by signing up as a member and attending an annual convention.¹⁰ One of its local leaders, Irish-born poet John Osborne Varian (1863-1931), had raised his interest in its Theosophical teaching.¹¹ But he had not been easily convinced. It took years of intellectual discussions. “I knew the scientific soundness of university teaching. I knew mathematics and philosophy ... yet, here was something that seemed to make an appeal to another possibility.”¹² Later in life, he will look back on this movement as a preparation for higher knowledge—“in most cases, quite sincere, but not always as wise as one might wish ...”¹³

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Contrast between Philosophy and Psychology," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 6.

¹⁰ In 1912, to be precise, see Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Life," 5.

¹¹ Lakshmi Devi, "Halcyon Revisited," *Assembly of Man Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (1960): 6.

¹² Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Life," 5.

¹³ Merrell-Wolff, "My Academic Life," 11.

When Merrell-Wolff entered “the Temple,” as it was first called,¹⁴ it had already been working for ten years to establish an autonomous commune in Halcyon—similar to what he had envisioned for Ventana. Its goal was to set an example for society of “a brotherhood of man in cooperation and self-evolution,”¹⁵ based on a utopian vision in which “*all the land will be owned all of the time by all of the people.*”¹⁶ However, the inspiration behind their work was not rooted in social but religious ideals. The board of the Temple claimed “direct personal correspondence and communication” with “the Masters” of “the White Brotherhood,”¹⁷ who aspired to share with “earnest investigators of life,” such as Merrell-Wolff, the same “Great Science ... as was imparted by HPB to her Esoteric Classes.”¹⁸ That is to say, like Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Guardian in Chief Francia LaDue allegedly “channeled” their ancient esoteric wisdom religion.¹⁹

Despite strong reservations about the intellectual soundness of their teaching, it seems Merrell-Wolff never questioned Theosophical claims about contact with metaphysical or physically remote beings. He even adopted its polemical contrast between negative “spiritualism” and positive “channeling.” One distracts us with the ramblings of any “Tom, Dick or Harry” who passed away and happened to have stumbled upon a medium through which they can communicate, he says, while the other, “so far as my experience goes,” directs us with meaningful messages that have been deliberately sent by enlightened “adepts.”²⁰ I return to his personal experiences in these matters below.

¹⁴ See e.g. Lucia A. LaDue, William H. Dower, “The Temple,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (695)* (Oceano: Temple Home Association, ca. 1900). They would change it several years after its foundation, arguing that “The Master gave the name The Temple of the People and directed its use for the Temple movement in 1899, but requested that only the first two words be used, until such time as he should indicate a change. That time is now here ... ,” see Lucia A. LaDue, William H. Dower, “The Temple of the People,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (695)* (Oceano: Temple Home Association, 1908), 31.

¹⁵ It drew these plans in 1904, Lucia A. LaDue, William H. Dower, “Open Meeting of the Temple Home Association,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (695)* (Oceano: Temple Home Association, 1904). In the early years, the board struggled to cover its costs, though, literally requesting their members to lend a helping hand, Lucia A. LaDue et al., “The Helping Hand,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (695)* (Oceano: Temple Home Association, 1905); Lucia A. LaDue et al., “The Helping Hand,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (695)* (Oceano: Temple Home Association, 1907); Lucia A. LaDue et al., “The Helping Hand,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (695)* (Oceano: Temple Home Association, 1908).

¹⁶ Lucia A. LaDue, William H. Dower, “The Temple Home Association Explained,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (695)* (Oceano: Temple Home Association, ca. 1904), 14.

¹⁷ LaDue, Dower, “The Temple,” 3 & 4; Lucia A. LaDue, William H. Dower, “The White Brotherhood and Its Connection to the Temple,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (695)* (Oceano: Temple Home Association, ca. 1900).

¹⁸ Lucia A. LaDue, “Private: To Members of the Order of the 36,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (698)* (Syracuse: The Temple, 1901/1903), 61.

¹⁹ Transcripts of her channeled messages are in Merrell-Wolff’s library, e.g. Lucia A. LaDue, “Message to All Students of Life,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (696)* (Syracuse: The Temple, 1899); Lucia A. LaDue, “Message,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (696)* (Halcyon: The Temple Home Association, no date); Lucia A. LaDue, “Prophecy,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (696)* (Syracuse: The Temple, 1902). Most of them are signed with “H” or “Hilarion” and one or two with “Morya.”

²⁰ Merrell-Wolff, “My Academic Life,” 9-10.

Here, the point is that Merrell-Wolff made Theosophical beliefs his own. This is a controversial claim, for some, as we shall see in Chapter Four. In his early work these beliefs are more explicit and in his later work more implicit, but they recur *throughout* his oeuvre. One of the best examples is “The Gupta Vidya,” an undated essay, which is generally believed to have been written before the turning point of his life in 1936.²¹

Briefly, Merrell-Wolff tells us that *Gupta Vidya* stands for “Secret Doctrine,” in the sense of a *Bodhi Dharma* or “Wisdom Religion” that is based on a *gnosis* or “esoteric knowledge” of the self and the divine—*Atma Vidya* and *Theosophia*, respectively—which underlies all great religions and philosophies East and West, but has been best preserved in the Greek-Egyptian tradition of Hermeticism and the Indian tradition of Advaita Vedānta.²² Now, the key to their perennial wisdom is contained in the axiom “as above, so below,” he explains, which means that “by fully knowing the microcosm, the macrocosm stands revealed.”²³ However, he goes on to argue, the empirical content of this knowledge is hidden. Not because its custodians have concealed it from us, but because we have yet to awaken the cognitive organ that enables the necessary “shifting of the base of reference in Consciousness.”²⁴ Until that faculty or function has awoken and that radical shift has occurred, he suggests the student of occult science would do well to assume a stance of tentative acceptance towards those who seem to have either direct or indirect access to its metaphysical fruits.²⁵ In other words, one should trust the masters as well as those who profess to share in their wisdom²⁶—like he had done, not just with Blavatsky and LaDue, but also with his dear Sarah, as we shall see next.

²¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Gupta Vidya,” (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, ca. 1930). It must have been written after 1928, at least, since he refers to Hall’s *Secret Teachings* (1928).

²² For further study, he lists Helena Petrova Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled. A Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Technology*, vol. 1 (New York: Bouton, 1877); Manly Palmer Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages: An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1928); Helena Petrova Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled. A Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Technology*, vol. 2 (New York: Bouton, 1877); Helena Petrova Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy*, vol. 1 (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888); *ibid.*, 2., above all, the introduction to the *Secret Doctrine*, Merrell-Wolff, “The Gupta Vidya,” 5.

²³ Merrell-Wolff, “The Gupta Vidya,” 28 & 32.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 & 17.

²⁵ “No one can ever become a real ‘Knower’ who is willing to accept blindly ... But strong evidence can be submitted, which will afford any sincere mind sufficient reason to seek farther ... *a priori* considerations may convince the student on purely logical grounds that Arcane Knowledge is possible and even probable, but only by empirical means does he become convinced that it actually exists,” *ibid.*, 3, 5, 14.

²⁶ For Merrell-Wolff, reliable “heroes, saints and sages” include the Vedic Ṛṣis, Vyasa, Rama, Buddha, Krishna, Śaṅkara, Laozi, Kongfuzi and Tsongkhapa, in the East, and Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Jesus, Apollonius of Tyana, St. Germain, Böhme, Paracelsus, Mesmer and Blavatsky, in the West, *ibid.*, 6-7.

“It was at Halcyon that I met the woman who later became my wife. She was Sarah A[lice] Merrell-Briggs, a married woman at the time.”²⁷ In fact, it was her second marriage. She had already exchanged vows with George Furness at fifteen and become a mother to George Junior at seventeen. But her first marital bond and her first born would both be short-lived. She was divorced by 1900 and had buried her son by 1910.

In 1900, she remarried George Abington Briggs, a well-to-do heir to the Chicago Telephone Supply Company. As the telephone was growing ever more prevalent,²⁸ the Briggs family acquired a small fortune. Suddenly, Sarah found herself socializing with presidential candidates like William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925). Both moved in elite circles, but Sarah seems to have been more actively involved in “secret societies.” A few years after the birth of their son James in 1908, she left home to participate in metaphysical movements like the Oriental Esoteric Society and the Hermetic Brotherhood.

The first was “a small group that, though not associated with the Theosophical Society, was closely allied to its tenets.”²⁹ The Oriental Esoteric Head Center had been established in 1902 by Albert de Sarak (b. 1858), who apparently presented himself to his students as a “Tibetan Adept.”³⁰ In 1910, its American head Agnes Elizabeth Marsland (d. 1855) started her own Oriental Esoteric Society, after Sarak expelled her from the apocryphal “Order of Initiates from Tibet.”³¹ Nevertheless, her *First Principles of Esoterism* [sic] similarly repackages Theosophical teachings³² with a practical twist.³³

²⁷ Merrell-Wolff, “A Recollection of my Early Life,” 7. Regarding Sarah, see Doroethy Briggs, “Sherifa's Story,” (Phoenix: unpublished, 2013); and Doroethy Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff: An American Philosopher and Mystic,” (Phoenix: unpublished, 2012), Chapter 6 & 7. Unless otherwise indicated, the following details about her life before she met and married Franklin depend almost entirely on Briggs.

²⁸ Note, for instance, that 1910 already saw over a million connected phones in America and that the first transcontinental line was a fact in 1914, Mark Whalan, *American Culture in the 1910s*, ed. Martin Halliwell, Twentieth-Century American Culture (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). 5.

²⁹ James Anthony Santucci, “H. N. Stokes and the O. E. Library Critic,” *Theosophical History* 1, no. 6 (1986): 130.

³⁰ Agnes Elizabeth Marsland, *First Principles of Esoterism: A Textbook for Students of the First Degree of the Oriental Esoteric Society in the United States of America and Elsewhere* (Washington: The Oriental Esoteric Publishing Co., 1910). Preface. Sarak is often made out as a “conjurer and swindler” and his O. E. Center as a “fraud plain and simple,” without further clarification, in secondary literature, e.g. Jean-Pierre Laurant, “Barlet, François-Charles (ps. of Albert Fauchaux),” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 162; Joscelyn Godwin et al., *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor: Initiatic and Historical Documents of an Order of Practical Occultism* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1995). 429.

³¹ Santucci, “H.N. Stokes,” 130-131. It is not clear why exactly Marsland was expelled from the O.E.S.

³² Arguing that throughout history a brotherhood of adepts has been guiding humanity to higher stages of spiritual development, whose ancient esoteric “wisdom religion” has been secretly transmitted to no more than a few worthy initiates, Marsland, *First Principles of Esotericism*: see particularly Chapter 1.

³³ e.g. “It requires of [the disciple] not alone intellectual study, but a changed life ... [I]ntellectualism and analysis, which is not our own method ... is good in its place, but this is second and never first in the spiritual life ... [One] is not understood to know a thing, until he has experienced it,” *ibid.*, 127-130.

The second group was possibly the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, but probably the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light—a different but obviously related order.³⁴ One arose around 1884, in Britain, France and America, as an occidental response to the orientalist turn of the Theosophical Society.³⁵ Though their own origin story portrays Max Theon (Louis Maximilian Bimstein, ca. 1848-1927) as a neophyte himself,³⁶ he is generally regarded as its founder, with Peter Davidson (1837-1915), William Alexander Ayton (1816-1909) and Thomas Henry Burgoyne (Thomas Dalton, 1855-1894) as its leaders and secretary. The history surrounding the other is shrouded in mystery. It is fairly certain, though, that it was (re)created in 1895, in America—Boston or Chicago—and that it anticipated the mix of oriental lore and sexual magic of the later *Ordo Templi Orientis*.³⁷ Either way, the “HB of L” provided a distinctly practical occultism, like the Oriental Esoteric Society, to balance the cerebral tone of Blavatsky’s Theosophy.

And yet, this anti-intellectual emphasis on practical instruction would typically take the form of theoretical education—by way of written courses, with questionnaires that tested the student’s grasp of the material. It was no different in the Temple.³⁸ Still, its touted blend of practice and theory had drawn both Sarah and Franklin to Halcyon.

Between 1915 and 1917, the two worked together as propaganda officers for the Temple,³⁹ until Franklin was drafted for the war. “I ... faced the First World War as a conscientious objector,” apparently, on philosophical grounds.⁴⁰ “I was ready to face imprisonment or the firing squad.”⁴¹ It did not come to that. LaDue allegedly channelled a message from Hilarion, reminding him that “A greater than I has said: render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, but render unto God the things that are God’s.”

³⁴ Godwin et al., *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*: 428.

³⁵ According to the “Origin and Object of the HB of L,” written around 1887 by Davidson, it was founded in 1870—five years prior to the TS. Yet, the first time the name of Theon appeared in print was in an ad, in the English edition of the *Corpus Hermeticum* from 1884, which reads: “Students of the Occult Science, searchers after truth and Theosophists who may have been disappointed in their expectations of Sublime Wisdom being freely dispensed by Hindoo Mahatmas are cordially invited to send in their names to the Editor of this Work, when, if found suitable, can be admitted, after a short probationary term, as members of an Occult Brotherhood, who do not boast of their knowledge or attainments, but teach freely and without reserve all they find worthy to receive ...” see *ibid.*, respectively 92-97 & 306.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 95 & 306.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 67. Marco Pasi, “Ordo Templi Orientis,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), for a passing comment about the HB of Light, 902.

³⁸ The Merrell-Wolff archive contains over a thousand pages of Temple material, for instance, consisting of lessons with questions, collected under the heading of “instructions” and “educational material.”

³⁹ Merrell-Wolff, “A Recollection of my Early Life,” 7.

⁴⁰ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Lectures to University Students (5 of 7),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1969), 3. For details, see Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Federalism and the Question of Conscientious Objection,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970). There, he submits that real conscientious objection should be based on an inner conviction and not on an outer affiliation to a recognized religious organization, though he admits that, in practice, this is difficult to determine.

⁴¹ Merrell-Wolff, “Lectures to University Students (5 of 7),” 4.

This led him to volunteer for the Spruce Production Division—chopping wood for the war. He could not shake the shame of indirectly aiding in the death of others, though.⁴²

The pre-war period is sometimes portrayed as the childhood of contemporary American culture, anticipating the adolescence of “the roaring twenties.”⁴³ It had witnessed a succession of cultural and legislative changes, to meet the demands of an increasingly complex society.⁴⁴ In 1915, a bill passed the House that would award women the right to vote—though it took several attempts before it finally passed the Senate, in 1919.⁴⁵ Between 1901 and 1910, immigration had gone through the roof, as nearly nine million newcomers from overseas arrived at the ports and flooded the cities, which resulted in a restriction bill, in 1917, requiring them to pass a literacy test. However, the war defeated the American people’s faith in societal harmony and individual rationality—partly due to the widespread government propaganda that “fanned the latent xenophobia and anti-intellectualism in American public life”—which ended “an era of intellectual freedom and idealism, political reform and ethno-cultural diversity.”⁴⁶

For many, the Great War spelled the bankruptcy of modernity—of enlightened reason and progress.⁴⁷ Merrell-Wolff remembers how Stanford president David Starr Jordan (1851-1931) had given a course on international peace and arbitration, in which he carefully argued that humankind had become “too intelligent to use the destructive agency of war, which was doing [it] untold damage ... particularly in [its] biologic evolution,”⁴⁸ but that history proved him horribly wrong, a few years later. It showed that violence had *not* vanished and that modern “culture” was merely varnished barbarity.

Nevertheless, some actually managed to find a source of hope in these horrors.

⁴² Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Life," 5. cf. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "God and/or Caesar," (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, ca. 1950).

⁴³ Bill Kte'pi, "Chapter 1: Introduction," in *The Roaring Twenties, 1920 to 1929*, ed. Rodney Carlisle, *Handbook to Life in America* (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 4. Others see this as a caricature that is used as a contrast for everything that made the 1920s roar, Whalan, *American Culture in the 1910s*: 3.

⁴⁴ Whalan, *American Culture in the 1910s*: 5.

⁴⁵ Bill Kte'pi, "Chapter 1: Introduction," in *The Age of Reform, 1890 to 1920*, ed. Rodney Carlisle, *Handbook to Life in America* (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 7.

⁴⁶ Whalan, *American Culture in the 1910s*: 28, 30, 33, 179.

⁴⁷ “[T]he end of the war presented America with a host of new problems to address. The pre-war experimentalism in culture had relied on a booming optimism about the future and progress, but the war exposed the bankruptcy of such idealism,” Susan Currell, *American Culture in the 1920s*, ed. Martin Halliwell, *Twentieth-Century American Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 2. It also undermined the Theosophical prospect of a brotherhood of man, which might explain why Dower and LaDue explicitly instructed their members “to refrain from connecting, directly or indirectly, the name of The Temple of the People, in any resolution, letter, written or printed statement, concerning the Great War,” see Lucia A. LaDue, William H. Dower, "Private: To the Guardian Stones of the Order of the 36," in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (698)* (Halcyon: The Temple Home Association, 1917), 1.

⁴⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "On the Meaning of Realization (13 of 16)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1951), 3.

In 1919, Horatio Dresser saw them as “a vivid reminder” that the moral and spiritual are neither subjective nor objective, but social. After the inward turn of the nineteenth century, which had placed self-reliance on personal experience above all, he said, the twentieth century would move outward again, using its psychological lessons to better social circumstances, as part of what he deemed “the dawning age of brotherhood.”⁴⁹

In hindsight, this turned out to be maybe half-true. If God had died by the nineteenth century, as Nietzsche said,⁵⁰ the war had been his funeral. He was now dead and buried. His death deprived people in the West of their “former belief in the divine purpose,”⁵¹ leading them to look for new meaning in their lives. As Rom Landau observed, “After the war of 1914-18, wherever I went ... conversation was likely to turn to supernatural subjects.”⁵² People were searching for “a greater reality.” And like Franklin and Sarah, a lot of the *individual* spiritual “seekers” looked for answers *collectively*.⁵³ That is, they sought refuge in “cults,” nowadays referred to as “new religious movements.”⁵⁴

Throughout America, but concentrated in California, “the years between about 1910 and 1935 marked another explosive era for [such] new movements.”⁵⁵ Reminiscent of earlier upsurges of unconventional religious enthusiasm, including the Great Awakenings of the mid-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, Philip Jenkins has described this sudden burst of small innovative religions as a “period of emergence.”⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Horatio W. Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1919). 1 & 8-11.

⁵⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian del Caro, German original 1882/1887 ed., Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). 109, 120 & 199.

⁵¹ Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement*: 2.

⁵² Rom Landau, *God is my Adventure: A Book on Modern Mystics, Masters and Teachers* (London: Faber & Faber, 1935). 18. “The title ... is immediately revealing. ‘God’ is presented as the object of a personalized human quest, while ‘adventure’ suggests excitement, diversion, even dalliance,” Steven J. Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (London: Routledge, 2003). 38.

⁵³ On communitarization, Kocku von Stuckrad, “Secular Religion: A Discourse—Historical Approach to Religion in Contemporary Western Europe,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 28, no. 1 (2013): 5-6.

⁵⁴ For a summary, see e.g. Eugene V. Gallagher, “‘Cults’ and ‘New Religious Movements,’” *History of Religions* 47, no. 2/3 (2007); James T. Richardson, “Cult and New Religions,” in *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (London: Routledge, 2006). More about NRMs in Chapter 4.

⁵⁵ Philip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). 7-8. Jenkins goes on to say that California attracted new religions, due to a combination of factors: first, its climate had made it a popular destination for bohemians wanting to start artistic or cultural colonies; second, its law made it easy to found a new religious body for anyone that could produce a modest filing fee and a handful of witnesses; third, its low real estate prices made it possible to build imposing churches or temples with relatively little means; fourth, established religions were weaker in the West, which meant that new religions faced a lot less opposition, *ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 & 70. Jenkins actually talks about *the* period of emergence. I have two problems with this. Semantically, the article seems ill-chosen, because, by Jenkins’s own admission, other periods like the 1840s, 1870-80s and 1960-70s could also be seen as periods of emergence. Historically, its boundaries seem too narrow, because most of the figures whom Jenkins counts among its key players lived till well into the second half of the twentieth century. For these reasons, I shall speak of *a* period of emergence.

However, most of the fringe groups of this period did not have evangelical, but metaphysical origins. Their ideas were drawn from Mesmerism, Transcendentalism as well as Spiritualism, Theosophy and New Thought and oriental(ist) traditions imported by the likes of Vivekananda.⁵⁷ Together, they formed a “cultic milieu,” as Colin Campbell famously characterized it,⁵⁸ which could be seen as a precursor of the countercultural New Age. Jenkins even calls it the “First New Age.”⁵⁹ The difference is that this earlier one was not yet aware of itself as a more or less unified culture-critical “movement.”⁶⁰

At first glance, this confirms what Steven Sutcliffe suggests, namely that there are two New Ages: the emblematic New Age of the interbellum and the idiomatic New Age of the counterculture.⁶¹ Though he acknowledges that “there is scattered usage of ‘New Age’ from the mid-Victorian era onwards” and that there is a seminal influence from “the acculturation of migrant traditions in Anglo-American culture such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Sufism” as well as “the interfaith movement ... exemplified in the World Congress of Faiths held in London in 1936,” he nevertheless limits himself to twentieth-century occultism. More specifically, Sutcliffe investigates the meaning of “New Age” in networks of alternative spirituality between the 1930s and the 1990s.⁶²

The First New Age, he maintains, emerged out of the elitist “quest” culture of the 1920s, but did not take off until the 1930s—with one person in particular, whom I return to shortly—and gained momentum in the 1950s and 1960s. In this early period, Sutcliffe says, the “New Age” was taken literally, as an emblem for a looming apocalyptic event, by persons and groups with an ascetic, puritanical and other-worldly bent.⁶³

The Second New Age, he goes on to say, resulted from a hermeneutical shift at the turn of the 1970s. Now, the “New Age” was taken metaphorically, as an idiom for a humanist project of spiritual growth towards self-realization in the here-and-now, by persons and groups with an emotionally expressive, hedonist and this-worldly bent.⁶⁴

I question Sutcliffe’s claim. *If* there is a sharp breach between an emblematic and idiomatic New Age, then the rise of the former and the shift to the latter occurred

⁵⁷ Ibid., 71-72 & 88.

⁵⁸ Colin Campbell, “The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization,” in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5, ed. Michael Hill (London: SCM Caterbury Press, 1972).

⁵⁹ Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs*: Chapter 4.

⁶⁰ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, 1996 original ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). 17.

⁶¹ Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age*. For a summary, see the seminal passage from this book that has been published separately as Steven J. Sutcliffe, “The Origins of “New Age” Religion between the Two World Wars,” in *Handbook of New Age*, ed. Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁶² Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age*: 25-26, 35 & 195.

⁶³ Ibid., 35, 53, 33, 51, 195, 3 & 27.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3, 5, 27 & 117.

long before 1930. As I said earlier, in the late 1910s, Horatio Dresser saw the dawn of a new age of brotherhood. What is more, in Chapter One, we have observed that Ralph Waldo Emerson was already convinced of standing on the brink of a new spiritual era, in the 1830s, and that Warren Felt Evans anticipated a new millennial age of the Holy Spirit, in the 1860s. There, I also noted that the ideal of a this-worldly embodied self-realization had already been widespread, by the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Think of the interplay of Neo-Hinduism and Neo-Buddhism with Theosophy and New Thought, especially after the interfaith World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, in 1893. This already hinted at a humanist turn, since their “self-realization” was interpreted as much in psychological as in religious terms. By leaving out Victorian and oriental(ist) influences, Sutcliffe historically handicapped himself. If there really was a First and Second New Age, then they belonged to a more prolonged, intercultural, interdenominational and gradual history than he makes them out to be.

This does not take anything away from the influence Alice Bailey had on “New Age” movements, from the 1930s on, as Sutcliffe argues.⁶⁵ Indeed, “Bailey’s discourse became the dominant model for ‘New Age’ activists, in the second half of the twentieth century ... [which] could gather and affirm the many disparate, potentially fissiparous spiritual paths pursued by her readers”—like Blavatsky’s discourse had, in the first half of the twentieth century. Before briefly elaborating on Bailey, I should say how Franklin and Sarah arrived at the ideological doorstep of her Arcane School, after the war.

In 1919, Franklin was discharged from the army. He and Sarah had been nurturing their romantic feelings through letters. By now, she had left George—after years of separation—allowing them to marry, on 25 June 1920.⁶⁶ They merged their surnames into *Merrell-Wolff*, as a sign of their equality.⁶⁷ The marriage was never consummated, though. As Franklin euphemistically puts it, it did not conform to “the usual biological objectives ... the raising of biological children.”⁶⁸ According to Briggs, he would remain celibate his whole life⁶⁹—though, this is a matter of some debate among his followers.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Autobiographical Material: The Feminine Side of my Experience (1 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1982), 3.

⁶⁷ Ron Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy of Franklin Merrell-Wolff* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). 17. To avoid confusion, I have used this combined surname from the start.

⁶⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Autobiographical Material: The Feminine Side of my Experience (2 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1982), 4.

⁶⁹ Doroethy Briggs, Jerome Wheeler, “Correspondence,” *The Aquarian Theosophist* 4, no. 3 (2003): 27.

In his absence, LaDue had promoted Franklin to Temple priest.⁷⁰ He started to teach courses on occult topics.⁷¹ Around that same time, LaDue showed Sarah how to contact Hilarion.⁷² It is speculation, but perhaps “Blue Star” was preparing successors for herself and her fellow-founder William “Red Star” Dower, based on the same gendered division of spiritual labor—male intellectual instruction and female intuitional channeling.⁷³ Nevertheless, Dower would claim the Temple throne, three years later.

In summer of 1922, LaDue died. A political drama ensued. A two-hundred page transcript of private messages, which Sarah had allegedly “received” from Hilarion—sometimes also Koot Hoomi and Morya or even Blue Star herself—shows how she and Franklin were compelled to convince Dower of “the new Temple Dawn,” in which she would replace LaDue. After all, on her death bed, BS had told Sarah that “You come next.”⁷⁴ Franklin was assigned the role of spiritual secretary—meant to replace Dower, if he became “unmanageable.”⁷⁵ Some of the messages were even directed at Dower himself, urging him to accept Sarah as the new esoteric head, who was to complement his exoteric activities. “I wish to say to you, William, that I have chosen this child as the Light Bearer to the coming Race. She will follow in BS’s footsteps ... You will do well to listen to these words, William.”⁷⁶ He would not listen, so they switched tactics.

Hilarion still declared they had been “selected as the first of twelve to be chosen,” but now instructed Sarah and Franklin to lay low. Do not oppose Dower, “let him have his way.” Allow him to think that their wise suggestions are his own. Do not even try to remove him from office, so long as he is yet to acknowledge Sarah’s power.⁷⁷ This was increasingly unlikely, though. Thus, Sarah finally steered a different course altogether.

⁷⁰ A handwritten certificate signed by “Chief Priest” LaDue, dated 11 August 1918, proves he had been initiated into the Temple’s Order of the Priesthood, while still in the army, Lucia A. LaDue, “To whom it may Concern,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive* (621) (Halcyon: The Temple of the People, 1918).

⁷¹ Briggs tells us he had begun teaching *before* the war, Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” 4.4. His first series was Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Special Course of Instruction: Occult Mathematics,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, no date, before 1936), in 1914-1915.

⁷² Based on unpublished sources, Briggs informs us that these lessons started in 1916, Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” 4.4. Her earliest messages from Hilarion found in the archive are slightly later, Sarah Alice Merrell-Wolff, “Channeled Messages,” (Lone Pine: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (652), 1920).

⁷³ Surprisingly, at some point, Franklin is also told to open his consciousness to “Koot Hoomi,” but his efforts apparently were only half-successful, Sarah Alice Merrell-Wolff, “Channeled Messages,” (Lone Pine: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (654), 1922), 51, 52, 58, 76. He remained critical, though. Beforehand, he asks “How may I distinguish between that which is genuinely from another intelligence and that which is merely words and phrases floating about in my own mind?” Afterwards, he says “From within me, one speaks and says ‘Thou art deceived, it is thy own personal mind that has builded this,’” *ibid.*, 53 & 58. To be fair, Sarah, who was usually less critical, entertained the same doubts, *ibid.*, 6, 55.

⁷⁴ LaDue had allegedly spoken these words to Sarah, as she sat beside her on her deathbed, *ibid.*, 3 & 4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3, 8.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 62, 85 & 121.

In her essay “Self-Realization,” Sarah reflects on LaDue’s last words. “When she said I would take her place when she was gone, she said truly, I have taken that place. But how different it is from what I thought ...”⁷⁸ In the rather incoherent explanation that follows, she surmises that Blue Star and Red Star are the “daughter” and “son” of Hilarion and the Temple their “child.” Sarah is the “daughter” of Blue Star, who, together with the “son” Franklin, must give birth to a “child” of their own. Thinking back to what Merrell-Wolff mentioned above, the lofty goal of their marriage was seen as the deliverance of a movement and the raising of spiritual—not biological—offspring.

At this time, they think their group shall spring from a section of the Temple. If they fail to revive this branch of the Temple tree, Sarah writes, they will go to “the HPB branch of the TS” instead,⁷⁹ which likely refers to the “United Lodge of Theosophists ... the most faithful group of students of the Secret Doctrine that we know.”⁸⁰ Apparently, they failed, for they soon left. But they did not proceed to the ULT, right away.

The Arcane School

During the year 1922, the principal head of the Temple of the People entered into her final illness and died one night, when my wife was attending her. After the funeral and the various activities connected with this death, we severed our connection with the Temple of the People and went down to San Fernando and managed to purchase the largest portion of my father’s orchard. [Sarah] became interested in the work of one of the members of Krotona ... Hollywood ... and went to New York associated with that work, while I continued with the orchard⁸¹

The member of Krotona whom Merrell-Wolff is referring to was one of *the* prophets of the “New Age”—Alice Ann Bailey (Alice LaTrobe Bateman, 1880-1949). Bailey was raised in a fundamental Christian environment in England, worked as an evangelical missionary in Ireland and India and moved to America, before she first encountered Theosophy, in 1915. She joined a Lodge at Pacific Grove. Two years later, she relocated to Los Angeles, in order to be nearer to its national headquarters, then in Hollywood.

⁷⁸ Sarah Alice Merrell-Wolff, “Self-Realization,” (Lone Pine: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (654), 1922), 179. It is appended to the same archive document that contains most of her channeled messages.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁸⁰ Merrell-Wolff, “Channeled Messages,” 134.

⁸¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Autobiographical Material: A Recollection of my Early Work with Sherifa,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 1. It is a detail, but by this time, after 1920, Krotona had already relocated, from Hollywood to the Ojai Valley, Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs*: 91.

In 1919, Bailey claimed to have made contact with an unknown master by the name of “Djwal Khul.” Her fellow theosophists questioned the authenticity of her encounter and the reliability of her “received” messages. This brought Bailey to leave behind the Society and to move to New York, in 1920, where she started her own Arcane School.⁸²

In true Theosophical fashion, her debut *Initiation, Human and Solar*⁸³ replaces an Olympus of dead Gods with a pantheon of living masters, among whom Blavatsky’s Morya and Koot Hoomi, LaDue’s Hilarion and her own Djwal Khul. “The Tibetan,” as Bailey often calls DK, is “the Messenger of the Masters.”⁸⁴ Over the next three decades, dozens of esoteric best-sellers are filled with his messages, which reflect a reworking of Theosophy, with newly coined terms and theories of its own.⁸⁵ Blending evangelical piety and Theosophical millennialism, they tell us “humanity is entering a new age and that the messiah of the new age is the Christ, who is about to make a reappearance.”⁸⁶

A few of these books landed in Merrell-Wolff’s library, some with an inscription by their author.⁸⁷ These are always dedicated to Sarah, though. According to Briggs, Sarah had met Bailey “before she began writing her books, but after the channeling,”⁸⁸ which means between 1919 and 1922. Franklin may never have met her. Even if he did, he hardly ever refers to her.⁸⁹ And yet, Bailey is still worth mentioning for two reasons.

The first reason relates to what her school represents—a budding quest culture, as in “a rash of grandly-named small groups ... active during the interwar period with varying numbers, lifespans and cultural impact ... [made up of] middle-class and lower middle-class social groups with an amateurist intellectual ethos and a corresponding taste for innovative ceremonial ... [who] met on private premises or in discreetly hired rooms and communicated through their own networks and publications.”⁹⁰ The relevance of this claim will become clearer, later, when we look at the Assembly of Man.

⁸² Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age*: 45-49.

⁸³ Alice Ann Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar* (New York: Lucifer Publishing Company, 1922). 53-60. There are two copies of this book in Merrell-Wolff’s library, this one from 1922 and one from 1951.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸⁵ Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). 152-3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁸⁷ It contains about ten of her books. The ones likely to have been read around this time are Alice Ann Bailey, *The Consciousness of the Atom: A Series of Lectures delivered in New York City Winter of 1921-22* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1922); Alice Ann Bailey, *The Soul and Its Mechanism (The Problem of Psychology)* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1930). Later ones include Alice Ann Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1948); as well as Alice Ann Bailey, *Telepathy and the Etheric Vehicle* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1950).

⁸⁸ Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” 6.5.

⁸⁹ One of the few explicit references to Bailey, for instance, is found in Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “A Brief Analysis of *The Impending Golden Age*,” (Lone Pine: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (610), no date).

⁹⁰ Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age*: 41.

The second reason is that Bailey facilitated Franklin and Sarah's encounter with a modern Sufi mystic. During one of her stays in New York, Sarah ran into an old acquaintance, Marya Cushing.⁹¹ While catching up, Cushing told Sarah about her teacher and suggested to set up a meeting with him, at the Arcane School headquarters. They asked Bailey, who agreed. So, soon after, the three were sipping tea with Inayat Khan.

The International Sufi Movement

Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan ... was the head of the western branch of the Sufi movement. The Sufis seemed to have been originally an esoteric division of the Mohammedan or Muslim religion, but at least in the form that Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan represented the Sufi movement, it was an attempt to effect a religious marriage among the various religions ... It was arranged to have established a sort of universal church which was placed in the hands of Sherifa and myself.⁹²

Inayat Khan (1882-1927) was a musician from India who became a spiritual teacher in Europe and America of what his grandson and successor Zia Inayat Khan has called a "hybrid Sufi movement."⁹³ As Zia Khan elaborates, his grandfather did not present a "pure" tradition, but creatively adapted traditional Indo-Islamic categories to the more secular concerns of his modern western audience—exemplifying the westernization of eastern Islam as well as the easternization of western esotericism.⁹⁴ Like Neo-Hinduism and Neo-Buddhism, his "Neo-Sufism," if you will, also reversed the orientalist gaze.⁹⁵

Inayat Khan first visited America in 1910, after his father had died and his master sent him to "harmonize the East and the West with the harmony of [his] music."⁹⁶

⁹¹ Briggs, "Franklin Merrell-Wolff," 11.1.

⁹² Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Work," 1 & 2.

⁹³ Actually, he says it started as a "Sufi Order" (1910-1920), then turned into a "Sufi Movement" (1920-1927), as it gradually transformed from "a transplanted Indo-Islamic esotericism" to "a globalized universalist messianism," Zia Inayat Khan, *A Hybrid Sufi Order at the Crossroads of Modernity: The Sufi Order and Sufi Movement of Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan*, published PhD dissertation ed. (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2006). 4-5. Zia Khan mentions his own "hybrid condition," as spiritual leader and academic researcher of the movement he is writing about, but argues he is still able to handle his subject with the critical rigor of a historian of religion, *ibid.*, 6-9. Having closely read most of this study, I am, indeed, impressed by the critical distance of his socio-historical reflections about his own religious movement.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7, 10, 11, 18. Though I completely agree with his conclusions, his analysis of western occultism or esotericism comes across as outdated. Saying that occultism was not a marginal phenomenon, but a major component of early twentieth century culture, that this occultism was significantly motivated by the secular concerns of late modernity and that it engendered an attempt to transcend the particularism of western tradition, at the time of his writing, was no longer as surprising as he believed it to be.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42 & 82.

⁹⁶ There are several versions of this injunction, moving from the teaching of music to Sufism, *ibid.*, 65.

Although he arrived in the capacity of a traveling musician, he was invited to lecture at several academic and religious venues across California. Among them was the Vedānta Society in San Francisco, where he met his first *mureed* or disciple, Ada Martin (Ada Ginsberg, 1871-1947).⁹⁷ Khan gave her the name “Rabia” and, half a year later, granted her the title of *murshida* or teacher. This made Rabia Martin the main representative of his budding Sufi Order in America, when Khan left for England, in the spring of 1912.

Europe had a lot in store for Khan. In 1913, he married Ora Ray Baker (1892-1955), an American lady whom he had met in New York.⁹⁸ They moved from England via Russia to France, only to return to England again, when the Germans declared war on the French.⁹⁹ In 1914, the Theosophical Society published his first book in English, *A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty*.¹⁰⁰ It introduces Khan as a “professor” of a Sufism that forms “the essence of all pure religions and philosophies,” merging eastern faith with western reason, in pursuit of “self-realization.”¹⁰¹ The next year, in 1915, the first issue of *The Sufi* magazine appeared. Finally, from 1917 to 1920, Khan gave lectures across the British Isles—hosted by the Theosophical Society—before moving his family back to France. After his excursion to Geneva, they settled in Suresnes, outside Paris.

According to Zia Khan, the Sufi Order increasingly took on a Theosophical cast. Similar to Blavatsky’s Theosophy, Khan’s Neo-Sufism situated itself between religion and secularism—both accommodating and assaulting post-Enlightenment modernity, its materialism and rationalism in particular.¹⁰² It began to show the same ambiguous adherence to the positivist methods and theories of science, on the one hand, and the romanticist premises of—a heavily psychologized—religion, on the other, by “redirecting rational inquiry towards the [irrational] inner depths of the modern subject.”¹⁰³ In other words, it was taking a reasoned flight beyond reason. It did remain less cerebral and more practical than Theosophy, but, for many, *that* is what made it so appealing.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁹⁸ She was a distant cousin of Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy, whom I mentioned in the Chapter 1, and a half-sister to Tantrik Order of America founder Pierre “Oom the Omnipotent” Bernard (1875-1955). Zia Khan speculates about racist motivations behind Bernard’s aggressive protection of Ora Ray from Inayat Khan’s courtship, which may have caused him to move to Europe, *ibid.*, 79-80.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 82-3.

¹⁰⁰ Inayat Khan, *A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1914).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 5 & 38, 3, 27.

¹⁰² Khan, *A Hybrid Sufi Order*: 109-112.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 99.

¹⁰⁴ “[I]f the promise of transcendence was the Theosophical Society’s greatest strength, its inability to fulfill the promise was its greatest weakness. The Society promoted ideas of spiritual evolution and ‘superphysical consciousness’ in elaborate theoretical terms, but offered little of substance in the form of practical instruction,” *ibid.*, 113.

As the dust of the war settled, the nature of the Order gradually changed into a messianic Movement. For many religious seekers in the West, the atrocities of the war hinted at the *eschaton*—the end of time, heralding the return of Christ, reconceived in Theosophy as the coming of the Maitreya. As Blavatsky successor Annie Besant (1847-1933) and her counselor Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854-1934) were professing that Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was destined to become this “World-Teacher,” Khan, for some, already seemed to fit that role. As Zia Khan tells us, by 1922, the idea that his grandfather may be the prophet of the new age was widespread among his *mureeds*.¹⁰⁵

In 1923, at the request of Rabia Martin, Khan left his wife and four children in France to return to America for another tour, but this time as a full-fledged spiritual teacher. Already aboard *the Pittsburg*, he left no doubt about the purpose of his visit, namely, to foster brotherhood, after a time of strife.¹⁰⁶ Later, he will add that America was not yet ready for his religious message in 1911-1912, but that things had changed since then and that “The World War was responsible for that. Not only is America now hungry for religion, the entire world is seeking the truth and the peace of God.”¹⁰⁷

Khan was detained at Ellis Island—the quota for Indians for that month had already been reached.¹⁰⁸ After an influx of mostly Chinese and Japanese workers, at the end of the nineteenth century, nativist sentiments had led to a Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and a similar Compact Agreement with Japan in 1905, to curb immigration.¹⁰⁹ These were followed up by a milder restriction bill that required newcomers to pass a literacy test, in 1917, but this merely proved a precedent for much tougher legislation, in the 1920s.¹¹⁰ As xenophobia ran rampant in the wake of the war, the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 imposed strict quotas on the admittance of people from outside the United States to, at first, three and, then, two percent of the existing population.¹¹¹

Luckily for Khan, *mureed* Marya “Khushi” Cushing quickly came to the rescue.

¹⁰⁵ This defied the finality of Mohammed’s revelation. Khan had stressed this finality in his early years, but would later submit that only parts of the prophecy had been fulfilled by Mohammed, *ibid.*, 151-162.

¹⁰⁶ Inayat Khan, “Untitled Talk aboard the ‘Pittsburg,’” in *Complete Works of Pir-O-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan: Lectures on Sufism 1923, Vol. I*, ed. Munira van Voorst van Beest (The Hague: East-West Publications, 1989), 87. Khan goes on to declare that both the central theme of the United States Constitution as well as the intention underlying Lincoln’s reform was that of universal “brotherhood.”

¹⁰⁷ Inayat Khan, “Article from *The World*,” in *Complete Works of Pir-O-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan: Lectures on Sufism 1923, Vol. I*, ed. Munira van Voorst van Beest (The Hague: East-West Publications, 1989), 91.

¹⁰⁸ Munira van Voorst van Beest, “Preface,” in *Complete Works of Pir-O-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan: Lectures on Sufism 1923, Vol. I*, ed. Munira van Voorst van Beest (The Hague: East-West Publications, 1989), xi.

¹⁰⁹ Theodore W. Eversole, “Chapter 1: Introduction,” in *The Gilded Age, 1870 to 1900*, ed. Rodney Carlisle, *Handbook to Life in America* (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 13.

¹¹⁰ Whalan, *American Culture in the 1910s*: 30.

¹¹¹ Kte’pi, “Introduction to the Roaring Twenties,” 8 & 10.

Kushi Cushing had become a disciple, the year before, after attending the first summer school in Suresnes. She had made the arrangements for Khan's stay in New York and organized part of his lecture tour in other cities as well.¹¹² After Cushing had explained to the immigration authorities who he was, Khan was allowed to enter the country. He delivered a few talks in New York, Boston, Detroit and Chicago, before setting course for California, where he would spend most of his visit. The first stop was Los Angeles.

Merrell-Wolff recalls how "Sherifa came back to the West with Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan." During their second meeting in New York, Sarah had received initiation from Khan and would be known to family and friends as "Sherifa," ever since.¹¹³ "I met them at the Union Station in Los Angeles and quickly arranged to drive up to San Francisco ..." ¹¹⁴ And so it happened that "[Khan] was driven in a motorcar from Los Angeles to San Francisco, along the Pacific coast, by his *mureeds* Mr. and Mrs. Wolff."¹¹⁵

The Bay Area hailed their exotic guest as a "Sufi mystic, philosopher, poet and musician."¹¹⁶ For seven weeks, Khan gave lectures and public and private classes, organized by Rabia Martin. Thinking back to them, Merrell-Wolff notes that Khan was not concerned with "problems on the plane of cognition," which, for him, made it difficult to fit his teaching into rational concepts. "[T]he real message of Murshid was through a medium which he might call a language within a language. And that inner language was music."¹¹⁷ Reading over their transcripts, there are clear recurrent themes, though.

Briefly, Khan tells us there are many religions, but one truth.¹¹⁸ The truth is that the divine resides inside our hearts.¹¹⁹ But he can only point to it, for thoughts cannot think it and words cannot speak it. It is ineffable.¹²⁰ Sadly, many—including most Americans¹²¹—are ignorant of the fact that the macrocosm is mirrored in the microcosm.¹²²

¹¹² van Voorst van Beest, "Preface to Lectures on Sufism 1923, Vol. I," xi-xii, biographical notes on 426.

¹¹³ Briggs, "Franklin Merrell-Wolff," 11.2-3. She is not to be confused for Lucy "Sherifa" Goodenough. Among Khan's two to three hundred disciples, "Rabia Martin, Sherifa Goodenough, Sofia Green and Fazal Egeling stand out, because they were given the highest possible initiation: that of *murshida* ... All of them were women, at a time when women still did not have the vote in some European countries ..." "The Sufi Movement and the Sufi Order" in Andrew Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997). 548-549, or similarly, 436-438.

¹¹⁴ Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Work," 1.

¹¹⁵ van Voorst van Beest, "Preface to Lectures on Sufism 1923, Vol. I," xii.

¹¹⁶ Khan, "Pamphlet Paul Elder Gallery," 382.

¹¹⁷ Merrell-Wolff wrote this in a short eulogy, eight years after his one-time master had died, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Memories of Inayat Khan," (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1935), 1.

¹¹⁸ Khan, "The Coming World Religion," 11.

¹¹⁹ Khan, "The Sufi Order," 69.

¹²⁰ Khan, "The Coming World Religion," 18; Khan, "The Sufi Order," 69; Khan, "Article from *The Detroit Free Press*," 93.

¹²¹ As far as social harmony as well as material prosperity go, America definitely sets the bar, concluded Khan, "Article from *The American*," 323. However, spirituality speaking, it is no more mature than the rest of the West, compared to the East, he said, Khan, "Article from *The San Francisco Examiner*," 140.

Sufism reminds us of (this) reality again.¹²³ Its reminder is not eastern or western, it is both.¹²⁴ After all, Sufism is almost as old as consciousness itself.¹²⁵ It is not a religion, then, but the essence of all religions—“with no distinction of caste, creed, race, nation or religion.”¹²⁶ And all religions urge to forget our ego self,¹²⁷ to realize our true self.¹²⁸

Key here is that Khan felt people tend to confuse worldly knowledge for divine wisdom. Like Emerson’s Coleridgean reading of reason and understanding in Kant, he separated understanding from comprehension, intellect from intelligence. One refers to “that faculty of knowing, saturated with the impressions of names and forms which it has collected” and the other to “that faculty ... which is capable of knowing all that is to be known.”¹²⁹ Intellectuals get lost in the names and forms of metaphysics, which (mis)leads them to think they understand everything, when they do not yet comprehend anything. They know the world, without knowing themselves. Only by “stilling” or “fasting” the mind can one come to know both, without merely acquiring more knowledge. This is why meditation is “more important than any and all intellectual study.”¹³⁰

According to Khan, meditation entails “the suppression of all conscious personal thought and feeling,” to reach a state of unity.¹³¹ Reminiscent of mesmeric magnetism and New Thought stoicism, he claims it increases the “vital electricity” that “recharges the mind,” which is “the cure for all troubles,” because without thought there can be no pain.¹³² More than that, “[it] is not only the way to healing, it is the key to all things.”¹³³

¹²² Khan, "The Universe in Man." Similarly, he says “All human beings ... are as different strings of one instrument, the universe, on which the Divine Being plays His music,” Khan, "Poet and Prophet," 114. For more music metaphors, Khan, "The Science and Art of Hindu Music; Khan, "The Psychic Influence of Music; Khan, "The Healing Power of Music; and Khan, "Spiritual Development by the Aid of Music."

¹²³ Khan, "The Coming World Religion," 24; Khan, "Article from *The World*," 91.

¹²⁴ Khan, "The Sufi Order," 69-71.

¹²⁵ “I am not coming with anything new. The Sufi philosophy is almost as old as consciousness,” Khan insists and then gives a familiar sounding list of traits, such as “tolerance, natural life, simplicity, self-realization, friendship, benevolence, forgiveness and God,” Khan, "Article from *The Detroit News*," 94.

¹²⁶ “It has been known by other names, such as Vedānta, Bible or Scripture, but wisdom in all its forms and at whatever time it has been given to the world is in fact Sufism,” Khan, "The Sufi Order," 69 & 72.

¹²⁷ “If there is anything to be learned or if anything is to be practiced or studied as the essence of religion, it is this process of forgetting oneself,” says Khan, "The Solution of the Problems of Today," 183.

¹²⁸ “... I think it is not by self-realization that God is attained; it is by God-realization that the real self is attained,” he asserts. “All fear and confusion is the outcome of ignorance of the self and all the wisdom and happiness and every kind of bliss is in the realization of self,” Khan, "Self-Realization," 334 & 337.

¹²⁹ Khan, "The Spirit of Guidance," 125. There are only a few (mis)quotes of Emerson in Khan’s oeuvre.

¹³⁰ See, for instance, Khan, "The Word that was Lost," 155 and Khan, "Self-Realization," 337 and Khan, "Gita Dhyana," 223, 224 & 239, respectively. He tells us that “to meditate attention is first given to the body, to see that it is relaxed, yet comfortable ... The doors of the senses should be held closed; shutting the eyes partly or entirely is beneficial ... Rhythmic breath holds the mind in place also,” but later adds that the goal is to achieve a state of silence and that the method is not important, *ibid.*, 223 & 287.

¹³¹ Khan, "Gita Dhyana," 316 & 321.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 247, 256, 303 & 313. But meditation is better than suggestion, as used in Mesmerism and New Thought, since it burdens the heart, not the mind, which, Khan reckons, is able to heal itself, *ibid.*, 305.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 240.

After weeks of listening to his lectures, the gist of which is summarized above, Franklin and Sherifa were asked to arrange a series of meetings in LA.¹³⁴ Soon after, Khan arrived there to give “six lectures [which] had been well organized and publicized by Mr. and Mrs. Wolff.”¹³⁵ It seemed a promising start of their own Sufi branch, after the disappointing attempt to revive a branch of the Temple tree. “Sherifa and I carried on the work of [Khan’s] Church ... I gave the lectures and Sherifa took care of the more or less ritualistic portion.” But their role in the Sufi movement was short-lived, because it became readily evident that “Murshida [Martin] was impossible to work with,” apparently too dominant for their taste.¹³⁶ And so, they returned to the Theosophical fold.

The United Lodge of Theosophists

It was during the period between 1923 and 1928 that we established our contact with the United Lodge of Theosophists¹³⁷ ... It is said that [it] was founded by a Robert Crosbie ... The policy of the ULT was to maintain the body of the doctrine taught [by the founders of Theosophy] unaltered. This may have been at times a bit on the fanatical side, but it was substantially, I would say, a sound policy.¹³⁸

The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a range of Theosophical schisms. It resulted in at least three influential movements, which all peaked in the twenties. One was the Indian based Theosophical Society of Besant and Leadbeater, out of which had blossomed the immensely popular Order of the Star (of the East) of future “anti-guru guru” Jiddu Krishnamurti. I already briefly mentioned them, above. Another was the American based Theosophical Society of Katherine Tingley (1846-1929), with its own social experiment at Point Loma—Lomaland. And then there was the United Lodge of Theosophists of Robert Crosbie (1849-1919), whose doctrinal “Back to Blavatsky” program stemmed from a growing chagrin about the bitter rivalry between Besant and Tingley.¹³⁹ Private papers show that all three were on Franklin and Sherifa’s radar.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Work," 1.

¹³⁵ van Voorst van Beest, "Preface to Lectures on Sufism 1923, Vol. I," xiv.

¹³⁶ Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Work," 2.

¹³⁷ Actually, he signed up as an associate, in December 1922, Briggs, Wheeler, "Correspondence," 27.

¹³⁸ Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Work," 2 & 4.

¹³⁹ Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*: Chapter 5, e.g. 113.

¹⁴⁰ Merrell-Wolff, "Channeled Messages," e.g. 134, 154, 155.

They steered in the direction of the United Lodge, not only because it had struck them as “the most faithful group of students of the Secret Doctrine,” but also because Hilarion had supposedly assured them that their activities would merge with those of B.P. Wadia (1881-1958), one of its main figures, after Crosbie had died in 1919.¹⁴¹ They attended a meeting in Los Angeles, where an old acquaintance from Stanford immediately introduced the two to John Garrigues (1868-1944) and Grace Clough (1876-d?).¹⁴²

These Lodge leaders proved critical of the Temple of the People. This seems to undermine the whole purpose behind their own movement, which had been to unite, not further divide, Theosophists, without any concern for dissensions or differences of opinion. Apparently, Garrigues and Clough felt that the brotherhood of theosophists envisioned by Crosbie¹⁴³ did not extend to LaDue and Dower, though they were pleased with Merrell-Wolff’s loyal defense of them. Key here is that this experience “opened the door to a problem in the Theosophical movement, with which we were very little familiar”¹⁴⁴—its internal polemics. Perhaps for the first time, they were made aware of the growing competition among religious fringe groups—inside and outside the Theosophical field. I shall return to the significance of this rising rivalry as we move along.

Returning to the United Lodge, Campbell explains that it spent most of its time and effort on the study and dissemination of Theosophical classics, which, in this case, meant the works of Blavatsky and Judge, and the (re)publication of educational books, both for adults and children.¹⁴⁵ This form of “literary religion” appealed to Franklin. “I was deeply impressed with the character and intellectual quality of the work that was produced by the ULT association. I could have found a basic home in it ...”¹⁴⁶ However, the contrary was true for Sherifa. In their words, the Temple and the Sufi movement had been heartfelt, which made the United Lodge seem heartless. At least, it did so to her. “Therefore, they felt “the ULT could not be, for both of us, our spiritual home.”¹⁴⁷

One thing that did come out of their contact with the ULT was a friendship with doctor Frederick Finch Strong (1872-1955), “on the basis of a common Theosophical interest.” They took two trips with him and his wife. One was in 1926, to Death Valley—so well named, Merrell-Wolff said, thinking back to the many graves along the road.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 73. For Wadia’s position within the ULT, see Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*: 127 & 143.

¹⁴² Merrell-Wolff, “A Recollection of my Early Work,” 2.

¹⁴³ Robert Crosbie, *The Friendly Philosopher: Letters and Talks on Theosophy and the Theosophical Life* (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company, 1934/1945). 4 & 9. Merrell-Wolff probably read his book.

¹⁴⁴ Merrell-Wolff, “A Recollection of my Early Work,” 3.

¹⁴⁵ Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*: 143-144.

¹⁴⁶ Merrell-Wolff, “A Recollection of my Early Work,” 4.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 6.

The other, in 1927, took them through the badlands of the Painted Desert of Arizona, with James–Sherifa’s son—joining them, this time. It was the same journey in reverse, which meant they had to traverse the nerve-wrecking roads of the Mormon Dugway a second time, to reach Lee’s Ferry, where they could cross over the Colorado River.¹⁴⁸

“[That] night, while lying in bed, waiting for sleep,” Merrell-Wolff recalls, years later, “I was thinking of this drive, outlining the course rather clearly in my mind,” when, suddenly, he found himself in his car. He was now steering it along the narrow slopes, around the treacherous corners, carefully creeping to the top, when another car appeared at the horizon, bolting towards him. It was a racing machine, unlike any he had ever seen. He quickly recognized who was sitting behind its wheel. There was no doubt. Pointed beard, squinted eyes squarely locked on him, around his lips a devilish grin. It was Mephisto, dead set on a collision. Disaster seemed inevitable. But the very moment they would crash, Merrell-Wolff woke up again. It was not until years later, that he would come to see it as one of two dreams with special symbolic significance.¹⁴⁹

The Benares League of America

In 1928, I, along with eleven others, was appointed by an East Indian known as Yogi Hari Rama Disciples of the Absolute and we were assigned to the task of continuing a work which he had started [namely, Super Yoga Science], which consisted primarily in the teaching of certain techniques which he called *keys* ... This was [an] adaptation of an Indian way of thinking to the American psyche.¹⁵⁰

After their departure from the Temple, the Sufi movement and the United Lodge, the Merrell-Wolffs briefly took to the silence of San Fernando, where they built their own home and worked part of the orange grove they bought from Franklin’s father.¹⁵¹ For a short time, this simple life suited them. But in 1925, they started to search for a teacher again. This is when they came across a self-professed Indian “psychologist and metaphysician,” going by the name of Hari Rama (Rama Mohan Singh, dates unknown).¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 7. See also Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Jungian Psychology and Personal Correlations (7 of 7)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1977), 1. There, he says it was the same trip reversed.

¹⁴⁹ Merrell-Wolff, "Jungian Psychology (7 of 7)," 1-2.

¹⁵⁰ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "The Yoga of Knowledge (2 of 3)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 7.

¹⁵¹ Merrell-Wolff, "A Recollection of my Early Work," 4.

¹⁵² Briggs, "Franklin Merrell-Wolff," 12.1. These titles are on the cover of his book, Hari Rama, "Human Life and Destiny," in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (103)* (unknown: H. Mohan Singh, 1927), 250.

Briggs tells us Yogi Rama had already been in the United States since 1909, but that he did not establish his own group—the Benares League of America—until after his alleged Realization, in 1924. Rama, too, would find the post-war twenties a highly fruitful period for establishing a new religion of his own. Several dozen students soon gathered around him, twelve of whom would later be initiated as apostolic disciples,¹⁵³ authorized to spread the gospel of “Christ-consciousness” of his *Super Yoga Science*.¹⁵⁴

Briefly, Super Yoga Science wants “to awaken the latent power in every human being,” through physical exercises and breath control combined with strict living and eating habits. This sounds fairly harmless, but the Benares League material in Merrell-Wolff’s library shows it also entailed a series of unusual—if not downright disturbing—rules of conduct, which tried to extend Rama’s control to everything from marriage and child rearing to more trivial matters such as cooking, bathing, sleeping and clothing.¹⁵⁵

For a bit more ideological depth, one has to turn to the booklets and lectures of his disciple Yogagnānī, in particular his *Yoga and Re-Embodiment*.¹⁵⁶ These offer “an outline of the rationale of Yoga as a basic philosophy and as a science of life practice” by “casting into a western rational form the metaphysical material which comes out of the East,” blending the oriental focus on Being with the occidental focus on Form,¹⁵⁷ as Merrell-Wolff said above, to adapt an Indian way of thinking to the American mind.

Yogagnānī describes Yoga as “a science based on a philosophy ... that man is in reality God.”¹⁵⁸ It consists of a technique or practice that creates a condition in which a dormant cognitive function is activated, which can then evoke a certain state again.

¹⁵³ Six women, six men, see Hari Rama, "Letter 'To Local Chapters of Benares League'," in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive* (103) (unknown: H. Mohan Singh, 1928). One of them was Franklin, see below.

¹⁵⁴ Super Yoga Science professes that there are three mental states or principles of sub-consciousness, consciousness and super-consciousness, whereby the latter is taken as equivalent to “Christ-consciousness,” Hari Rama, "Super Yoga Science: 'Occult Chemistry' combined with 'the Chemical Composition of Life Elements'," in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive* (103) (unknown: H. Mohan Singh, 1927), e.g. 13.

¹⁵⁵ Saying everyone should be married, should not serve meat to young children, should drink hot water in the morning to prolong life, should not bathe when menstruating, should not sleep on their left side and should wear blue or green hats seems odd, no matter the larger context, *ibid.*, 11, 12, 13, 22, 23, 24.

¹⁵⁶ See Yogagnani, *Re-Embodiment or Human Incarnations* (San Fernando: Merrell-Wolff Publishing Company, 1930); Yogagnani, *Yoga: Its Problems, Its Philosophy, Its Technique* (Los Angeles: Skelton Publishing Company, 1930). Unlike his booklets, his lectures also outline Mesmerist and New Thought techniques for healing others or realizing material wishes, Yogagnani, "Course on Mantra Jnana Yoga " (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (703), ca. 1928), the best example is lesson six, 35-36.

¹⁵⁷ Yogagnani, *Yoga*: 7; Yogagnani, *Re-Embodiment*: 10. “The cultures of the East and the West have developed in diametrically opposed directions,” whereby India reflects *subjective* mystical genius and Europe *objective* material genius. Each comes across as inferior to the other, but “If the metaphysical significance of the now superficially familiar Theory of Relativity were more generally understood, this mistake would not be made. No one culture can possibly afford an absolute criterion,” Yogagnani, *Yoga*: 9; Yogagnani, *Re-Embodiment*: 9. A textbook case of orientalism, cf. Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (Oxon: Routledge, 1999). Chapter 1 & 4-6.

¹⁵⁸ Yogagnani, *Yoga*: 25. Similar ideas are also found throughout his lecture notes, see e.g. Yogagnani, "Civilisation: Looking Forward," (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (540), 1929), 1.

In his own words, “Yoga science is a technique by which new cognitive powers may be awakened ... [It] is the life practice designed to produce a favorable condition for the Realization ... of that which is formulated in [the] philosophy of Wisdom Religion,” that is, “the destruction of the false ego and the Realization of the One Self.”¹⁵⁹ Now, if this metaphysics sounds more like a psychology than a philosophy that is no surprise, since Yogagñānī presumes that Yoga “places primary reality in Consciousness.” Regardless whether or not there is a reality *as such*, the only meaningful reality that exists *for us* is the one that is wholly dependent on consciousness.¹⁶⁰ As individual consciousness is identical with pure consciousness, “in psychology, in [the] sense of self-analysis, is found [the] key to all knowledge.”¹⁶¹ This line of reasoning implies that every problem is actually a cognitive problem, which leads him to surmise that “Yoga Philosophy has the critical spirit, in the Kantian sense, and builds metaphysics upon epistemology.”¹⁶²

His Yoga, then, focuses on *jñāna* or Knowledge—capital *K*, given that it is “both intellectual and Spiritual ... what might be called intellectio-spiritual knowledge.”¹⁶³ In western terms, he is talking about *gnosis*.¹⁶⁴ There are many different routes of Yoga—roughly seven, by Yogagñānī’s count¹⁶⁵—but only the Path of Knowledge or Jñāna Yoga can lead to liberation, he thinks, since there is nothing to do and nowhere to go, except to *know* that “you are (already) that”—*tat tvam asi*.¹⁶⁶ Needless to say, this is an “advaitized” Yoga—reminiscent of Roy and Vivekananda—which centers on the realization or immediate religious experience of *mokṣa*,¹⁶⁷ as a non-dualist state of consciousness that needs yet exceeds the intellect. It wields reason as a metaphysical stepping stone.

Moving on, Yogagñānī submits that Yoga is often dismissed or even despised in the West for being too intellectual or philosophical and not practical enough.¹⁶⁸ Recent studies convincingly show, however, that the opposite is more likely to have been true.

¹⁵⁹ Yogagnani, "America in Relation to the World-Crisis," (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (487), ca. 1933), 1-2; Yogagnani, "Yoga and its Transforming Power," (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (27), 1929), 1.

¹⁶⁰ Yogagnani, *Yoga*: 34.

¹⁶¹ He jotted this claim down in his notes, Yogagnani, "Western Science and Yoga Philosophy," (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (499), 1929), 1. For a similar remark, Yogagnani, *Yoga*: 152-153.

¹⁶² Yogagnani, *Yoga*: 34-35.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 145. As this quote shows, Yogagñānī throws a lot of capitals around, but not very consistently.

¹⁶⁴ The Greek *gnosis* and Sanskrit *jñāna* both mean “knowledge” as in “to know” and “sapien wisdom,” Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). 21.

¹⁶⁵ These are Karma, Bhakti, Mantra, Hatha, Laya, Raja and Jñāna Yoga which respectively correspond with the paths of action, devotion, chanting, exercising the physical body, exercising the subtle body of the chakras, meditation in the sense of concentration and knowledge, Yogagnani, *Yoga*: Chapter III-IX.

¹⁶⁶ These claims often recur, see e.g. Yogagnani, *Re-Embodiment*: 13; Yogagnani, *Yoga*: 37-38, 41, 148.

¹⁶⁷ He equates (Hindu) *mokṣa* with (Buddhist) *nirvāṇa*, as the peak of *samādhi*, Yogagnani, *Yoga*: 131.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

Richard King, for one, has reminded us that philosophy in the West is a European invention, which can be traced to ancient Greece, where, at some point, the elite started to separate *mythos* from *logos*—one being meaningful stories about reality, the other rational descriptions of it. In modern days, this divide has been used to exclude much of non-western thought from “philosophical” discourse, King claims, since their metaphorical side has allowed them to be readily dismissed as “theological” or—worse—as “mystical.” The problem with this is that it has not placed philosophical debates on a level playing field, given that the rules of the game have been set to favor one team.¹⁶⁹

Probably, Yogagñānī projected the anti-intellectual antipathy towards idealism of his pragmatist and behaviorist contemporaries onto Indian philosophy. With this in mind, he preemptively turned around the empiricist argument of the former to support the rationalist position of the latter, by employing a Jamesian quip against itself. Because to argue that the belief in a material reality *out there* has no effect on our conscious experience of reality *in here* makes it “a difference that makes no difference.”¹⁷⁰

Did the Benares League offer idealist theories to a people that favored practical methods? Not entirely. The huge appeal of metaphysical movements like Yogagñānī’s own League, once again, suggests that, after the war, a desire emerged in the West for a “higher knowledge” vis-a-vis a “greater reality” that had not invested in the materialist and rationalist values of its considered-to-be-bankrupted culture. Yogagñānī himself says it all, when he says that the “monstrosity of the recent war” laid bare the cavities of the outward development of western society and that the inward “Fruit of Yoga” is sorely required, “because our present culture has failed to meet our deepest needs.”¹⁷¹

How does this tie in with our subject? The “intellectio-spiritual” Benares League ideology of Yogagñānī is important for the life and teaching of Franklin Merrell-Wolff, not because he was *influenced* by Yogagñānī, but because he actually *was* Yogagñānī.

¹⁶⁹ Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1999). Chapter 2. Take Klostermaier. He is right to suggest that the *Upaniṣads*—a primary source for all *darśanas* or schools of “Hinduism,” including Yoga—do not fit in the frame of *western* philosophical thought. But denying them any philosophical or even theological status and interpreting them as a form of mysticism instead is problematic, Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994/2007). 71-72. The problem is, it renders “Hinduism” powerless in the playing fields of religion, politics and academia, for “The privatization of mysticism, when coupled with the post-Enlightenment association of the mystical with the non-rational or the irrational has ... led to a characterization of ‘mystics’ as largely uninterested in or antithetical to social, ecclesiastical and political authority,” Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (Oxon: Routledge, 1999). Chapter 1, 27-33 & 40.

¹⁷⁰ “There can be no difference anywhere that doesn’t *make* a difference elsewhere ...” William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907). 49-50. James realized that his argument, in principle, works both ways, *ibid.*, lecture III, e.g. 95.

¹⁷¹ Yogagnani, “Civilisation: Looking Forward,” 1-2; Yogagnani, “Yoga and its Transforming Power,” 2.

The Assembly of Man

At midnight on December 21 1928, Sherifa and I founded The Assembly of Man. From that time [on], there were many lecture trips ... and many workings with individual *sādhakas*. Sherifa was the head of the organization and I maintained the greater part of the lecture activity ... oriented to the esoteric philosophy.¹⁷²

By late 1928, Hari Rama returned to India, leaving behind twelve disciples to carry on his legacy in America. He announced their names in an internal letter to the chapters. Number eight on the list is “Dr. Franklin F. Wolff of San Fernando,” who is appointed to teach the Super Yoga Science in general and lead the Chicago chapter in particular.¹⁷³

Though he was neither, from the late twenties to late thirties, our “Doctor” temporarily reinvented himself as a “Yogi.” Reminiscent of popular New Thought thinker William Walker Atkinson, who wrote books under the pseudonym of “Ramacharaka,” Merrell-Wolff commenced his teaching career as the alter ego of “Yogagñānī.”¹⁷⁴ However, he carried it one step further. Not only did he adopt an Indian name, he assumed an exotic attire to match—complete with a robe and turban. This makes sense, within the context of the (post-war) quest for higher knowledge—*jñāna* or *gnosis*—outside the confines of conventional modern western culture. At least, within Theosophical and New Thought circles, eastern sages were perceived as the archetypal custodians of the “wisdom religion.” But because increasingly restrictive immigration laws had reduced their influx to a slow trickle, western students-turned-teacher took up their role as instructors on the road to realization.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, few went so far as Merrell-Wolff.

Gradually, an “inner section”—the Order of Avalokiteśvara—converged around Yogagñānī, with whom he shared his own occult Yoga. This raised eyebrows among the other disciples of Hari Rama. Not without reason, so it seems. Its internal documents clearly present “the O of A [as] a special work given to Yogagñānī by the Great Master.”

¹⁷² Merrell-Wolff, “A Recollection of my Early Life,” 1.

¹⁷³ Another disciple already presided over the Los Angeles chapter, Rama, “Letter 'To Local Chapters'.”

¹⁷⁴ In fact, a number of his lectures echo the “self-help” mind-cure teaching of Ramacharaka, with New Thought sounding titles as Yogagnani, “How to Revitalize and Rebuild your Mind and Body,” (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (481), ca. 1929); Yogagnani, “How to gain Health, Happiness and Success,” (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (482), no date); Yogagnani, “How to get What you Want,” (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (483), no date), among many others.

¹⁷⁵ A good example is Charles Haanel (1866-1949)—a New Thought writer, best known for his Master Key System, see Charles Francis Haanel, “The Master Key System,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (103)* (St. Louis: Mail Order Course (incomplete), 1912). He also co-authored an exposition of amazing “Yoga Secrets,” see Charles Francis Haanel, Victor Simon Perera, “The Amazing Secrets of the Yogi,” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (103)* (St. Louis: Mail Order Course (incomplete), ca. 1929). Parts of both of these correspondence courses are in Merrell-Wolff’s library. However, he never refers to them.

In fact, it is so special that “No disciple of H[ari] R[ama] may know anything about it, except by initiation.”¹⁷⁶ It is not to be discussed with anyone else, unless they can produce the secret symbol of the Order. This internal strife ended in a break from the Benares League. Franklin and Sherifa now felt they were ready to strike out on their own.

In 1928, they established the Rama Sangha—also Jñāna Sangha, read as “Arcane School”¹⁷⁷—later renamed Assembly of Man, with Sherifa as “Head of the Esoteric Section” and Yogagnānī as “Ambassador General.” They saw themselves in a “guru line” of whose initials I assume to be B[uddha] and C[hrist] to M[orya] to K[oot] H[oomi] and [H]ilarion to I[nayat] K[han] and H[ari] R[ama] all the way down to Y[ogagnānī] and S[herifa].¹⁷⁸ Their students were again appointed as either one of five “Guardians” or one of the “Pillars,” all of whom had to proceed through the ranks of first, second and third degree disciple in order to graduate as a Priest in the Order of Avalokiteśvara.¹⁷⁹

Finally, Franklin and Sherifa accomplished what they had set out to do, since their break from the Temple of the People¹⁸⁰—to sprout a new religious branch and become “spiritual parents” to an ideological offspring of their own.¹⁸¹ But in the wake of the war, religious fringe groups abounded. In the early 1930s, towards the peak of this period of emergence, they apparently felt the need to resort to a similar polemics as they had encountered—and disliked—in the ULT. “The country is filled to overflowing of pseudo-occult organizations,” they said. And even if it appeared the same, the Assembly provided a rare opportunity “to unite yourself with a *truly* occult movement.”¹⁸²

Their “truly occult” teaching was spread through booklets and correspondence courses as well as via public and private events, such as children’s and sacred services on Sundays and study groups on Thursdays. The services consisted of meditation and reading sessions, to which intricately scripted rituals were added in the study groups.

¹⁷⁶ Sarah Merrell-Wolff, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Meeting Material: Instructions for Services,” (Group Work: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (705), no date), 24. “Given in the simplest terms Avalokiteśvara is ‘the Great Master,’” he clarifies. “The greatest error that man has ever made is the thinking of God as an objective being. This idea has been fostered by priestcraft and organized religion and thus these two have become man’s greatest curse ... Avalokiteśvara is the Light of Consciousness which sustains the Universe ... To realize that I am Avalokiteśvara is the goal of all Yoga ... This brief discussion should bring to students a better conception of the significance of the Order to which they belong,” Yogagnani, “The Meaning of Avalotikeshvara,” (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (612), ca. 1928), 1.

¹⁷⁷ Yogagnani, “The Arcane School (Sangha Jnana),” in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (607)* (Lone Pine: Assembly of Man, no date).

¹⁷⁸ Merrell-Wolff, Merrell-Wolff, “Instructions for Services,” 3.

¹⁷⁹ Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” 16.2. For Guardian and Priest texts, see archive material 709-712.

¹⁸⁰ Some students took the Assembly as a culmination of the Temple, see Devi, “Halcyon Revisited,” 5.

¹⁸¹ “... a soul must have a father and mother, before it can incarnate and perfect a physical body, so too must the Neophyte have a spiritual father and mother, e’er he can build and incarnate in an Immortal Body of Light. Are you ready, o Child ... ?” Merrell-Wolff, Merrell-Wolff, “Instructions for Services,” 26.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 82, italics mine.

The latter ones were “secret.” Insiders had to solemnly swear not to share documents with outsiders and not to let non- or even former members in on these gatherings.¹⁸³

There is no reason to divulge their actual content. Suffice it to say, they include complex but typical occult practices. These are meticulously scripted in the “Rules of the O of A,”¹⁸⁴ which served as a guidebook for disciples around the country. During the following decades, talks and study groups were organized in Arroyo Grande, Des Moines, Denver, Chicago, Juneau, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Morenci and Phoenix. Doroethy Briggs estimates that about thirty to sixty people attended the talks, including ten to twenty initiates who also frequented the local study groups, depending on the city.¹⁸⁵ This would amount to one- or two-hundred Assembly members, but its archival papers and pictures lead me to surmise it was closer to half that—if not less.

Briggs further says, “Sherifa enjoys the ritual more than Franklin does.”¹⁸⁶ Now, I do not intend to contribute to Merrell-Wolff’s posthumously reconstructed image—to which I return, in Chapter Four—but I tend to agree with her, on this. It is subjective, I admit, but after reading thousands of pages by Franklin’s hand and several dozen by Sherifa’s, I would describe the former as convoluted in structure but clear in style and the latter the other way around. The tone of the Assembly of Man’s instructional material bears her mark. It is safe to assume that—just like before, in their Sufi branch—Sherifa took care of the administrative and ritual routines and Franklin of the doctrine.

Part of this doctrine is that “Realization is but the waking up of the *Jīvātman* (individualized soul) to realizing the fact that it is Absolute Being [*Paramātmān*], that it always was and always will be That” and that “The universe is but a description of its reflection or *māyā*.” Even the notion of a road to realization is an illusion. On a lower level of consciousness, there *seem* to be experiences leading to higher knowledge, but these are only relatively true. “The resolution of this seeming process transcends intellection, it is found only in the realization of Self-Knowledge.” One must “go within,” for “Metaphysical knowledge in the strict sense is not by cognition, but by identification of the Knower with the Known,”¹⁸⁷ by knowledge through identity, if you will. To Merrell-Wolff, this “higher knowledge” seemed best expressed and easiest accessed in and for the West with Einstein’s attempt to blend scientific intellection and religious intuition.

¹⁸³ “Do you pledge yourself not to speak the name of this Order nor of the services of initiation nor concerning any of its forms or instructions ... to anyone who is not a known Initiate of the Order,” *ibid.*, 29.

¹⁸⁴ Next to detailed role descriptions, incomplete versions of the “Rules of the O of A” are found in *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” 14.2; Doroethy Briggs, Correspondence with the Author, 2013.

¹⁸⁶ Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” 16.4.

¹⁸⁷ Yogagnani, “Correspondence with Students,” (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (10), 1929), 2 & 11.

PHILOSOPHY

There has just come before my attention a brief statement of your beautiful mystical philosophy or Cosmic Religion and it has flashed into my consciousness ... that you have become the focal point for the expression of that true religious basis that has become a crying need in the Occident, which can no longer be satisfied in its depths by the outworn creeds and forms of current religiosity.¹⁸⁸

In 1921, Albert Einstein (1879-1955) visited America for the first time. After his introduction of the special and general theory of relativity, in 1905 and 1915, the star of this former patent officer had rapidly risen from obscure physicist to celebrity scientist. His arrival created a true media sensation, followed by a torrent of popularizations of his theories.¹⁸⁹ Einstein himself never understood nor endorsed his idolization. "The cult of individuals is always, in my view, unjustified," he espoused, though it did strike him as "a welcome symptom in an age which is commonly denounced as materialistic that it makes heroes of men whose goals lie wholly in the intellectual and moral sphere."¹⁹⁰

Ten years later, at the advent of another war, Einstein returned permanently to the States. By now, Merrell-Wolff was well informed of his physics¹⁹¹ and—even more so—inspired by his metaphysics. The quote above is the opening line from a three-page letter which he wrote to Einstein, in early 1931. As he explains himself, he had just read his essay on "Cosmic Religion"¹⁹² and felt compelled to share his thoughts with him.

¹⁸⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Correspondence with Albert Einstein," (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (1), 1931), 1. The letter is not signed. It is not certain if Einstein received, let alone replied, to it.

¹⁸⁹ Currell, *American Culture in the 1920s*: 11.

¹⁹⁰ Albert Einstein, "My First Impression of the USA," in *Ideas and Opinions*, ed. unknown (New York: Bonanza Books, 1954), 4.

¹⁹¹ The books in his library include L. Silberstein, *The Theory of Relativity* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1914); Moritz Schlick, *Space and Time in Contemporary Physics: An Introduction to the Theory of Relativity and Gravitation*, trans. Henry L. Brose, 1917 original German ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920); Edwin E. Slosson, *Early Lessons in Einstein: A Discussion of the More Intelligible Features of the Theory of Relativity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920); Arthur Stanley Eddington, *Report on the Relativity Theory of Gravitation* (London: Fleetway Press, 1920); Malcolm Bird, ed. *Einstein's Theories of Relativity and Gravitation: A Selection of Material from the Essays submitted in the Competition for the Eugene Higgins Prize of \$5000* (New York: Scientific American Publishing, 1921); Albert Einstein, "Geometry and Experience," *Sidelights on Relativity*, trans. G. Jeffrey and W. Perrett, 1921 original German ed. (London: Methuen, 1923); Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*, trans. Robert W. Lawson, 1916 original German ed. (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1921). Several other more general introductions to physics were also found in his library; popular titles, such as James Jeans, *The Universe around Us* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929); James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930).

¹⁹² After it had appeared in the New York Times, in 1930, the essay was republished in Albert Einstein, *Cosmic Religion with Other Opinions and Aphorisms* (New York: Covici Friede Publishers, 1931). He had read this edition. I refer to this text under a different title: Einstein, "Religion and Science," 36-40.

“The moral debacle of the recent great war only too clearly shows the danger threatening our civilization,” he agrees with the physicist,¹⁹³ telling him he is the right person to light the way to a brighter future. “For you are a recognized master in just precisely that field which even the hardest minds among us must perforce respect.”¹⁹⁴

Merrell-Wolff claims “the spiritual principles enunciated by the liberated Sages of the past,”¹⁹⁵ nowadays, only speak to a very small number of people. “The poetic and imaginative forms of the Hindus,” for instance—what King earlier referred to as their metaphorical side—suits well in *their* socio-historical context, but not in *our* “modern scientific field.”¹⁹⁶ Therefore, we need to find a new “language,” one that is convincing to the “intellectual consciousness,” which he considers to dominate the world today.¹⁹⁷

Based on his own background, “I have no doubt that within mathematics lies the same undying Wisdom that forms the common substance of all great Sages.”¹⁹⁸ And so, he rhetorically asks, “Is it not possible, then, that somehow out of mathematics, or mathematics in combination with physical science, we will find the adequate language to express mystical profundity in a form which will command both the attention and respect of our present externally intellectualized public?”¹⁹⁹ Obviously, he believed so.

But that does not blind him to other mystical modes, which complement rather than contradict the intellectual route, he assured Einstein. “Count Keyserling, I should say, is the most prominent exemplar of this complementary mode that we see upon the occidental horizon today.”²⁰⁰ In fact—still drawing on the authority of Hindu sages, by comparison, despite their allegedly dwindled influence—he claims “the Kṛṣṇa of Indian tradition has much in common with Keyserling, while the exquisite rational spirit of Śaṅkara is a continuation on the same fundamental line you have expressed.”²⁰¹ Next, I explore the extent to which his ideas are related to those of Einstein and Keyserling.

¹⁹³ After WWI, Einstein had already implored America to become more involved in international politics, Einstein, “My First Impression of the USA,” 7. After WWII, he added that “unless another war is prevented, it is likely to bring destruction on a scale never before held possible ... and that little civilization would survive it,” Einstein, “Atomic War or Peace,” 123. Merrell-Wolff also perceived the threat of a Spenglerian decline of civilization, but he considered “cultural insulation probably the best course for America,” Yogagnani, “America in Relation to the World-Crisis,” 1. Isolationism was actually widely supported by Americans, during this time, David Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s*, ed. Martin Halliwell, Twentieth-Century American Culture (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008). 22.

¹⁹⁴ Merrell-Wolff, “Correspondence with Einstein,” 1 & 3.

¹⁹⁵ “[Like] Gautama, Śaṅkara, Jesus and Laotse,” *ibid.*, 1.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ “... especially the Occident,” *ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ He even says that he finds himself “in the same profound harmony” with him as with Śaṅkara,” *ibid.*

Einstein's Philosophy of "Religion"

"People complain that our generation has no philosophers. Quite unjustly: it is merely that today's philosophers sit in another department, their names are Planck and Einstein."²⁰² Indeed, Arnold Sommerfeld elaborates, ever since his "miraculous year" of 1905, the latter had touched upon questions about the nature of space and time, which would prove no less pertinent for philosophy than they are for physics²⁰³—probably not so much for ethics,²⁰⁴ but most surely for epistemology²⁰⁵ and for metaphysics.²⁰⁶

Relevant for us are the philosophical rather than mathematical implications of his relativity theory. Einstein criticized Kant for his absolutism. According to his own scientific pragmatism, a claim is "correct," if its content can be logically deduced from the axioms of a certain system. The axioms themselves may be freely chosen, as long as the facts that are derived from them correlate to sense experience. A claim is "true," if its content also reflects and predicts experience.²⁰⁷ "To Einstein, the physical theory is a product of human inventiveness, the correctness of which can be judged only on the basis of its logical simplicity and the agreement of its observable consequences with experience."²⁰⁸ In short, the outer world is pragmatically adapted to inner inventions.

²⁰² Adolf von Harnack in Arnold Sommerfeld, "To Albert Einstein's Seventieth Birthday," in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: MJF Books, 1949/1970), 99.

²⁰³ Ibid. During this year, he published five influential papers. As John Stachel tells us, the "miraculous year" of Einstein (1905) is named as such to draw a parallel with the "annus mirabilis" of Isaac Newton (1666), that actually never referred to Newton specifically, but to an eventful year that included several of his celebrated discoveries, John Stachel, "Introduction," in *Einstein's Miraculous Year: Five Papers that Changed the Face of Physics*, ed. John Stachel (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 3.

²⁰⁴ "That moral conceptions vary with the social class and the structure of civilization is ... not derivable from Einstein's theory; the parallelism between the relativity of ethics and that of space and time is nothing more than a superficial analogy ..." Hans Reichenbach, "The Philosophical Significance of the Theory of Relativity," in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: MJF Books, 1949/1970), 289. The theory of relativity does not support Social Darwinism, for instance.

²⁰⁵ Because epistemology means theories of knowledge and theories of knowledge mean the relation between conception and sensation, revisions of such fundamental concepts as space and time are directly relevant for epistemology e.g. Ibid., 290; Victor F. Lenzen, "Einstein's Theory of Knowledge," in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: MJF Books, 1949/1970), 358-359.

²⁰⁶ "The metaphysical wealth [regarding the ontological status of reality] reposing largely untapped in modern physical theory is enormous," Henry Margeneau, "Einstein's Conception of Reality," in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: MJF Books, 1949/1970), 246.

²⁰⁷ "A proposition is correct if, within a logical system, it is deduced according to the accepted logical rules. A system has truth-content according to the certainty and completeness of its coordination-possibility to the totality of experience ... All concepts, even those which are closest to experience, are from the point of view of logic freely chosen conventions," Albert Einstein, "Autobiographical Notes," in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: MJF Books, 1949/1970), 11 & 13.

²⁰⁸ Philipp Frank, *Einstein: His Life and Times*, trans. George Rosen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947). 282; cf. Ilse Rosenthal-Schneider, "Presuppositions and Anticipations in Einstein's Physics," in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: MJF Books, 1949/1970), 132; Lenzen, "Einstein's Theory of Knowledge," 373. Ushenko deems "simplicity" an extra-logical axiom itself, Andrew Paul Ushenko, "Einstein's Influence on Contemporary Philosophy," in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: MJF Books, 1949/1970), 613. I would agree.

So, all that is needed to prevent a conceptual system from degrading into idle talk or empty metaphysics is for most of its propositions to order parsimoniously and anticipate pragmatically our experiences, regardless if it is “a free play with symbols according to (logically) arbitrarily given rules of the game.”²⁰⁹ After all, Ilse Rosenthal-Schneider rightly points out, though arbitrary and relative, those rules are what make the game possible to begin with.²¹⁰ Clearly, this leaves no room for absolute categories.

As Hans Reichenbach says, Einstein’s relativity theory undercuts our ingrained belief in Kantian categories—purely reasonable *a priori* principles, like time, space and causality, which inform sensory experiences *a posteriori*—for it has proven that none of them may be taken as final facts about reality.²¹¹ A concept or theory is only right, when it works within a specified frame of reference. Reminiscent of Peirce and James, Einstein finds that “the only justification lies in its usefulness ... the degree to which its use contributes to making the totality of the contents of consciousness ‘intelligible.’”²¹²

That his relativity is relevant for philosophy, Reichenbach warns, does not make Einstein a philosopher.²¹³ He was a physicist first and a metaphysicist by implication only. True. But I also agree with Max Jammer, that we should not overlook or underestimate the influence of his undogmatic philosophy of religion on his emotional and intellectual life.²¹⁴ It is precisely this philosophy of religion—more than his science—that ties Einstein to Merrell-Wolff. So, the question is: what does his “religion” entail?

First of all, Einstein never opposed religion to science. No, he considered them complementary rather than contradictory. Science provides us with powerful tools to accomplish certain goals, he argued, but the very longing to reach those goals comes from religion. They respectively represent what *is* versus what *should be*—facts versus values. In an attempt to define the two, he says science is the rational systematization of experience by means of conceptualization, whereas religion is the pursuit of super-personal objects and goals that neither require nor permit any rational foundation.²¹⁵

²⁰⁹ Einstein, "Bertrand Russell's Theory of Knowledge," 23.

²¹⁰ Rosenthal-Schneider, "Presuppositions and Anticipations," 135.

²¹¹ Reichenbach, "The Philosophical Significance of the Theory of Relativity," 307-310. In all fairness, Einstein did not discard Kantian epistemology altogether. He points out that “The theoretical attitude here advocated is distinct from that of Kant only by the fact that we do not conceive of the ‘categories’ as unalterable (conditioned by the nature of the understanding), but as (in the logical sense) free conventions. They appear to be *a priori* only insofar as thinking without the positing of categories and of concepts in general would be as impossible as is breathing in a vacuum,” see Einstein, "Remarks," 674.

²¹² Einstein, "Remarks," 673.

²¹³ Reichenbach, "The Philosophical Significance of the Theory of Relativity," 290 & 310.

²¹⁴ Max Jammer, *Einstein and Religion: Physics and Theology* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999/2002). 4 & 6. My view on Einstein’s philosophy of religion relies significantly on this study.

²¹⁵ Or the relation between facts and between facts and values, Einstein, "Science and Religion," 41-45.

Inspired by Kant,²¹⁶ Einstein emphasized that “science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.”²¹⁷ Conflicts between them spring from a misapprehension; how can they collide, if they pertain to such different domains?²¹⁸ That is not to say they are not closely connected, for the religious feeling of mystery—“even if mixed with fear”—stands at the cradle of true science.²¹⁹ It is this very sense of tremendous awe which infuses “the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research.”²²⁰ What does that mean? The answer requires a look at his threefold categorization of religion.

Einstein listed three types of religion. First, religions of fear. These are generally found among primitive people, who have created illusory beings, in their own image, whose favors they try to secure by performing those rites and rituals that have been passed on to them through the generations. Second, social or moral religions, which revolve around a God(s) of providence, a divine being(s), who cares and protects as well as corrects and punishes their flock, like the Judeo-Christian father in heaven. Third, cosmic religions, which lack fixed ideologies and institutions and will appeal to those who have realized the meaninglessness of human goals and desires, on the one hand, but have retained the sense of harmony in nature and thought, on the other.²²¹

Actually, Einstein never speaks of a “cosmic religion,” only of a “cosmic religious feeling,” which intuits “the Reason that manifests itself in nature.”²²² This seems like a trivial nuance—it is not. In reducing religion to a direct experience of a divine reason, Einstein the philosopher continued the rationalist and romanticist legacy of Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677)²²³ and Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834).²²⁴

In a nutshell, Spinoza saw reason in man akin to reason in nature, which allows for us to acquire a tranquil understanding of our reality by understanding ourselves.²²⁵

²¹⁶ “[I]ntuition can never be other than sensible ... The faculty for thinking of objects of sensible intuition, on the contrary, is the understanding. Neither of these properties is to be preferred to the other ... Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind,” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781 original German ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). 193-194.

²¹⁷ Einstein, “Science and Religion,” 46.

²¹⁸ “The main source of the present-day conflicts between the spheres of religion and of science lies in this concept of a personal God,” he thinks. Strictly speaking, this doctrine cannot be refuted by science, given that religion can—unfairly—retreat into domains in which science has yet to set foot, *ibid.*, 47-48.

²¹⁹ Einstein, “The World as I see It,” 11.

²²⁰ Einstein, “Religion and Science,” 39.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 36-38.

²²² Einstein, “The World as I see It,” 11.

²²³ By the late 1920s, Einstein had repeatedly studied the *Ethics*, Jammer, *Einstein and Religion*: 144.

²²⁴ According to Jammer, it is also “very likely that Einstein had read Schleiermacher,” for a published excerpt of the *Speeches on Religion* were found in Einstein’s library in Berlin, *ibid.*, 130, footnote 91.

²²⁵ Michael L. Morgan, Introduction to Benedict de Spinoza, *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ca. 1660-1677 original ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002). x.

In his own words, “Man, insofar as he is part of Nature, constitutes a part of the power of Nature.”²²⁶ Nature equals God,²²⁷ so man is part of God.²²⁸ Seeing as “everything in Nature involves and expresses the conception of God in proportion to its essence and perfection ... we acquire a greater and more perfect knowledge of God as we gain more knowledge of natural phenomena.”²²⁹ All our actions should, thus, be aimed at gaining knowledge about (our) nature, since that will lead to knowledge about God.²³⁰ That is, *clear* knowledge about nature and God. Spinoza recognized three categories of increasingly certain cognition: opinions, beliefs and clear knowledge. One stems from “casual experience” or “imagination,” the other from “reason” and the last from “intuition.”²³¹

Schleiermacher took these ideas from “the holy rejected Spinoza” to construct a post-Kantian view of religion.²³² If, as Kant asserted, we can only know the phenomenal reality of our mind, how, then, can we know (there is) a corresponding noumenal reality? We cannot, his critics complained. Kant replied that knowledge requires *both* external impressions and internal categories. But what bothered contemporaries, like Schleiermacher, is that when this line of reasoning is applied to God, God moves out of reach. The divine is not an object, so does not provide any sensory input,²³³ which means we can only conceive it through our own concepts. Indeed, for Kant, the *idea* of God ought to be the categorical imperative in our life. Though a Kantian in many ways, this religious morality based on reason alone did not sit well with Schleiermacher.²³⁴ Instead, he made the seminal move of reducing religion to an *Anschauung* or *Gefühl*.

²²⁶ Benedict de Spinoza, "Theological-Political Treatise," in *Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 426.

²²⁷ Spinoza uses the terms synonymously, e.g. *Ibid.*, 447.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 395.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 428.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ e.g. Spinoza, "Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being," 62-63; Spinoza, "Ethics," 267-268.

²³² Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter, 1799 original German ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). 24. Actually, he never read Spinoza, but relied on Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819), who invoked Spinoza as a straw man in his anti-intellectual attack on Kantian rationalism. Against Kant, Jacobi believed that noumenal reality *could* be immediately known through (a leap of) “faith.” Schleiermacher reversed this reading of Spinoza, using him to see through critical philosophy more consistently than Kant himself, supposedly, had done, Julia A. Lamm, "Schleiermacher's Post-Kantian Spinozism: The Early Essays on Spinoza, 1793-94," *The Journal of Religion* 74, no. 4 (1994). Nevertheless, “The term *feeling* seems to be taken from Jacobi, although not entirely with Jacobi’s meaning ... Schleiermacher clearly understands it to be a form of Spinoza’s ‘immediate concept,’ what in the *Ethics* is referred to as ‘intuition,’” *ibid.*, 502. Lamm explains elsewhere that this fundamental term would eventually take on the connotation of “intellectual intuition” for Schleiermacher, Julia A. Lamm, "The Early Philosophical Roots of Schleiermacher's Notion of Gefühl, 1788-1794," *The Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 1 (1994): 101.

²³³ As Farley puts it, “If God were a being among beings, God could not be the source of all that is. God would simply be another piece of the furniture of the cosmos ... God would not be God,” Wendy Farley, "Schleiermacher, the Via Negativa, and the Gospel of Love," *Theology Today* 65, no. 2 (2008): 150.

²³⁴ Nicolas Adams, "Shapers of Protestantism: F.D.E. Schleiermacher," in *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism*, ed. Alister E. McGrath and Darren C. Marks (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 72.

“Religion’s essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling.”²³⁵ In the wake of the “Pantheism Controversy,”²³⁶ which had held Europe firmly in its sway, for decades, this was perceived as either professing an imminent God or doing away with God altogether. Given some of the bold statements in his *Speeches*, these charges were far from gratuitous.²³⁷ Nevertheless, they did not diminish Schleiermacher’s influence.

Spinoza influenced Schleiermacher and Schleiermacher influenced many early-twentieth century religious thinkers again, among whom theological giants as Rudolph Otto (1869-1937), Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) and Paul Johannes Tillich (1886-1965). Given their shared sources of inspiration, it is no surprise Jammer sees striking parallels between them and Einstein²³⁸—though, Einstein would have preferred to be ranked among philosophers instead of theologians.²³⁹ Each reflects the religious flight from wonder that drives intellectual culture, as Einstein puts it,²⁴⁰ the reasoned flight beyond reason of cultured despisers of “religion,”²⁴¹ if you will, which wields the intellect as an epistemological stepping stone for anti-intellectual “spiritual” experiences.

As a student, Merrell-Wolff had read (about) Spinoza²⁴² and Schleiermacher.²⁴³

²³⁵ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*: 22. In the first edition (1799) of his *Reden*, “feeling” is tucked in the shadow of “intuition,” but gradually replaces it, in the second (1806) and third (1831). In his *Glaubenslehre*, “feeling” is itself replaced again by “the feeling of absolute dependence,” Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 1821-2 original German ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1948). 12.

²³⁶ The origin of the Pantheism Controversy is typically traced to an debate between Friedrich Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) about their acquaintance Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), after the latter had passed. Jacobi claimed that Lessing had been a closet Spinozist, which was basically calling him an atheist—Spinoza’s monist view of the divine was incompatible with the personal God of orthodox Christianity, which led many to equate his pantheism with atheism. Mendelssohn agreed that Lessing was the champion of Spinozism, albeit a “refined Spinozism,” which did not significantly differ from traditional theism, Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 92-93; Lamm, “Schleiermacher’s Post-Kantian Spinozism: The Early Essays on Spinoza, 1793-94,” 478-479; B. A. Gerrish, “The Secret Religion of Germany: Christian Piety and the Pantheism Controversy,” *The Journal of Religion* 67, no. 4 (1987): 439-443.

²³⁷ e.g. “[O]ne religion without God can be better than another with God,” “[T]he idea of God does not rank as high as you think,” “God is not everything in religion,” Schleiermacher, *On Religion*: 52, 53, 54.

²³⁸ Jammer, *Einstein and Religion*: 107-114, 130.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁴⁰ Einstein, “Autobiographical Notes,” 9.

²⁴¹ Crouter situates Schleiermacher “between Enlightenment and Romanticism,” because he rationally systemizes religion, on the one hand, while rooting it in private religious experience, on the other hand, Richard Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). This is a prototypical precursor of intellectual anti-intellectualism.

²⁴² His library contains Benedict de Spinoza, *Spinoza’s Ethics and “De Intellectus Emendatione”*, trans. A. Boyle, 1677 & 1662 original Latin ed. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1930); Benedict de Spinoza, *Spinoza’s Short Treatise on God, Man and Human Welfare*, trans. Lydia Gillingham Robinson, ca. 1660 original Dutch ed. (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1909). Secondary sources include Arthur Kenyon Rogers, *A Student’s History of Philosophy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901/1908). 278-304; and Benjamin Rand, *Modern Classical Philosophers: Selections Illustrating Modern Philosophy from Bruno to Spencer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908). 148-198.

²⁴³ Schleiermacher is absent from his library, but he would have read about his reduction of religion to a feeling of dependence in Auguste Sabatier, *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion based on Psychology and History*, 1897 original French ed. (New York: James Pott & Co., 1910). e.g. 28-29, 232 & 269-270.

It was Spinoza's rationalism and Schleiermacher's romanticism that now drew him to Einstein. Both recognized religious genius in the scientist, as "[a] deep faith in [the] rationality of [the] structure of [the] world,"²⁴⁴ which clearly also befitted themselves.

Einstein, for one, was in awe of the mysterious intelligibility of the world.²⁴⁵ "I have found no better expression than 'religious' for confidence in the rational nature of reality as it is accessible to human reason," he once wrote to a friend.²⁴⁶ In a similar vein, Merrell-Wolff was convinced that "One of the most fundamental intuitions of man is that Nature is orderly or, in other words, Rational."²⁴⁷ This fact is not derived from philosophical sophistry, he said, but from our everyday reality, since we all act as if this principle is necessarily true.²⁴⁸ However, as Hume has shown, our assurance cannot rest upon sheer sense experience alone,²⁴⁹ something more is required, some intrinsic source of conviction. "This something we call the fundamental intuitions."²⁵⁰

Merrell-Wolff took "nature's rationality" beyond Einstein, though. Science has made great strides on the physical plane, he granted, but has yet to acknowledge the existence of a metaphysical reality. In Spencerian fashion, based on the law of conservation of matter-energy, science sees the universe as "a self-contained Whole," which constantly strives towards a state of equilibrium. This means every action has an equal reaction in opposite direction, which, in time, acquires a cyclical pattern. These principles of, what he calls, uniformity and periodicity are all around us—just look at the rise and recession of the sun and the seasons.²⁵¹ Building up towards his controversial claim, Merrell-Wolff reminds us that logic dictates that "if a principle applies without exception in the domains of Nature which can be traced, then *the presumption is that that principle still governs in the domain which is now beyond our power of direct observation.*"²⁵² So, to him, it was only reasonable to presume that uniformity and periodicity also apply to the most fundamental pattern in nature, that of life and death.

²⁴⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Notes re Einstein," (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (535), no date), 2. For a similar statement, compare this with Einstein, "The Religious Spirit of Science," 40.

²⁴⁵ e.g. Einstein, "The World as I see It," 11. "This Spinozistic tenet underlies Einstein's epistemological realism ... that a rational explanation of the universe is possible," Jammer, *Einstein and Religion*: 52.

²⁴⁶ Einstein in a letter to Maurice Solovine (1875-1958), cited in Jammer, *Einstein and Religion*: 120.

²⁴⁷ Yogagnani, *Re-Embodiment*: 17.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

²⁴⁹ Order requires consistent causal relationships, but Hume argued these are hypothetical projections into the future based on repeated past sense impressions. Einstein agreed, Einstein, "Autobiographical Notes," 13. And so did Merrell-Wolff, probably after he had read David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding and Selections from A Treatise of Human Nature, with Hume's Autobiography and a Letter from Adam Smith* (Chicago: The Open Court, 1748 & 1739-1740/1909). 185-223.

²⁵⁰ Yogagnani, *Re-Embodiment*: 18-19.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 19-31.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 30, original italics.

Now armed with scientific arguments, he revisited his childhood ruminations on “resurrection” with renewed orientalist vigor. Physically, our bodies do not decay into nothing. Psychologically, our character traits do not come and go out of nowhere. That would violate the law of conservation and the rules of commonsense. Reincarnation is the most rational hypothesis. “There is a pragmatic or ethical argument for reincarnation which, while lacking all formal logical value, still has a distinct psychological and practical utility. The essence of this line of reasoning is that if an idea gives a perspective for the viewing of the problems of Life, such that [they] become more easily resolved in Consciousness, then a presumption of truth is established for that idea.”²⁵³

Reincarnation is one of the axioms of Blavatsky’s wisdom religion. According to Merrell-Wolff, if physical science is right to regard reason as the ruling principle of nature, then (her) metaphysical science is more logically consistent and pragmatically gratifying, because it extends it to *all* planes of being. By “interpreting ... manifested Being in conformity to the principle of Order or Reason marks the Wisdom Religion as ... being a Science” and by “subordinating all knowledge to moral values ... this body of Knowledge becomes also a Religion.”²⁵⁴ Key here is that Merrell-Wolff claimed that the theory of relativity “approaches toward [the] cosmology of [the] S[ecret] D[octrine].”²⁵⁵

Einstein would have begged to differ, though. He also believed “being” implies a pragmatic rational construct—“something which we freely posit (in the logical sense)” —whose presumption of truth is, indeed, its ability to make the sensationally supplied contents of consciousness more intelligible.²⁵⁶ But he drew a line at things like survival after death—“let feeble souls, from fear or absurd egoism, cherish such thoughts”—for that requires religion to retreat unfairly into realms where science has yet to set foot.²⁵⁷

Contrary to what Merrell-Wolff wanted them to be, Einstein was no mystic nor his cosmic religion an orientalized occultism. Einstein saw Spiritualism and Theosophy as a sign of confusion and never showed any interest in far eastern philosophy.²⁵⁸ “[I]n spite of his use of words like ‘awe,’ his philosophy of religion never transcended the realm of the rational”²⁵⁹—contrary to the religious “philosophy” of Graf Keyserling.

²⁵³ Ibid., 34, 37-38, 49.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 22-23. This reflects the common search for scientific verification of reincarnation, at the time, see e.g. Courtney Bender, “American Reincarnations: What the Many Lives of Past Lives Tell Us about Contemporary Spiritual Practice,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 3 (2007): 595.

²⁵⁵ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Einstein: The Man and the Mystic (the Significance of Einstein),” (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (532), no date), 1.

²⁵⁶ Einstein, “Remarks,” 669 & 673.

²⁵⁷ Einstein, “The World as I see It,” 11; Einstein, “Science and Religion,” 48.

²⁵⁸ Jammer, *Einstein and Religion*: 126 & 236.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 127.

Keyserling's religious "Philosophy"

Though he could not resist reaching out to Einstein, whose combination of scientific authority and religious affinity would have lend credibility to his own cosmic religion, Merrell-Wolff actually stood a lot closer to someone like Hermann Alexander Keyserling (1880-1946). In his letter to Einstein, he says the Estonian count had rightly noted an "intellectual awakening, which has extended too far for large portions of mankind to be satisfied spiritually by forms that are intellectually crude or scientifically untrue."²⁶⁰

Indeed, in his popular two-volume *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*²⁶¹—which was "more widely read than either travel books or books by philosophers"²⁶²—Keyserling confessed he had lost the ability of unconditional faith. "I must understand before a spiritual reality becomes real to me and capable, therefore, of influencing my inner being."²⁶³ He needed a rational hold of a religious feeling, before it could take hold of him. This troubled him, for he felt it slowed his development. But he took consolation in the idea that he was a pioneer. "My course will in fact become more and more that of every one, because the process of intellectualization continues to advance irrepressibly."²⁶⁴

Looking at the many "cults" around him, it struck Keyserling that a "developed individual," like himself, either believes in the God within or does not believe at all.²⁶⁵ "Theo[sophy] and Anthroposophy, New Thought, Christian Science, the New Gnosis, Vivekananda's Vedāntism, the Neo-Persian and Indo-Islamic Esoterism [e.g. Khan's Sufi Movement], not to mention those of the Hindus and of the Buddhists, the Baha'i system, the professed faith of the various spiritualistic and occult circles, and even the freemasons"—most of which we have also come across—"all start from essentially the same basis ..."²⁶⁶ This basis, he believed, would "soon become the faith of millions."²⁶⁷

Keyserling describes it as an inward reformation of religion through the intellect—a reasoned flight beyond reason, if you will. It has to be as such, he said, because the times of "blind belief" and "definite forms" both have passed. Neither pure faith nor pure reason suffices anymore, in our growing search for a "synthesis of mind and soul."

²⁶⁰ Merrell-Wolff, "Correspondence with Einstein," 1.

²⁶¹ Merrell-Wolff read Hermann Alexander Keyserling, *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher: Complete in One Volume*, trans. J. Holroyd Reece, 1919 original German ed. (1929). I quote Hermann Alexander Keyserling, *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, trans. J. Holroyd Reece, 1919 original German ed., vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1925); *ibid.*, 2. He almost exclusively quotes from the first volume.

²⁶² Landau, *God is my Adventure*: 25.

²⁶³ Keyserling, *Travel Diary*, 1: 328.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 233 & 162.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

For him, this search suggested “*the most important task today is not assigned to religion, but to philosophy.*”²⁶⁸ But not what it was in the last centuries, not as some “eccentric mental activity” or “intellectual sport”—no vicious intellectualism, as James would have said—but as an appreciation and an expression of “the *meaning* of religion [that] brings man into direct and fresh touch with Divinity,” through “recognition.”²⁶⁹

Retaining or returning to a naive faith by repressing the intellect does not work, Keyserling reckoned, for modern man is an intellectual being. Nor will it do to discard faith altogether, no matter how primitive it seems. The point is to go deeper. “Once the intellect has developed sufficiently to understand the meaning of faith, the profound significance of all that it originally regarded as nonsense, then the intellect will become religious once more.”²⁷⁰ Intuition and intellect must be united through knowledge. So, conflating Christian and Vedāntin terms, he says “the Hindus are right in their teaching that all salvation [*mokṣa*, liberation] depends on recognition [*jñāna*, knowledge].”²⁷¹

For Keyserling, this struck at the core of the difference between oriental and occidental ways of thinking. Thought is significant, “*on the one hand, as the intellectual correspondent of an external object; on the other, as the means of expression of an independent and autonomous meaning,*” which he equated respectively with the West and the East.²⁷² The West is successful at grasping the physical appearance of things, whereas the East excels in expressing their metaphysical essence.²⁷³ Now, “*if mankind wishes to attain to a higher stage of insight, it must go beyond both East and West.*”²⁷⁴

To further this end, Keyserling founded the *Gesellschaft für Freie Philosophie*, in 1920, to set an example. This School of Wisdom²⁷⁵ was not to become one more institution with a fixed program of abstract teachings, he said—that would only lower the already lowering level of the so-called educated, especially in America—but instead a practical “living improvisation [of the spiritual source of Life] at the right moment.”²⁷⁶

²⁶⁸ See Hermann Alexander Keyserling, *Creative Understanding*, trans. Theresa Duerr and Hermann Keyserling, 1922 original German ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929). 124-125. Though he paid more attention to the *Travel Diary*, Merrell-Wolff had also read this book. I cite from the same edition.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 125, 139-140.

²⁷⁰ Keyserling, *Travel Diary*, 1: 243.

²⁷¹ Keyserling, *Creative Understanding*: 129. This seems a typical orientalist conflation of “Hinduism” with one version of Vedānta. He was well aware, though, that it embraces different paths of knowledge (*jñāna*), devotion (*bhakti*) and action (*karma*) and that the first can be further split into monistic (*advaita*), dualistic (*dvaita*) and theistic (*viśiṣṭādvaita*) traditions, Keyserling, *Travel Diary*, 1: 108 & 237.

²⁷² Keyserling, *Creative Understanding*: 11.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁷⁵ More precisely, the *Schule der Weisheit* or School of Wisdom was organized by this “Society for Free Philosophy,” Hermann Alexander Keyserling, “The School of Wisdom,” *The Forum*, no. 2 (1928): 201.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 202-203, 207-208.

Nonetheless, it is a school, he insisted, with five types of activity. The first is the personal interview, to learn from the right person in the right relationship at the right time. The second is to learn a series of spiritual exercises based on ancient methods of self-improvement. The third are the yearly *Tagungen*, when seekers from around the world meet in Darmstadt to learn from each other through lectures. Finally, the fourth and the fifth are to learn from the annual and bi-annual publications of the School.²⁷⁷

In “explor[ing] the by-ways of modern esotericism,” Rom Landau had attended one of the yearly gatherings, around 1930.²⁷⁸ With Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig as its patron and Count Keyserling as its host, he saw that the School attracted many of the old but powerless European nobility, who were hoping it would preserve their ancient traditions through spiritual reform. Some of these hopes were justified, Landau goes on to say. “Keyserling *was* eager to create by degrees in society an elite class that, by its higher intellectual and moral standards, would set a potent example to the people at large.”²⁷⁹ Blending aspects of Sutcliffe’s emblematic and idiomatic New Age, this new class would absorb eastern and western wisdom, to guide humanity to a higher stage of *collective* development through *individual* realization. But it seemed to Landau that most of this potential “elite” was out for entertainment rather than enlightenment.²⁸⁰

Less skeptical than Landau, Merrell-Wolff praised Keyserling as a “stimulating philosophical spirit,” in an Emersonian sense.²⁸¹ Beside occultist Arthur Avalon (John George Woodruffe, 1865-1936)²⁸² and orientalist Paul Jakob Deussen (1845-1919),²⁸³ he counted Keyserling as one of the few in the West to have understood the East.²⁸⁴ The circularity of his claim obviously escaped him, the fact that he believed these men best represented “the East” based on an image that was actually (also) derived from them.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 204-206.

²⁷⁸ Landau, *God is my Adventure*: 7 & Chapter 1.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 30-33, italics mine.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 25 & 33.

²⁸¹ According to him, Keyserling was “Not a systematic thinker, but Man thinking,” Yogagnani, “Count Hermann Keyserling: Philosopher,” (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (537), ca. 1931), 1.

²⁸² By this time, Merrell-Wolff owned and likely had read Arthur Avalon, ed. *Principles of Tantra, Part 1: the Tantratattva of Shriyukta Shiva Chandra Vidyarnava Bhattacharyya Mahodaya* (London: Luzac & Co, 1914); Arthur Avalon, ed. *The Serpent Power being the Shat-Chakra-Nirupana and Paduka-Panchaka* (Madras: Ganesh & Co, 1924); Arthur Avalon, ed. *Tantra of the Great Liberation (Mahanirvana Tantra)* (London: Luzac & Co, 1913). The second is commonly seen as an occult classic.

²⁸³ Merrell-Wolff’s private library contains Paul Jakob Deussen, *The System of the Vedanta, according to Baadarayana’s Brahma-Sutras and Cankara’s Commentary thereon set forth as a Compendium of the Dogmatics of Brahmanism from the Standpoint of Cankara*, 1883 original German ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1912/1973). It is certain he read an earlier copy, most likely the 1912 edition.

²⁸⁴ Yogagnani, “Count Hermann Keyserling,” (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (520), 1930), 1. He even went so far as to aver, pace Avalon, that “Hindus submitted to a European education lose the power of understanding their own thought,” Yogagnani, “Notes re Keyserling,” (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (521), no date), 5. This is a typical instance of a full-blown orientalism.

Not only that, it implied he belonged to their select company. For it takes one to know one. Merrell-Wolff even felt he could correct the Count. Keyserling views “the oriental spirit” through pragmatist eyes, for instance, “[which] does not accord with the thought of K[oot] H[oomi] and M[orya] in [*The*] S[ecret] D[octrine] and elsewhere, where the accordance is clearly most with conceptualism, rationalism and idealism,” he says.²⁸⁵

Still, there is no doubt Keyserling inspired him. Around the same time he would have read about Darmstadt,²⁸⁶ Merrell-Wolff laid the foundation, literally, for his Ajna Ashram.²⁸⁷ Though speculative, reading about (the *Tagungen* at) the School of Wisdom could have sparked the idea for his own (summer) school in Lone Pine. In any case, Merrell-Wolff can be said to have taken to heart Keyserling’s closing remark about the Darmstadt experiment: “Whether anything like the School of Wisdom would be possible or useful in the United States, depends on whether there is an individual American who incarnates a similar impulse, or whether there is a foreigner incarnating it who would appeal to Americans, and whether the response [they] could find would be wide enough to justify the creation of a corresponding institution.”²⁸⁸ As foreign sages were rare in America, during that time, due to the immigration restrictions, he took it upon himself to build that bridge between intuition and intellect beyond East and West that Darmstadt had envisioned. Of course, its “real” spiritual successor would be Eranos.²⁸⁹

PSYCHOLOGY

As is characteristic of nearly all popular use of scientific concepts, there is a great deal of misunderstanding as to just what psychology is and also with respect to the field of usefulness of this body of knowledge. Consequently, it is important that members of the D[egree] of P[riest] ... have some clear understanding of [it]

²⁸⁵ Yogagnani, "Count Hermann Keyserling," 1; Yogagnani, "Notes re Keyserling," 2. It is telling that he invoked Morya and Koot Hoomi against Keyserling. This shows that Merrell-Wolff acknowledged the existence as well as authority of the Theosophical Mahatmas. It is equally telling that his eight pages of “Notes” about the *Travel Diary* almost completely gloss over Keyserling’s fifty pages of criticism on the Theosophical Society, see Keyserling, *Travel Diary*, 1: 118-173. It strongly suggests a Theosophical bias.

²⁸⁶ The *Forum* article about the School that I cited above was included in the introduction to the 1929 English publication of Keyserling, *Creative Understanding*: see xi-xxiv, which Merrell-Wolff owned.

²⁸⁷ On the permit from the United States Forest Service, from 1930, it is described as a storage building for a summer school, US Forest Service, "Special Use Permit," (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (73), 1930). The program of the first *Rama Sangha* summer school, from 1931, had scheduled “Work on the Ashrama daily,” Yogagnani, Sarah Merrell-Wolff, "Mt. Whitney Summer School and Camp," in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (632)* (San Fernando: The Rama Sangha, 1931). The early stage of this work are reported in detail by one of the students in Anonymous, "Laying the Foundation Stone of the Ajna Ashrama: Report of the Service," (Miscellaneous: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (718), ca. 1930).

²⁸⁸ Keyserling, *Creative Understanding*: xxiv.

²⁸⁹ Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, trans. Christopher McIntosh, 2013 original German ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014). 38-42.

Psychology is the latest field of knowledge that has become an object of scientific research in the West. Long ago, it constituted a field of study in the Orient, as might be expected, since the inner or psychic man has always been an object of prior interest in the East ... But the eastern Initiates ... had the advantage of certain psychical organs ... not generally awakened in the case of western scientists²⁹⁰

In 1930, affluent Dutch Theosophist Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn (1881-1962) sent out a notice for a “Summer School for Spiritual Research” at her Casa Gabriella, on the shores of the Lago Maggiore, close to the Monte Verita in Ascona. Among the first speakers to be invited at this yearly assembly was Alice Bailey. She accepted the invitation and would even return the following three summers. However, things changed, around 1933.²⁹¹

When Keyserling’s forum was cancelled, at the onset of another war, with the National-Socialist take over in Germany, Fröbe-Kapteyn offered a viable alternative in Switzerland. Several guests of the Darmstadt school now found their way to Ascona.²⁹²

Initially, the Ascona meetings were nameless, but later Rudolph Otto suggested the title “Eranos,” in the ancient Greek sense of a banquet to which each member brings their own contribution. It nicely captured the idea behind the conferences, Ira Progoff argues, which was to gather experts from different fields for a week-long fest “to bring the highest intellectual competence to bear upon questions of spiritual importance.”²⁹³

Based on his own visits, Progoff recalls there was something about the atmosphere at Eranos. Somehow, it combined intuition and intellect. From 1933 on, the summer school took a more academic turn to the occult.²⁹⁴ This is apparently why Bailey left. She disliked that “the place was overrun by German professors,” which, for her, had signaled a shift from spirituality to philosophy.²⁹⁵ Unlike Bailey, Progoff felt that their lectures built up to “an experience of much larger scope than mere intellectual understanding ... but *a knowing through direct experience*.” They were not just rational games, as Bailey had suggested, but “a cumulative movement into the depths ...”²⁹⁶

In sum, “a willingness to take *myth and symbolism* seriously and explore their relevance to history and modern culture is what the Eranos meetings were all about,”

²⁹⁰ This quote is from an essay intended for the more advanced students—“priests”—of the Assembly of Man, see Yogagnani, “Western Psychology,” (Essays: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (425), no date), 1.

²⁹¹ James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1976). 396-397.

²⁹² Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, “Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericism between Counterculture and New Complexity,” *Aries* 1, no. 1 (2001): 8.

²⁹³ Ira Progoff, “The Idea of Eranos,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 5, no. 4 (1966): 309.

²⁹⁴ Webb, *Occult Establishment*: 397.

²⁹⁵ Bailey cited in *ibid.*, 396.

²⁹⁶ Progoff, “The Idea of Eranos,” 312.

out of a conviction that the Enlightenment had ignored something crucial, Hanegraaff explains, “that neither the individual nor the collective was capable of living by ‘reason’ alone.”²⁹⁷ The Eranosians studied all sorts of rejected knowledge that had been thrown into the wastebasket of irrationality against which the “Age of Reason” had defined its own identity,²⁹⁸ because, the interbellum intellectuals insisted, the “other” of western rationality had to be actively confronted, on a personal as well as a social level, since it was never going to vanish, as “its ultimate source was the human unconscious itself.”²⁹⁹

Hanegraaff does not mention that these Eranos meetings continued Keyserling’s “focus on the history of religion and culture, *with a particular emphasis on the relation between the East and the West.*”³⁰⁰ Both in the “Jung Era” and the “Eliade Era,”³⁰¹ its speakers presented the Orient and the occult as the cultural and psychological shadow of the Occident. Our eye is on the key figure of the first era, in which Eranos may not have been a “Jungian conclave,”³⁰² but *was* shaped by Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961).³⁰³

Jung’s “Creative Phantasy”

Jung’s psychological approach to religion most likely caught on among his peers and public, because it offered “a restatement of the ideas at the core of occult tradition in terms accessible to those ill at ease with religious language.”³⁰⁴ That is, he repackaged the history of rejected knowledge in western culture in strictly psychological terms, as a history of western culture’s repressed unconscious.³⁰⁵ Though hardly reliable as an autobiographical source, the opening line of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* does say it all: “My life is a story of the self-realization of the unconscious.”³⁰⁶ This telling quote could be considered to cover his personal life just as much as his professional outlook.

²⁹⁷ Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 278 & 281. For similar, but generally more sympathetically biased, observations about Eranos, cf. Hakl, *Eranos*: notably Chapter 17, e.g. 289 & 290.

²⁹⁸ Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*: 221; he derives the notion of the occult as rejected knowledge from James Webb, *The Occult Underground* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1974). 191-192.

²⁹⁹ Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*: 280.

³⁰⁰ Sonu Shamdasani, *Jung and the Making of Modern Psychology: The Dream of a Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). 21, italics mine.

³⁰¹ Pre/post WWII, Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*: 278; Webb, *Occult Underground*: 397.

³⁰² Progoff, “The Idea of Eranos,” 307.

³⁰³ Jung would often recommend topics and speakers, Shamdasani, *Jung and Modern Psychology*: 21. In addition, his own ideas on archetypes and individuation influenced both of these, Hakl, *Eranos*: 48.

³⁰⁴ Webb, *Occult Establishment*: 387.

³⁰⁵ Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*: 295.

³⁰⁶ Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston, 1962 original German ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1963/1989). 3. “Jung never regarded the book as his autobiography,” but more as a creation of his secretary Aniela Jaffé, Sonu Shamdasani, “Memories, Dreams, Omissions,” in *Jung in Context: A Reader*, ed. Paul Bishop (London: Routledge, 1999/2003), 46. It is her biography of him more than his autobiography, *ibid.*, 47. Merrell-Wolff would also read it.

According to Jung, religious experiences are really psychological ones. The mind functions as a self-regulating system, which thrives on opposition, but strives towards equilibrium.³⁰⁷ Its sought state of balance can be realized by reconciling the conscious and unconscious elements of the psyche.³⁰⁸ But western culture has forgotten how to do this, Jung argued, due to a dangerously overdeveloped reason.³⁰⁹ He considered its severance from (the meaningful myths of) the unconscious the (spiritual) problem of modern man. He even went so far as to suggest that the rational suppression of its irrational side had caused the World War.³¹⁰ Therefore, “realization” or “individuation” required a sustained conscious (individual) excavation of our (collective) unconscious, which demands a reflection on and inclusion of the material emerging from the depths of our psyche.³¹¹ Jung related this process of integration to a “transcendent function.”

This concept was one of the results of an intense personal struggle. Briefly, after breaking with his mentor Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), around 1912, Jung underwent a “confrontation with the unconscious.”³¹² Between 1913 and 1916, he actively engaged in dreams and phantasies. He penned these down in his private “black books,” some of which would subsequently be literarily reworked into his “red book.” Except for the Gnostic-styled allegory of the “Seven Sermons to the Dead”³¹³—which Jung printed on a limited scale for intimate friends and relatives and later also appended to his “autobiography”—the content of this corpus remained a complete mystery, until recently.³¹⁴

*The Red Book*³¹⁵ delivers a series of dialogues with imaginary figures, allegedly, coming from the (collective) unconscious, as a prototype of Jung’s (own) individuation process, in a style strongly reminiscent of Goethe’s *Faust* and Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*.

³⁰⁷ See Jeffrey C. Miller, *The Transcendent Function: Jung’s Model of Psychological Growth through Dialogue with the Unconscious* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), notably 32-37.

³⁰⁸ “Adaptation [of unconscious material] is never achieved once and for all,” though, Carl Gustav Jung, “The Transcendent Function,” in *The Transcendent Function: Jung’s Model of Psychological Growth through Dialogue with the Unconscious*, ed. Jeffrey C. Miller (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 151. In other words, Jung deemed a perfect state of harmony to be (humanly) impossible.

³⁰⁹ Jung actually talks about “civilized life today,” *ibid.*, 148. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume, as Miller does, he specifically had modern *western* civilized life in mind, Miller, *The Transcendent Function*: 21.

³¹⁰ Carl Gustav Jung, “The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man,” in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, ed. W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1933), 240; Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*: 176. He was not alone, others did so as well, cf. Landau, *God is my Adventure*: 8.

³¹¹ “For Jung, the goal of analysis was not just adjustment to life tasks, but the cultivation of a symbolic attitude to help modern individuals cope with living in a ‘disenchanted’ world; a sustained effort to understand what seems most subjective in oneself (dreams, fantasies, memories) leads to greater appreciation for the objective forces that lie beyond the individual. Jung called this process ‘individuation’...” Jay Sherry, *Carl Gustav Jung: Avant-Garde Conservative* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 5.

³¹² He—rather, Jaffe—reports this period in detail, in Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*: Chapter 7.

³¹³ *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos* in *ibid.*, appendix v, 378-390. He wrote it in three evenings, in 1916.

³¹⁴ At his own request, it was published decades after his death, Carl Gustav Jung, *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, trans. Mark Kyburz, John Peck, and Sonu Shamdasani (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009).

³¹⁵ Shamdasani in *ibid.*, 207-208 & 212.

According to Sonu Shamdasani, the work should be considered a private opus that ran parallel to Jung's public scholarly opus.³¹⁶ Relevant for us is that this core piece of his oeuvre presents personal examples underlying the professional technique that he first explained in a prefatory paper from 1916,³¹⁷ entitled "The Transcendent Function."³¹⁸

"There is nothing mysterious or metaphysical about the term," Jung writes, "The psychological 'transcendent function' arises from the union of *conscious* and *unconscious* contents."³¹⁹ According to Jeffrey Miller, Jung was certain this union cannot be rendered rationally, because the irrational content of the unconscious is "not *contrary* to reason but *beyond* it, so that it cannot be understood."³²⁰ Individuation, then, calls for a reasoned flight beyond reason—through dreams or through creative phantasy.³²¹

The unconscious is most readily expressed in dreams, Jung argued, yet they are often too difficult to grasp.³²² A better method for accessing the unconscious is active imagination, which has "a more composed and coherent character."³²³ Once irrational content from the unconscious is allowed into rational consciousness—via such wakeful reveries, in which the critical mind has been kept at bay—the next step is to integrate it through a combination of aesthetic "formulation" and intellectual "understanding."³²⁴

In sum, Jung suggested creative phantasy or active imagination as a *method* for triggering a transcendent function, which *relates* rational consciousness with irrational material from the unconscious, in a *process* of realization or individuation of the self.

³¹⁶ Shamdasani in *ibid.*, 220.

³¹⁷ Shamdasani sees the *Liber Novus* as a "central book" and the paper as its "preface," *ibid.*, 221 & 209.

³¹⁸ Jung, "The Transcendent Function." Note that it was written in 1916, but published in 1958. Some scholars have argued that "The Transcendent Function" was a direct result of the "Seven Sermons," e.g. Judith Hubback, "VII Sermones Ad Mortuos," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 11, no. 2 (1966): 107.

³¹⁹ Jung, "The Transcendent Function," 145. Miller says that "[the transcendent function] is mysterious and metaphysical!" and speculates that "the 'scientific' Jung was reacting to the 'metaphysical' Jung in a denial of what was clearly an intuitive, abstract, even numinous concept," Miller, *The Transcendent Function*: 14. I find the first three chapters of his thorough analysis convincing, but this comment anticipates an increasingly subjective interpretation, which seems exemplary of a Jungian psychology that is "far removed from what Jung had in mind himself," Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*: 282.

³²⁰ Miller, *The Transcendent Function*: 45.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 42 & 22-24; cf. Jung, "The Transcendent Function," 156 & 158.

³²² Jung, "The Transcendent Function," 156-157.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 158 & 167. Chodorow says that "Jung's therapeutic method had many different names before he settled on the term active imagination. At first it was the 'transcendent function.' Later he called it the 'picture method.' Other names were 'active fantasy' and 'active phantasying.' Sometimes the process was referred to as 'trancing,' 'visioning,' 'exercises,' 'dialectical method,' 'technique of differentiation,' 'technique of introversion,' 'introspection' and 'technique of the descent.' When he delivered the Tavistock lectures in London in 1935 he used the term 'active imagination' for the first time in public," Carl Gustav Jung, *C.G. Jung on Active Imagination: Key Readings Selected and Introduced by Joan Chodorow* (London: Routledge, 1997). 3. Given my limited knowledge on Jung, I am hesitant to assert strong criticism, but based on "The Transcendent Function," I feel confident to question her equation of creative imagination with the transcendent function. To me, Jung considered one as a trigger for the other. However, this may itself be a result of the unsolved ambiguity surrounding his terms. See below.

³²⁴ Jung, "The Transcendent Function," 167-172.

As Miller rightly points out, the problem with the transcendent function is the ambiguity built into it—“in addition to referring to the transcendent function as both a relationship and a process, Jung even sometimes refers to it as a method.”³²⁵ As we shall see, in Chapter Three, the same ambiguity around a similar cognitive function recurs in Merrell-Wolff. Did he read “The Transcendent Function”? It is unlikely. But he could have gleaned the gist of it from three other texts by Jung, which he did study.

In the *Psychology of the Unconscious*³²⁶ from 1912, Jung discerned two types of thinking. One pertains to a strenuous pursuit of verbal trains of thought and the other to a generally effortless play of images that pulls us away from our present reality. He would sometimes shorthand them as “directed attention” versus “dreaming.” The first relies on intellection, while the second refers to (intellectual) intuition. Dreaming or intellectual intuition is clearly equated with what he earlier called “creative phantasy.”

Taking his cue from William James’s contrast of “tender-minded” rationalists and “tough-minded” empiricists, in the *Psychological Types* from 1921,³²⁷ Jung made another distinction between two characterological stances. Some are introverted types, whose libido turns away from the object to the inner stirrings of the subject. Others are extroverted types, whose libido turns to the object away from the subject.³²⁸ Everybody is disposed to one, whereby the other retreats into their unconscious. In addition, each type tends to favor one of four functions, again—that is, thinking, feeling, sensation or intuition.³²⁹ At a time when psychology’s status was still fragile,³³⁰ Jung had seen that its future as a science hinged on the “personal equation.”³³¹ Even though *applied* psychology had rapidly expanded, after the war,³³² the fate of *fundamental* psychology yet relied on its ability to halt the potentially infinite regress and relativity of subjectivity.

³²⁵ Miller, *The Transcendent Function*: 55.

³²⁶ I cite from Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido; a Contribution to the History of the Evolution of Thought*, trans. Beatrice M. Hinkle, 1912 original German ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1949). 8-41, especially 13-14 & 21. Merrell-Wolff had a 1927 edition of this translation, which he had probably read, by this time.

³²⁷ Merrell-Wolff owned and had likely read by now a 1926 edition, but I am quoting from Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychological Types or the Psychology of Individuation*, trans. H. Godwin Baynes, 1921 original German ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953). Chapter 8 & 10. He refers to James, *Pragmatism*: 6-12.

³²⁸ Jung, *Psychological Types*: for a review, 9-14; for details, Chapter 10; for definitions, 542-3, 567.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 611-612, 543-547, 585-588, 567-569.

³³⁰ The change from a philosophical and introspective to a practical—social scientific, often statistical—approach within psychology gained momentum, in the 1920s, James H. Capshaw, *Psychologists on the March: Science, Practice and Professional Identity in America, 1929-1969* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Chapter 1, e.g. 16; Kurt Danziger, *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990/1998). e.g. 4, 79 & 118-121.

³³¹ Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century, the term was first used for “a calculus of observational error in astronomy,” but would later develop to become “the hallmark of the attempt to develop an objective experimental science of psychology,” Shamdasani, *Jung and Modern Psychology*: 30-1.

³³² Jung, *Psychological Types*: 611-612, 543-547, 585-588, 567-569.

It had to deliver fixed axioms, like the empirical laws of the natural sciences. Jung felt his typology did precisely that, by both allowing for and limiting human differences.³³³

His commentary on the Taoist *Secret of the Golden Flower*³³⁴ from 1929 formed a turning point in Jung's life, after which he shifted from personal experimentation to professional theorization, with a focus on the relation between occidental psychology, on the one hand, and oriental and occult religion, on the other.³³⁵ Jung now started to project his psychology onto eastern philosophy and alchemy. In later commentaries, he would do so more explicitly.³³⁶ Seeing as Merrell-Wolff had only read his first attempt, at this time, I will refrain from referring to these others. Of course, the psychologized orientalism would remain much the same throughout these texts. Jung will typically say, for instance, that the increasing familiarity with the spiritual East in the scientific West reflects its encounter with foreign elements within itself. It symbolizes western culture's collective confrontation of its inner—repressed, unconscious—other.³³⁷ But the larger significance of this externalized dialogue is lost on most, Jung rued, which is not to imitate, but to integrate, those strange aspects.³³⁸ For if we manage to unify western extroverted thinking with eastern introverted intuition,³³⁹ by employing active imagination, like they do in the Orient,³⁴⁰ so he leads his readers to conclude, it will trigger “a third psychic [transcendent] function,”³⁴¹ which brings us closer to our self.

³³³ Shamdasani, *Jung and Modern Psychology*: 75.

³³⁴ I refer to Carl Gustav Jung, “Psychological Commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower*,” in *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, ed. Richard Wilhelm (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1931/1962). No copy was found in his study, but references suggest Merrell-Wolff had read the 1931 or 1935 translation, e.g. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Chicago Lectures (2 of 10),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1938), 14.

³³⁵ “The beginning of the end [of working with dreams and phantasies, for the red book] came in 1928, when Wilhelm sent me the text of the *Golden Flower*, an alchemical treatise,” Jung, *Liber Novus*: 360.

³³⁶ To give one example, he says “The East bases itself upon psychic reality, that is, upon the psyche as the main and unique condition of existence. It seems as if this Eastern recognition were a psychological or temperamental fact rather than a result of philosophical reasoning. It is a typically *introverted point of view*, contrasted with the equally typical *extraverted point of view* of the West,” Carl Gustav Jung, “Psychological Commentary on *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*,” in *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, ed. Read Herbert, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), 481, italics mine. Franklin adopted this belief.

³³⁷ Jung, “*Golden Flower*,” 128.

³³⁸ “When faced with this problem of grasping the ideas of the East, the usual mistake of Western man is ... he ... turns his back on science, and, carried away by Eastern occultism, takes over yoga practices ... literally and becomes a pitiable imitator. (Theosophy is our best example of this mistake),” *ibid.*, 82.

³³⁹ He does not use the words introversion for the East and extraversion for the West in relation to the transcendent function, but I do read him as such: “The East came to its *knowledge of inner things* in relative ignorance of the external world. We, on the other hand, will investigate the psyche and its depths supported by a tremendously extensive historical and scientific knowledge. At this present moment ... *knowledge of the external world* is the greatest obstacle to *introspection* ...” *Ibid.*, 120-121, italics mine.

³⁴⁰ “In the East, conceptions and teachings prevail which express the *creative fantasy* in richest measure ... We ... look upon fantasy as valueless subjective day-dreaming,” *ibid.*, 120, cf. 93-94, italics mine.

³⁴¹ He mentions it indirectly, saying “If we should succeed in elevating another, or even a third psychic function to the dignity accorded intellect, then the West might expect to surpass the East ...” *Ibid.*, 85.

Clearly influenced by Jungian literature, Merrell-Wolff recounts one of his own confrontations with the unconscious, in “A Creative Phantasy.”³⁴² This undated essay presents an orientalized poimandrian dialogue between the narrator and an imaginary being,³⁴³ during a prospecting trip. While the Great Depression was wreaking financial havoc across the country—in the wake of the Wall Street Crash—withering funds had forced Franklin and Sherifa to find some other means of income. Their orange grove no longer sustained them. Joined by a handful of students, they had set off for Michigan Bluff, to try their luck at mining for gold. Sherifa returned home, after a year, due to declining health. Franklin stayed for several more.³⁴⁴ Though, “The place seems lonely without you here.”³⁴⁵ During this solitary period, which would have been late summer of 1936, he may have found new—unforeseen—company. Enter his creative phantasy.

“After several months of practice,” Merrell-Wolff writes, “I had finally perfected the power of visualization.”³⁴⁶ He could now effortlessly project and perceive an image in front of him, with his mind. By way of playful exercise, he continued to construct a symbol of wisdom in human form. “I named it Prajñā.”³⁴⁷ To his surprise, Prajñā then developed a life and personality of its own—as if separate from him—until, one day, his imaginary friend even began to talk: “Hast thou considered the mystery of Thyself?”³⁴⁸

With these words Prajñā vanished, leaving him in a baffled but blissful state of stillness. “At last, the strain of life was gone and contentment reigned ... I rested within Myself, a Great Space containing all spaces and all times ... I knew all and comprehended all, for I was identical with all.”³⁴⁹ After a period of meditation, on a mountain top, he returned to camp and retired to bed, only to be burned out of his tent again, by the blistering sun, just a few hours later. “[U]nder that solar urging,” he goes on, “I arose at once, feeling unusually refreshed and joyous, but, at the same time, curiously tired.”³⁵⁰

³⁴² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “A Creative Phantasy,” (Essays: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive, no date).

³⁴³ There is no proof Merrell-Wolff read the *Corpus Hermeticum*, but he would have been familiar with the style and content of its “Poimandres” dialogue from reading Hall, *The Secret Teachings*: Chapter 6.

³⁴⁴ Doroethy Briggs brackets his prospecting period between 1932-1935, see Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” Chapter 7. An anecdote in a letter to Walter Felver shows he had already been mining in 1930, Yogagnani, “Correspondence with Students,” 12. Besides that, I do largely depend on Briggs for details.

³⁴⁵ He told Sherifa this in (a transcript of) an undated letter, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Correspondence with Sherifa,” (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (2), ca. 1932-1947), 23. Interestingly, he turned to unconventional methods to assist in her recovery from a distance. In another letter, he talks about a remote “mesmeric treatment,” saying “I felt the characteristic tingling in the hand though not as intensely as when working within a few inches of your body,” “Michican Bluff, Sunday Morning” in *ibid.*, 53.

³⁴⁶ Merrell-Wolff, “A Creative Phantasy,” 1.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

As the fatigue dissipated, only joy remained. After finishing his morning duties around the camp, “I became immersed in a train of profound thought which seemed to think itself, with scarcely any conscious effort on my part.” Through introspection, he now realized that the “me” and the “I” were not the same. One was the object of the other—transparent—subject, a witnessing self that cannot be witnessed itself. “I saw, too, that when man wished to explore the mystery of this larger Self, he did not proceed by the external method of observation and discovery, but rather he proceeded to produce *a creative phantasy* and thus revealed Himself to himself.” After all, he echoes Jung, “it is that when man creates [aesthetically formulates], he also discovers [intellectually understands] more than he knew.” At that point, Prajñā reappeared. “Now thou art in a position to understand that within the Self lies the answer to all questions,” Prajñā affirmed. Indeed, he added, it is with “the creative power of imagination” that truth is made and found, “through imagination you ... discover the hidden Reality.”³⁵¹

The essay then turns to reflections on “purity” in relation to “true insight and its counterfeit.”³⁵² More interesting for us is whether Merrell-Wolff wanted the preceding passages to be taken literally or allegorically. Were they autobiographical, fictional or biographictional?³⁵³ We know that he drafted at least one fictional story, which, (not so) coincidentally, also ends with a note on “purity.” A difference is that the narrator of “Toward Liberation”³⁵⁴ is identified as John Kainologos, while the first person of his “Creative Phantasy” is tacitly presented as Franklin Merrell-Wolff himself, because its biographical context as well as metaphysical terminology both recognizably reflect his early life and later teaching. I suspect, therefore, that this essay was an (unpublished) aesthetic formulation meant to complement the (published) intellectual understanding of the alleged activation of his own “transcendent(al) function,” to which we turn next.

Down through the cycle of lives/at last came the day and the hour/when
in the sky dark and grim/that I scarce knew existed at all/first there
broke the dim, rare light/which during the days yet to follow/was due to
become that absorbing brilliance/drowning the light of all other suns.³⁵⁵

³⁵¹ Ibid., 7, 8 & 10, italics mine.

³⁵² Ibid., 11-17. His concern with “true” and “false” religious experience might be a remnant of his evangelical upbringing, cf. Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), particularly Part 1.

³⁵³ For a brief discussion of topics related to auto/biography and contemporary religion, see Chapter 4.

³⁵⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Toward Liberation,” (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, ca. 1939). The pseudonym *Kainologos* is Greek, which means (one who is) “coining new forms or phrases.”

³⁵⁵ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Rising Sun,” (Aphorisms and Poetry: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive, no date). This is (most of) the first verse of a five couplet poem, which he must have written after 1936.

CHAPTER 3
REALIZATION
(1936-1978)

CHAPTER 3

REALIZATION

Finally, it happened. “The ineffable transition came, about ten days ago.”¹ This sounds like the start of a riveting mystery novel, but it is the opening line of a personal narrative about a twenty-four year search for “higher knowledge,” which, allegedly, ended on 7 August 1936. After an investigation that covered over two decades—leading him to join one religious movement after another, even launching one of his own—Franklin Merrell-Wolff claimed to have had the transformational experience he had been looking for, ever since he left the academy. Though, he will not refer to it as an experience, but an “imperience” instead.² In his own words, “It was an Awakening to a Knowledge which I can best represent by calling it Knowledge through Identity and thus the process—in so far as we can speak of a process in this connection at all—is best expressed by the word ‘Recognition.’”³ So, what had happened “about ten days ago”? He saw it as the completion of a series of “realizations,” going back circa fourteen years. Given their seminal role in his (later) life and teaching, I start with a detailed descriptive summery.

Three Preliminary Realizations

Looking back, Merrell-Wolff recalls he had a first taste of what was to come, around 1922, when a friend outlined an old method of systematic discrimination between the self and the not-self, which logically carried him to the conclusion that “I am Ātman.”

¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” in *Experience and Philosophy: A Personal Record of Transformation and a Discussion of Transcendental Consciousness*, ed. Elliott Eisenberg (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1944/1994), 3.

² This term was suggested to him by his friend Erma Hamilton, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Cognition as Unconditioned by Perspective: Extemporaneous Comments,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1976), 6. “It is akin to sense perception, in the sense of being immediate, but is not sensuous. It is not conceptual, in the sense that it is not a logically determined form of cognition, but an immediate form,” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Extemporaneous Statement of my Philosophy,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1972), 2. He coined another term for it, which I discuss below.

³ Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 5-6. Note, he uses it interchangeably with “realization.”

His readings in oriental literature had given him a cognitive grasp of this fact, but the flash of sudden insight carried an immediacy beyond its rational meaning. In Emersonian terms, it made all the difference between mere understanding and pure reason.⁴

Thirteen years later, mid-1935, a second premonition took place. Reading about the self-enquiry—"Who am I?"—of Advaitin Ramana Maharshi in *A Search in Secret India* by Paul Brunton,⁵ it dawned on him that "I am Nirvāṇa." He had been thinking of it in other-worldly terms, but now saw that it was not some objective existence, but the space which contains objective existence. Based on those same oriental readings, this, too, should have been obvious, he admits, but due to an "intellectual laziness" he had curiously succumbed to, over the past few years, he had failed to think it through.⁶

After a few months, in late summer of 1936, a third intellectual intuition occurred. He had been giving lectures and classes, every day, based on routine—"speaking with the momentum of past thought"—because his intellectual lethargy had built up to the point that it all but prevented him from thinking. By the end of his tour, he felt depleted and longing for solitude. This led him back to Michigan Bluff, where he soon regained some clarity of mind. A few days passed, when he noticed a growing sense of expectation and excitement, as if the end of a long search was within reach. It was accompanied by a crucial insight, which, retrospectively, was "the critical or turning point that rendered the final recognition accessible." Standing on the bank of the Eldorado Creek, he was struck by the idea that our phenomenal reality of relative appearances is absolutely empty and the noumenal reality that appears relatively empty is absolutely full, that "Substantiality is inversely proportional to sensibility or ponderability."⁷ In a word, the essence of reality cannot be truly known through perception or conception.

⁴ See in particular *ibid.*, 26; and Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "The Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object," in *Experience and Philosophy: A Personal Record of Transformation and a Discussion of Transcendental Consciousness*, ed. Elliott Eisenberg (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1973/1994), 257-259. This friend might have been James Morgan Pryse (1859-1942), Doroethy Briggs, "Franklin Merrell-Wolff: An American Philosopher and Mystic," (Phoenix: unpublished, 2012), 18.1-2.

⁵ Paul Brunton, *A Search in Secret India* (New York: E.P Dutton & Co., 1934/1935). Chapter 9.

⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Extemporaneous Comments on Personal Time," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1974).

⁷ Merrell-Wolff, "Pathways through to Space," 28-29; Merrell-Wolff, "Philosophy of Consciousness," 260-261. cf. "... I was standing one day on the bank of the [Eldorado] creek, looking upward above the mountains at the sky (northward, as I remember), when suddenly it dawned upon me that our search for the Real was oriented in the wrong direction. We normally seek the Real in the content of our experiences of the sensuous world—and that means all cognized through the senses—or through the concepts of the mind in their own immediate pointing. The thing that came to me is that the Real is there in the voids between the images and the concepts ... What seems to our normal consciousness as void, in Reality is full, and what seems to be full, the apparent, is in Reality empty—or rather, relatively empty," Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Mathematics, Philosophy & Yoga: A Lecture Series Presented at the Los Olivos Conference Room in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1966*, ed. Ron Leonard (Phoenix: Phoenix Philosophical Press, 1966/1995). 59. He often told this story, but this is a particularly succinct account.

First Fundamental Realization

During his stay at Michigan Bluff, Merrell-Wolff divided his attention between prospecting and reflecting. “I was engaged in the reading of portions of *The System of the Vedānta* by Paul Deussen⁸ ... an interpretation in western philosophical form of the Vedānta as it is developed in the commentaries of Śaṅkara on the Brahmasūtras.”⁹ It strongly resonated with him. He had even come to regard Śaṅkara as something of his own personal guru. “I found myself in striking agreement with the more fundamental phases of his thought and quite willing to apply the highly intellectual technique that he had charted.” In fact, of all the teachers whom he had met or read along the way—say Emerson, Blavatsky, Ramacharaka, Vivekananda, Khan, Rama, Ramana, Carus or Keyserling—“Śaṅkara alone adequately satisfied the intellectual side of my nature.”¹⁰ Even though he did modify some of his teachings, to “satisfy the needs of an academically trained occidental nature,” none of those adaptations violated their foundations.

Back home, he went on to study his work. Sitting on the porch swing, one day, he turned to the chapter on *mokṣa*. In these pages,¹¹ his “guru” reminded him that liberation is awakening to the fact that the self is one with Brahman. It is knowledge, but a special kind of knowledge, because there is really no-thing to know, since its “object” is the subject, and the subject always takes one step back—the seer cannot see itself.

Contemplating these comments, it occurred to him that a common mistake—his mistake—in meditation is still to look for “something that could be experienced.” He had long known this, of course, but only now recognized that some “thing” had, nevertheless, crept into his thinking. All these years, he had been searching a subtle object, whereas the state to be sought is one of pure subjectivity or consciousness *without* an object. Since he had found it impossible to subdue thought fully—Mephisto was always dancing—he figured the trick was to focus on the subjective pole of consciousness, allowing the mind to pursue its spontaneous objectifying activity, at the periphery. “This was the final turn of the Key that opened the Door.” His introvert experiment worked.

⁸ Paul Jakob Deussen, *The System of the Vedanta, according to Baadarayana's Brahma-Sutras and Cankara's Commentary thereon set forth as a Compendium of the Dogmatics of Brahmanism from the Standpoint of Cankara*, 1883 original German ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1912/1973). He, obviously, must have owned an earlier translation as well, which would have been the first 1912 edition.

⁹ One evening, he entered a blissful contemplative state, whose content he claims not to recall, Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 3. But this may be his “creative phantasy” of the previous chapter.

¹⁰ “I had met various individuals and groups who offered and rendered assistance in the direction I was seeking to go ... But none of them offered methods that proved decisively effective with me. Nearly all these placed their predominant stress upon feeling-transformation and failed to satisfy the intellectual demands that, with me, always remained strong,” Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy of Consciousness,” 254.

¹¹ Deussen, *The System of the Vedanta*: Chapter 35, 401-417.

Once he saw he was not to silence the mind but surpass it, there was a breakthrough.¹²

The final thought before the “breakthrough” was the very clear realization that *there was nothing to be attained*. For attainment implied acquisition and acquisition implied change of content in consciousness. But the Goal is not change of content, but divorcement from content ... Recognition has nothing to do with anything that happens. I am already That which I seek and, therefore, there is nothing to be sought. By the very seeking I hide Myself from myself ... This was the end of the long search. I died and in the same instant was born again. Spontaneity took over in place of the old self-determined effort ... I knew directly the Consciousness possessing the characteristics reported by the mystics, again and again. Instead of this process being irrational, it is the very apogee of logic. It is reasoned thought carried to the end, with mathematical completeness.¹³

Essentially nothing happened, though introspection did reveal certain changes in relative consciousness. He lists fourteen of them.¹⁴ There was a *shift in the base of consciousness*, whereby reality was no longer ascribed to the objects but to the subject of consciousness, which gave “a dreamlike quality of unreality” to the world.¹⁵ In turn, this sparked a *transformation in the meaning of the self*, from a “Point-I to Space-I.”¹⁶ His mind was, furthermore, flooded with unthinkable—imageless—thoughts of pure significance, beyond all concepts, as a sort of *depth penetration*.¹⁷ Its corollary was a *cognition* that tends to be characterized in terms of “intuition,” but which he prefers to call “knowledge through identity”—to retain its distinct noetic quality—which directly delivers non-logical axioms that can be developed into a logical system.¹⁸ He now also perceived himself as being *above space, time and causality*, with a feeling of *complete freedom*.¹⁹ This involved a *freedom from guilt* as well as a sense of *having found the solution to the “wrongness” of the world*.²⁰ Disturbances produced by circumstances and forces of the world lost their potency, resulting in a deep *calmness and serenity*.²¹

¹² Merrell-Wolff, "Pathways through to Space," 6; Merrell-Wolff, "Philosophy of Consciousness," 263.

¹³ Merrell-Wolff, "Philosophy of Consciousness," 294, endnote 9.

¹⁴ For a summary, see *ibid.*, 264-276. Note that he lists each separately, whereas I have clustered them.

¹⁵ In addition to his later more reflective summary, cf. Merrell-Wolff, "Pathways through to Space," 138.

¹⁶ cf. *Ibid.*, 186-189.

¹⁷ cf. *Ibid.*, 206 & 227.

¹⁸ cf. *Ibid.*, 64-68 & 110.

¹⁹ cf. *Ibid.*, 6 & 197-208.

²⁰ cf. *Ibid.*, 73, 173 & 182.

²¹ cf. *Ibid.*, 12 & 138.

The *significance and value of information radically changed*, whereby factual knowledge became a means to express what was already more intimately known.²² He felt submerged in a purifying “current of ambrosia,” whose dynamic life force supplied a physiological, emotional and intellectual *felicity*.²³ Linked to this feeling of bliss was a *benevolence*, which dissolved the distinction between self and other.²⁴ He moved in a non-trance state of *ecstasy*.²⁵ Finally, there were *atypical features*, like a lack of parapsychological “occult powers,” including channeling, automatisms and clairvoyance.²⁶

For the past year or so, Merrell-Wolff had been in conversation “with one whom I recognized as a Sage,”²⁷ who had proven a particularly helpful mentor on the road to realization. Nowhere in his written work does he explicitly elaborate on this mysterious figure.²⁸ It is only much later, in one or two informal lectures for students, that he reveals his identity. Supposedly, it was a channeled sage from Atlantis—an “adept,” like Morya, Koot Hoomi and Hilarion—who had chosen Sherifa as a vehicle for communication.²⁹ This Atlantean sage, whom they would come to address as “Senior,” warned him to watch out for “a cycle of thirty-three,” without further clarification.³⁰ In spite of this alleged admonition, Merrell-Wolff was no less surprised, thirty-three days later.

Second Fundamental Realization

“How shall I describe what happened last night? It is utterly baffling ... both cognition and perception are hopelessly inadequate either to represent or contain it.” Assuming the search to be finished, imagine his utter surprise, when one month after his alleged realization, in the wee hours of 9 September 1936, he found that the infinite contains “Mysteries within Mysteries,” as another fundamental realization unfolded in him.³¹

²² cf. *Ibid.*, 98-99.

²³ cf. *Ibid.*, 7, 19-21 & 29.

²⁴ cf. *Ibid.*, 91-92.

²⁵ cf. *Ibid.*, 167 & 226.

²⁶ cf. *Ibid.*, 59-63. Given their absence, he only addresses parapsychological experiences in general. He did experiment with “channeling,” at least once, during his early years, see Chapter 2, 81, footnote 73.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸ Later, one learns he did implicitly write about him, in his poem “The Atlantean Sage,” *ibid.*, 171-172.

²⁹ Summarizing one of the clearest accounts I have come across, Merrell-Wolff claims, one evening, in 1934-5, another entity spoke and moved through Sherifa. Over the years, they had many mostly philosophical conversations, in which his knowledge and background as well as his presence and mentality seemed so different from that of Sherifa that it was as if he was talking and walking with “a bearded Sage.” He told him that “he dwelt in a subtle world ... where most of the Adepts abide most of the time” and that he had last assumed a gross body 10,000 years ago, on the Isle of Atlantis, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “On Tulku (1 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 5-6, abbreviated.

³⁰ Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 218.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 99-106 & 218-222.

After retiring to bed, later that night, he had allegedly navigated through several stages towards an unprecedented state of pure consciousness. Sherifa will later confide to her diary that “He was neither asleep nor awake, but seemed to be in both states at once ... I called out and asked *Are you alright, Franklin?* He laughed and answered *I am above the subject-object consciousness and watching it ...*” As his consciousness seemed to penetrate ever deeper depths, his mind stayed present on the sideline, as a witness. It all sounded so surreal—“I am certain if anyone should read this record, they would decide that I was mentally unbalanced, or that he was. But neither of us [is].”³²

“None of my previous readings in Theosophic or Vedāntic sources had prepared me for anything like the state of Consciousness which I have called the ‘High Indifference,’”³³ Merrell-Wolff exclaims, afterwards. The final temptation of its nirvāṇic bliss was so enticing that he could easily understand why some would choose to reside in it and refuse to return to active life. He had been trained in the tradition of *The Voice of the Silence*,³⁴ though, he explains, which had taught him to renounce personal gain for the benefit of others. Indeed, the *Voice* states that “To don Nirmāṇakāya’s humble robe is to forego eternal bliss for Self, to help on man’s salvation. To reach Nirvāṇa’s bliss, but to renounce it is the supreme, the final step—the highest on Renunciation’s Path.”³⁵ Merrell-Wolff summarizes this as the acceptance of the Guanyin vow—Guanyin being the Chinese female equivalent of Avalokiteśvara, who is again the Mahāyāna Buddha of Compassion. Apparently, in the face of liberation, he pledged “never [to] seek nor receive private, individual salvation, never [to] enter into final peace alone, but forever, and everywhere, [to] strive for the redemption of all creatures throughout the world.”³⁶

³² Sarah Alice Merrell-Wolff, "Excerpts from Sherifa's Journal," (Private Journal: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1936), 3.

³³ Merrell-Wolff, "Pathways through to Space," 220; cf. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Reflections on the High Indifference," (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1936); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "On the High Indifference," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975). He employs it as an umbrella term for four consecutive substates, which I will elaborate on, in more detail, in a moment.

³⁴ Merrell-Wolff, "High Indifference," 2. He means Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence and Other Chosen Fragments from the "Book of the Golden Precepts" for the Daily Use of Lanoos (Disciples)* (New York: The Alliance Publishing Company, 1889). He saw it as one of the “authoritative sources on Recognition,” on par with the work of Buddha and Śaṅkara and the Bhagavadgītā, even “the most important scripture available,” Merrell-Wolff, "Pathways through to Space," 73; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "On the Meaning of Redemption," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1969), 1.

³⁵ Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*: 33. Another Theosophical text similarly taught him that “instead of going into selfish bliss, [the Adept or the Yogi] chooses a life of self-sacrifice ... to help mankind in an invisible yet most effective manner,” Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892). 231. Note, Buddhism discerns three bodies of Buddha, the Nirmāṇakāya (physical body), the Sambhogakāya (enjoyment body) and the Dharmakāya (truth body).

³⁶ e.g. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Epistemology and Realization," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1969), 5.

Introception

It seemed like a lifetime ago that Merrell-Wolff had passed up a career in mathematics or philosophy, because he had become convinced of “another way of thought”—a third faculty or function of cognition, next to perception and conception—that was not being addressed inside the academy. Fast forward twenty years, and he now felt vindicated.

At the exact mid-point of his life, aged forty-nine, Merrell-Wolff claimed to have found this third form of cognition, which he comes to address as “introception.” Note, “[introception] is not a process of simple introspection, as is commonly used in experimental psychology.”³⁷ He insists on a seminal difference. Imagine consciousness as a lighted lamp. If the empirical psychologist introspects the lamp, he clarifies, then the rational idealist introcepts its light. In fact, he settles on a definition for introception as “the power whereby the Light of consciousness turns upon itself towards its Source,” whereby the light designates the “cognitive aspect of consciousness” and cognition is again seen as “knowing in any form whatsoever.”³⁸ Rather, it has multiple definitions.

According to Merrell-Wolff, introception not only refers to “a faculty or function of consciousness,” but also to “the content or state of consciousness rendered accessible by the function.”³⁹ In most people, this function and its content are potentially—not actually—available.⁴⁰ Because the turning around of consciousness towards its source supposedly changes that, one could say that introception also concerns the condition which triggers the function that renders that content or state accessible. Like Merrell-Wolff himself, I use the contrived “condition”—rather than the more natural sounding “method,” “practice” or “process”—given that realization can apparently spring from a spontaneous coincidence of circumstances as well as a technique of deliberate effort.⁴¹

The *faculty* or *function* of introception is often rendered in psychological terms, as a carrying into consciousness the immediate content of what is normally considered the unconscious—a union of conscious and unconscious elements, if you will. Indeed,

³⁷ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” in *Transformations in Consciousness: The Metaphysics and Epistemology*, ed. Ron Leonard (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975/1995), 103-113.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 144; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Conversation with Dr. Rein’l (1 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 6; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “An Abstract of the Philosophy (8 of 14),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 6. Humans are “a great deal more than a cognitive entity,” but he explains that his work focuses on their cognitive side, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “A Western Contribution to Yogic Method,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1977), 4.

³⁹ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 144.

⁴⁰ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Three functions of Cognition,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1971), 3. He considers it “a latent psychical function,” Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 5.

⁴¹ He does say “[introception] is to be understood as the process whereby consciousness turns upon itself and moves toward its source,” but only if we try to conceptualize it, he later adds—“in the strictest sense, there is no process ... only sudden Enlightenment,” Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 104 & 298.

it could be seen as a sort of intuition. But not entirely, because intuition usually implies the spontaneous entry of unconscious material into consciousness, while the function of introception is seen as a deliberate access of consciousness into the unconscious.⁴²

The *content* of introception is said to be pure consciousness or “consciousness-without-an-object (and without-a-subject).” This undeniably awkward concept might not be the most elegant, but it is, nevertheless, an apt pointer to what Merrell-Wolff had in mind. That is, a non-dual consciousness beyond the subject-object distinction.⁴³

The *state* of consciousness-without-an-object is a “high indifference.” Drawing on his own “imperience,” Merrell-Wolff recalls four progressive sub-states. First, one of satisfaction—it is not satisfactory, he stresses, it is satisfaction. Second, one of indifference, a balanced consciousness above all polarity. Third, one whereby the subject and object void into consciousness—“I [the subject of consciousness] vanished and the object of consciousness vanished,” he reminisces, which gave way to “a stage wherein both that which I have called the Self and that which had the value of Divinity ... dissolved in a Somewhat still more transcendent.” Fourth, one of gradual transition into a rational abyss. Merrell-Wolff remembers how his spiritual search culminated with a plunge into the unknown. “I descended into darkness, a darkness of non-cognition.”⁴⁴

The *condition* required for introception is “the capacity to maintain consciousness apart from all objects.”⁴⁵ This triggers “a shift in the base of reference.”⁴⁶ But its occurrence cannot be coerced. It simply happens. One can seek out circumstances that are favorable to it and avoid others that are likely to obstruct it, though, Merrell-Wolff assured. For instance, by stimulating a burning desire for liberation, on the one hand, and a cool detachment from the world, on the other. Being in the presence of a guru also helps, since their company can be enough for higher consciousness to “catch on,” by way of “induction.”⁴⁷ In addition, Merrell-Wolff recommended not to invest too much in the ego, not to lose focus due to intellectual laziness, not to have the will taken hostage by sensual desires or to continue to look upon the phenomena of the world as being more substantial than the very noumenal consciousness in which they appear.⁴⁸

⁴² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Concerning Intuition,” (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, ca. 1939).

⁴³ This is thematized throughout the book, e.g. Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy of Consciousness,” 315-322.

⁴⁴ These four successive stages are standard ingredients of his Realization narrative, e.g. Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 64-68; Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy of Consciousness,” 280-288; he neatly charts them in Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Questing,” (Lectures: The Great Space Center, 1968), 2.

⁴⁵ Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 234.

⁴⁶ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 280-282.

⁴⁷ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Induction Talk,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970).

⁴⁸ For “conditions favorable for recognition,” see Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 79-85.

Introceptualism

Introception formed the foundation for a philosophy of introceptual idealism. Merrell-Wolff makes this “Introceptualism” out to be revolutionary, shocking, a radical break from most religious, philosophical and psychological perspectives on reality—in short, a Copernican shift in consciousness.⁴⁹ He contends its combination of eastern theories and western methods is “as a whole, rather unique, though the parts of it ... are found scattered through the thoughts of other individuals both occidental and oriental.” Elsewhere, he slightly mitigates his claim, by conceding that “There may be a question even whether any part of it is entirely unique, but it would seem that some portions are.”⁵⁰

Introceptualism is portrayed as unique, with its unique character being its novel *combination* of methods and theories. More specifically, its combination of eastern and western religion, philosophy and psychology. It is at their intersection that one comes across “the most vital and persistent problems and concerns that have compelled the attention of humanity, in all times and places.”⁵¹ He goes on to say that these domains stand in a hierarchically descending relation. Religion pertains to judgments of value, philosophy to judgments of meaning and psychology to judgments of facts. And their “common denominator”—the core concept that ties them together—is consciousness.⁵²

In his own words, “‘Consciousness’ is my great term ... but a term that cannot be defined.” In fact, “If anybody defined it ... [i]t would be a term actually contained by the real Consciousness that defined it and not the Truth itself. This is my fundamental message.”⁵³ Shuffling along the precipice of solipsism, he states that all things are the same in their “seeming to consciousness.”⁵⁴ He leans further over the edge, by telling us “I am the pure light, which by illuminating everything gives to everything existence for me and except as things exist[ing] for me there is no meaning in predicating existence of them.”⁵⁵ What saves him from plummeting into the abyss is that he adds that consciousness gives to everything existence for me, the same way that it does for you.

⁴⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “An Abstract of the Philosophy (10 of 14),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 1. For his epistemological claim concerning a “Copernican shift in individual consciousness,” clearly reminiscent of Kant, see Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 88 & 138.

⁵⁰ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “General Discourse on the Subject of my Philosophy (1 of 12),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1971), 1; cf. Merrell-Wolff, “Extemporaneous Statement of my Philosophy,” 8.

⁵¹ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 1; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy, Psychology and Religion,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970).

⁵² Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy of Consciousness,” 321.

⁵³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Perception, Conception and Introception (2 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 6.

⁵⁴ Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy of Consciousness,” 361.

⁵⁵ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 155.

Had he left out that last part, he would have found himself alone in this world—with maybe only Bishop Berkeley there to shake his hand. Generally, Merrell-Wolff will “go around the solipsist’s hypothesis,” though, assuming “I” am not alone in this world.⁵⁶

Based on his realization, he submits that the “one true and authentic axiom” is the primacy of consciousness. This is not an assumption, he insists, since it is already implied in the very act of making an assumption. “Without consciousness there is nothing whatsoever.”⁵⁷ He dissects this fundamental premise into three propositions: one, that consciousness is original, self-existent and constitutive of all things; two, that the subject always transcends the object of consciousness; three, that there is a third faculty or function of cognition, which provides immediate access to this higher knowledge.⁵⁸

In sum, Merrell-Wolff laid claim to a shift in consciousness towards its source, for which he coined the term introception. His introception proved, for him, the fundamental primacy of consciousness. From this subjective proof followed three objective axioms. And out of these three axioms developed his philosophy of Introceptualism.

The philosophy of Introceptualism is contained in two completed books, some unfinished ones, an academic article, a few dozen essays and more than four hundred (transcripts of) recorded one-hour lectures, which, combined with unpublished notes and letters, approximately rack up to a daunting ten thousand pages of source material.

His first book—originally titled “From Point-I to Space-I”⁵⁹—can be described as an introspection of his introception. As he himself puts it, “*Pathways through to Space* is a record of transformation in consciousness written down during the actual process itself.”⁶⁰ It was penned in 1936, during a period of a hundred-and-one days, at the time of his final realizations, but published in 1944⁶¹ and republished in 1973⁶² and 1994.⁶³

⁵⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Lectures to University Students (3 of 7),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1969), 2. One can question this assumption, he sometimes adds, if the “I” is seen not as the lower self, but the higher self that is one with the divine or consciousness, e.g. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “An Abstract of the Philosophy (1 of 14),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 1. This would reduce the world to a dream, if that. He usually settles for an intermediate stance, whereby our objective world is only *relatively* real compared to our subjective world, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Sangsara, Nirvana and Parinirvana (2 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1969), 8. Again, in this case, “our subjective world” or “I” means the consciousness that is (in) all of us.

⁵⁷ Merrell-Wolff, “An Abstract of the Philosophy (8 of 14),” 1.

⁵⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Three Fundamentals of Introceptive Philosophy (1 of 16),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1973), 1.

⁵⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “From Point-I to Space-I,” (Books: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1939). It was written in 1936, but extended with a preface, introduction, addenda and glossary, in 1939.

⁶⁰ Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” x.

⁶¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Pathways through to Space: A Personal Record of Transformation in Consciousness* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1944). This first edition was subsidized by Merrell-Wolff.

⁶² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Pathways through to Space: An Experiential Journal*, 2nd ed. (New York: Julian Press, 1973).

⁶³ Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space.” I have consistently referred to this SUNY press edition.

His second book offers a more critical reformulation of the events described in the first book. As he puts it, *The Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object* is “a recapitulation of the record, written after the fact.”⁶⁴ He wrote it sometime between 1939 and 1945. At first, a typed copy circulated. In 1970, his students created a mimeographed edition⁶⁵—also referred to as “the white book,” at the time—before it was twice published in two parts, in 1973 and 1975⁶⁶ and more recently again in 1994 and 1995.⁶⁷

His article attempts to reasonably defend the *possibility* of “a timeless and non-phenomenal consciousness,” perhaps as a preamble for his full-blown philosophy. After all, he explains, years later, “I had envisaged, when I left Harvard, that if [that which] I found was successful, I would bring back to the academy what I found.”⁶⁸ Written sometime between his two books and published in a major academic journal, *Concept, Percept and Reality*⁶⁹ was perhaps meant to make good on that promise. In his candid but equally turgid tone, Merrell-Wolff informs his peers, on the one hand, that he has tasted the “spiritual” consciousness mentioned above and, on the other hand, that such an “indefinable” cannot be banned from the discussion merely because it is not (yet) shared by most among the current intellectual elite. What is more, he argues, “recognition of the type here introduced has played a decisive part as a determinant in the philosophy and religion of other cultures,” especially in Indian and German idealism.⁷⁰

His enormous collection of essays and recorded lectures is devoted to rationally elaborating and elucidating the bold claims of his books and article. Some of the longer series offer a fresh outline of his entire worldview,⁷¹ but most texts and talks pick out one specific religious,⁷² philosophical⁷³ or psychological⁷⁴ topic for further clarification.

⁶⁴ Ibid., x; Merrell-Wolff, "Introceptualism."

⁶⁵ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *The Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object: A Discussion of the Nature of Transcendental Consciousness*, Mimeograph ed. (Books: Phoenix Philosophical Press, 1970). Leonard informed me of its informal title, Ron Leonard, Correspondence with the Author, 2012.

⁶⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *The Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object: Reflections on the Nature of Transcendental Consciousness* (New York: Julian Press, 1973); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Introceptualism: The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object Volume II* (Phoenix: Phoenix Philosophical Press, 1975). One consists of parts I and II, the other parts III and IV—ergo “Volume II.”

⁶⁷ Merrell-Wolff, "Philosophy of Consciousness; Merrell-Wolff, "Introceptualism." One contains parts I and II and the other parts III and IV, again. I have consistently referred to these SUNY press editions.

⁶⁸ “What I hoped was that the idea might gain enough recognition, at least, to be disagreed with on the floor of a seminar. I don’t care whether a person agrees with the ideas ... [Even] If he fights them, he’s hooked ... There’s magic in this stuff,” he adds, Merrell-Wolff, "Conversation with Dr. Rein'l (1 of 2)," 8.

⁶⁹ Franklin Fowler Wolff, "Concept, Percept and Reality," *The Philosophical Review* 48, no. 4 (1939). Also see Gustavus Watts Cunningham, "Letter from *The Philosophical Review*," (Letters: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1937). This letter shows the (revised) text had already been accepted in 1937.

⁷⁰ Wolff, "Concept, Percept and Reality," 402-403.

⁷¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "On the Meaning of Realization (1 of 16)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1951); Merrell-Wolff, "General Discourse (1 of 12); Merrell-Wolff, "Three Fundamentals (1 of 16); Merrell-Wolff, "An Abstract of the Philosophy (1 of 14); Franklin Merrell-

RELIGION

First of all, [*Pathways through to Space*] is a record of a Transformation in Consciousness, in so far as that record could be observed and interpreted by the intellect ... It covers a fairly diverse range of interests. The common denominator of the book is myself. In this work, I have used myself as a sort of laboratory of research. What I found in that laboratory I reported as faithfully as I could.⁷⁵

In his first book, Merrell-Wolff uses a technique of introspection—reminiscent of the experimental psychology of Titchener, save its associationist premise—to intellectually comprehend and to communicate his realization. He combines this psychological perception with philosophical conception to support his religious claim to introception.

The first to read its draft, John William Lloyd (1857-1940), told Merrell-Wolff, “This book, I fancy, will never be popular, but I believe it will be immortal ... It must be published.”⁷⁶ Some years later, as it was being prepared for publication, the publisher sent it to others. But Merrell-Wolff always looked to this fellow sage as the only among his reviewers “competent to give an evaluation.”⁷⁷ As it turns out, Lloyd was right. Not only did Merrell-Wolff have to pay for it out of his own pocket, the book would not sell especially well. Maybe a few hundred copies, if that. This begs the question: why not?

Wolff, "Purpose, Method and Policy of this Work (1 of 15)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1976). Most of such longer series are from the early-mid seventies, his most prolific period.

⁷² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "A Mystical View of the World," (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1937); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Liberation," (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1939); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "A Principle of Practical Magic," (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1966); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Pseudopodal Theory of Reincarnation," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970).

⁷³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Various Philosophical Considerations (1 of 2)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1972); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Three Philosophic Perspectives," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1979); Yogagnani, "Philosophical Explanation of Reality," (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1938).

⁷⁴ Yogagnani, "What is Thought," (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1939); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "On the Limits of Psychology," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1951); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Psychology: East and West," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1977).

⁷⁵ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Original Introduction to *From Point-I to Space-I*," (Books: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1939), xi & xiii. This introduction never actually made it into the final book.

⁷⁶ He did so, in a letter, John William Lloyd, "Review of the *Pathways*," (Letters: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship (19), 1937), 4. "J. William Lloyd was the first man who read the manuscript. [He] was one of those that appear in Maurice Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*. He was something of a mystic in his own right ..." Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Sangsara, Nirvana and Parinirvana (1 of 2)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1969), 7; cf. Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1901/1969). 284-285. Merrell-Wolff had likely read John William Lloyd, *Dawn-Thought on the Reconciliation: A Volume of Pantheistic Impressions and Glimpses of Larger Religion* (Westfield: The Lloyd Group, 1900/1904).

⁷⁷ Merrell-Wolff, "Conversation with Dr. Rein¹ (1 of 2)," 10-11.

The first publication of the *Pathways*, in the mid-forties, did not sell well, probably because its psychological method was passé, its philosophical position unpopular and its religious ideology—much like any ideology, at the time, really, let alone an unconventional one—reproved. More specifically, in America, Introspectionism had been bullied away by Behaviorism, Idealism had significantly lost appeal to Pragmatism and social and religious ideologies had become straw men for paranoid Cold War suspicion.

In the thirties, a political consensus had arisen that endured during the Second World War and matured over the subsequent decades—the New Deal Order.⁷⁸ It started with the landslide election and reelection of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945), in 1932 and 1936. As Merrell-Wolff enjoyed a period of personal elation, most Americans suffered one of collective depression. This socio-economic malaise had led Roosevelt to turn his back on the long-cherished ethos of rugged individualism and take on the “entrenched greed” of the capitalist elite, which had deprived working men and women of economic freedom.⁷⁹ “[His] New Deal demanded a type of ideological thinking that exalted the common man and disapproved of concentrations of wealth,” Paul Bondi adds, but such ideologies quickly came to be discarded, in the charged climate of the forties.⁸⁰

Halfway into his third term, in early 1942, despite a campaign promise to the contrary, Roosevelt took the country to war. Few blamed him for it. If Americans had been divided on their nation’s isolationist and non-interventionist policy,⁸¹ 7 December 1941 would change all that. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States forged an alliance with the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union against Germany’s Nazi’s, Italy’s fascists and Japan’s warlords.⁸² But their brittle pact of convenience already began to crack before the bombs that brutally ended the conflict had dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By installing pro-communist governments in the countries they “liberated,” Russia lit the fuse for *another* global fire. This time, it would be a cold burn.

Between 1945 and 1991—peaking during the “long fifties,” from 1946 to 1964—a paradoxical climate existed in America. On the one hand, it emerged from the war as the undisputed leader of the free world at a time of unprecedented economic prosperity.

⁷⁸ Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretative History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005). 208.

⁷⁹ David Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s*, ed. Martin Halliwell, Twentieth-Century American Culture (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008). 13 & 17.

⁸⁰ Victor Bondi, ed. *American Decades, 1940-1949* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), x.

⁸¹ “As the 1940s began, isolationism, the belief that America was somehow disconnected from the rest of the world, was the most popular political movement in America; the decade ended with the United States signing unprecedented military alliances with foreign powers [i.e. NATO alliances],” *ibid.*, viii.

⁸² Tim McNeese, *The Cold War and Postwar America, 1946-1963* (New York: Chelsea House, 2010). 13-14 & 16. As McNeese says, this “shaky alliance” had been one of convenience and so was short-lived.

On the other hand, it also experienced a mix of existentialist fear, political anxiety and enforced national unity, in the clasp of the “red scare.”⁸³ As Keith Booker summarizes it, “Americans came increasingly, in the long 1950s, to think of their lives as an island of prosperity and tranquility surrounded by a threatening sea of poverty and turmoil.”⁸⁴

In the forties, liberalism seemed to be on the rise.⁸⁵ But as progressive and conservative currents blurred,⁸⁶ working toward the so-called Cold War consensus, it gave way to a culture of “containment,” under Roosevelt-successor Harry S. Truman (1884-1972), in the fifties.⁸⁷ Its repressive climate checked critical reason and choked creative imagination, to the point that *any* alternative view on society tended to be equated with communism—so much so that Booker even speaks of a “post-utopian” era in America.⁸⁸

Further stimulated by Joseph McCarthy’s (1908-1957) crusade against domestic communism, the general public succumbed to a suspicion of intellectuals, a distrust of idea(l)s and a reluctance to speak out on controversial topics. Even popular thinkers like Einstein were mistrusted by the masses, once they stepped outside their specialist domains to address social issues. All of this added to what Hofstadter would come to criticize as a widespread anti-intellectualism in American society,⁸⁹ which could itself be read as a thinly veiled elitist critique on its popular culture and egalitarian values.⁹⁰

Based on historians such as Hofstadter but also sociologists like Daniel Bell, Van Gosse adds that most intellectuals would be remembered and rebuked for abandoning their role as critics of power, during this period—particularly by New Left thinkers, in the sixties.⁹¹ They had stopped to question the socio-political status quo. Interestingly, this acrid accusation of intellectuals never seemed to apply to Franklin Merrell-Wolff.

⁸³ Among others, see Bondi, *American Decades, 1940-1949*, vii; Theodore W. Eversole, “Chapter 1: Introduction,” in *Postwar America, 1950 to 1969*, ed. Rodney Carlisle, *Handbook to Life in America* (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 1-2; Jacqueline Foertsch, *American Culture in the 1940s*, ed. Martin Halliwell, *Twentieth-Century American Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 18 & 28; Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*: 10; Martin Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, ed. Martin Halliwell, *Twentieth-Century American Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 2.

⁸⁴ More specifically, this mainly applied to “white, middle-class Americans,” M. Keith Booker, *The Post-Utopian Imagination: American Culture in the Long 1950s* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 10.

⁸⁵ Bondi, *American Decades, 1940-1949*, ix.

⁸⁶ Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*: 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 8. cf. Spalding Edwards, Elizabeth, *The First Cold Warrior: Harry Truman, Containment, and the Remaking of Liberal Internationalism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

⁸⁸ Booker, *The Post-Utopian Imagination*: e.g. 1-2 & 4. “I use the term [utopianism] in a Marxist sense ... in the sense of an ability to imagine a preferable systemic alternative to the status quo, while at the same time imagining a historical process that might lead in the direction of that alternative,” *ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁹ Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*: 18, 20, 24.

⁹⁰ David S. Brown, *Richard Hofstadter: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Chapter 6, e.g. 124-126, 131-132 & 137-138.

⁹¹ See, respectively, Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963); Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960/2000); referenced in Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*: 12.

Already in 1932, right after an overwhelming majority of the American people had voted Roosevelt into the presidential office, Merrell-Wolff commented that “Of all the events in the history of the United States, the outcome of the last election may well prove to be the most significant since the Revolution of 1776.”⁹² Nevertheless, he was certain the masses were scarcely aware of the repercussions of their decision, which, he claimed, could drastically alter the course of American—even all of western—culture. It did not only signify a socio-economic change, but also a religio-philosophical one. For the New Deal carried a fundamental challenge to the Reformation and Enlightenment ideals of individualism and liberalism over collectivism and authoritarianism on which the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution were built. In fact, he felt, it even approached the paternalist regimes of Russia, Germany, Italy and Spain.⁹³

A few years later, in 1940, after Roosevelt had been reelected for a second time, Merrell-Wolff wrote a fifty-page epistle against his New Deal legislation, in which he decried “the rolling under of the right.”⁹⁴ In his own words, what bothered him was that “the New Deal, as a movement, both consciously and unconsciously, gives expression to philosophical, psychological and even religious attitudes which are not capable of representing the needs of all men.” It reflects “a tendency with a decided orientation to the political *left*,” whereby “the body of citizens who naturally and by temperament belong to the political *right* are so far ashamed of themselves that they hesitate to formulate their position explicitly and openly.” But repressing or rejecting tendencies has grave results. “[Stalin’s] Russia of today and, in modified degree, Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy, illustrate the effects of a radically submerged *right*,” he submits to the reader—the absence or silence of the right allowed for radical revolutions to the left, with an eradication of independent capital power and domination by political power.⁹⁵ To him, New Deal America was really not that different.⁹⁶ The problem was that “the meaning of ‘liberalism,’ as it was understood by Herbert Spencer, defines ... just precisely the ground on which the *right* stands opposed to the New Deal, which in turn is conceived by its proponents as liberal,” he claims, with a acerbically ironic undertone.⁹⁷

⁹² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "The Significance of this Election," (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, ca. 1932), 1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

⁹⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "The Vertical Thought Movement," (Essays: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, ca. 1940).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1,2, 30. He places all three regimes, in different degrees, left of the political spectrum, *ibid.*, 25.

⁹⁶ i.e. “Methodological differences still are great, but there is a clear ideological convergence ... [all] of these have a collectivistic orientation and give to political power overwhelming predominance,” *ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁷ In fact, he reckons, “in the Spencerian sense, the New Deal would appear as anti-liberal,” *ibid.*, 8 & 9.

From a Spencerian perspective, “rugged individualism” is liberalism. But most people fail to see this, Merrell-Wolff rued. Therefore, complete democracy is not the most perfect form of government, he argued, for it imposes the values of one majority on every other minority—who, together, may even make up a larger part of society. In fact, such a democracy is not entirely different from totalitarianism, especially if we recall that many dictators even received their mandate by popular vote. “Superficially, government of, by, and for the people sounds very well, but when one examines into the implications of this formula the picture becomes far less attractive,” he concludes.⁹⁸

Instead, he suggests, in a Social Darwinist tone and Platonist vein, to substitute “rule by the many” for “rule by the best,” in the shape of an aristo-democracy. Despite facing challenges of its own—like who and how to select “the best”—philosopher-kings will prove better equipped to reign and raise *all* members of society. Unlike New Deal politicians, they will, no doubt, be able to balance both leftist and rightist tendencies.⁹⁹

At this point, it is key to know what he meant by “left” and “right.” Simply put, leftists tend to have a horizontal orientation and rightists a vertical orientation. Despite what appears a genuine effort to remain unbiased, he depicts these two orientations in clearly polemical terms, as oriented either to wistfulness or to correctness, breadth or depth, social mindedness or integrity and authenticity, tolerance or truth.¹⁰⁰ Lifting it to an abstract level, on the one hand, “all philosophies which find the primary value or reality in the Thing, in Sensation, in Experience, in Purpose or Desire or in empiric Life are *leftist*,” while, on the other, “[those] which find the primary value or reality in the Idea, in Reason, in the Self, in Consciousness or in Spirit are *rightist*.” To him, leftists seems mostly conformed to (social) feeling and rightists to (religious) thinking.¹⁰¹

Pulling the political discussion further into a metaphysical frame, he simplifies their difference as a valuation of economics and politics versus religion and philosophy.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 36-39.

⁹⁹ Although discussed in a different context, his severe criticism on “the exaltation of majority opinion and evaluation” that “drag[s] culture down to the dead level of mediocrity,” based on Plato’s cave story, are still relevant here, Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 76-78. He owned a copy of Francis Macdonald Cornford, *The Republic of Plato*, ca. 400 BCE original Greek ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941/1956). Of course, he would have already learned of Plato’s aristocratic outlook, during his studies, particularly via Roger’s introductory textbook, whose views he seems to have made his own—cf. “Of all the forms of government that are not entire perversions, a democracy is the worst ... With [its] talk of liberty and equality, Plato has no sympathy. Men are not equal and it is but a perversion that the worst should rule the best. The mass of men have not the brains to know what is for their own good ... Accordingly, they will be vastly better off if they cease bothering their heads about affairs of state and turn over the conduct of their lives to those whose wisdom gives them the right to rule,” Arthur Kenyon Rogers, *A Student's History of Philosophy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901/1908). 82-86.

¹⁰⁰ Merrell-Wolff, “The Vertical Thought Movement,” 12.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 25 & 27.

That is to say, those on the left tend to regard spiritual self-reflection and cultivation as a by-product of socio-economic progress, whereas those on the right tend to look upon socio-economic progress as a by-product of spiritual self-reflection and cultivation.¹⁰²

Within the realms of religion and philosophy, he reckons, this relates to what is now known as the empiricist-contra-rationalist debate. In the East, religion and philosophy have often been rationalist, exemplified by the works of Buddha and Śaṅkara. In the West, there has been more of a balance between rationalist and empiricist views, ever since the intellectual clashes between the likes of Parmenides and Heraclitus and Plato and Aristotle. In modern times, Kant took up an intermediate position, but from his critical philosophy emerged opposite perspectives again, with, say, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Spengler on the left as well as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel on the right.¹⁰³

Regardless whether this take on the history of eastern and western religion and philosophy is accurate, it is clear that Merrell-Wolff inclined towards “rightist” Indian and German idealism. He thought they were similar. “I call attention to the profound affinity between the idealism of philosophers such as Fichte, Hegel and Schopenhauer, on the one hand, and an orientation that is characteristic of the *Upaniṣads*, on the other hand. This similarity is especially notable in the case of the philosophy of the great Indian monist Śaṅkara.”¹⁰⁴ What is more, his own system of Introceptualism “is not to be identified with either Vedāntism or current Idealism,” but “it is arrived at by a process of passing through these schools of interpretation,” he will go on to say, elsewhere.¹⁰⁵

In what follows, I will sometimes interrupt my historical investigation for more theoretical comparisons, than I have done so far, of (his view of) Indian and German idealism with Introceptualism. Fitting certain kinds of Hinduism and Buddhism under the heading of Indian *idealism* can be seen as a form of orientalism, since it represents traditions from the “East” in terms of the “West,”¹⁰⁶ yet I feel justified in doing so, as it nicely reflects Merrell-Wolff’s unwittingly westernized renditions of eastern traditions.

¹⁰² Geographically, throughout American history, he finds, this religious interest in self-cultivation can be traced to New England and to Southern California, *ibid.*, 21. See Chapter 1, 18-21 and Chapter 2, 78.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 9 & 24-25.

¹⁰⁴ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 125. It seems, Merrell-Wolff relied on the New Thought rendition of Ramacharaka, *The Spirit of the Upanishads or the Aphorisms of the Wise: A Collection of Texts, Aphorisms, Sayings, Proverbs, etc. from “the Upanishads” or Sacred Writings of India, compiled and adapted from over Fifty Authorities, expressing the Cream of the Hindu Philosophical Thought* (Chicago: The Yogi Publication Society, 1907). This (also) explains the perceived parallel with idealism.

¹⁰⁵ Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy of Consciousness,” 350, italics mine.

¹⁰⁶ The orientalist does not repudiate the oriental, but represents him, “the aggression being reinscribed in his imagery,” Michael Beard, “Review of Said’s *Orientalism: Between West and World*,” *Diacritics* 9, no. 4 (1979): 4.

Indian Idealism

It is a common misconception that feeling is, in principle, capable of deeper penetration into the Beyond than cognition ... Now, it is a fact that, within the historic period, no man has reached to a spiritual height superior to that attained by Buddha and Śāṅkara. With both these men, cognition is active at the highest level of their expression of which we have record. This fact alone should be sufficient to cause men to pause and to consider well before dogmatically asserting: "Not by thought, but by feeling, we enter the Kingdom of Heaven."¹⁰⁷

By his own admission, "great teacher" Śāṅkarāchārya (ca. 800 CE) was among the most significant influences on both the life and teaching of Franklin Merrell-Wolff. Śāṅkara is "the *philosopher Sage*, par excellence," he said, the kind of philosopher-sage, one suspects, he himself aspired to be.¹⁰⁸ But while western audiences had already been introduced to a range of ideas from Advaita Vedānta, since the start of the nineteenth century—for instance, via the influential reverse orientalist efforts of Roy and, later, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda—it sorely lacked a solid foundation for the study of its founder,¹⁰⁹ until the end of the nineteenth century. As Natalia Isayeva explains, even though it interpreted Advaita in light of German philosophy, this shift towards a better informed grasp of his non-dualist doctrine started with Paul Deussen's *System of the Vedānta*,¹¹⁰ that is, the very book that would become so influential for Merrell-Wolff.

¹⁰⁷ Merrell-Wolff, "Reflections on High Indifference," 1.

¹⁰⁸ Merrell-Wolff, "Introceptualism," 242. In his library, there are also copies of Sankara, *The Atma-Bodha (Self-Wisdom) of Shankara-Acharya*, trans. Charles Johnson (Chicago: The Divine Life Press, 1910); Sankara, *Select Works of Sri Sankaracharya*, trans. S. Venkataramanan (Madras: G.A. Natesan & Co., 1911/1921); Sankara, *Shankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination (Viveka-Chudamani)*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (Hollywood Los Angeles: Vedanta Press, 1947).

¹⁰⁹ History has chosen Śāṅkara as its founder, though many of his ideas were anticipated by Gauḍapāda, his guru's guru, Natalia Isayeva, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). 10; cf. Nikhilananda, Introduction to Sankara, *Self-Knowledge (Atmabodha)*, trans. Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1946/1989). 47. Merrell-Wolff owned a translation of the latter's *kārikā* or commentary on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* with the former's *bhāṣya* or explanation of it, Manilal N. Dvivedi, *Mandukyopanishad with Gaudapa's Karikas and the Bhasya of Sankara*, 8th century CE original Sanskrit ed. (Tookaram Tatyā F.T.S., 1894). He never references it.

¹¹⁰ Isayeva, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy*: 3-4. Others have similarly pointed out his projection of (post)Kantian ideas onto Indian philosophy, e.g. Hans Rollmann, "Deussen, Nietzsche, and Vedānta," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39, no. 1 (1978). Though not at first, Merrell-Wolff later recognized this western bias and wondered if it affected his appreciation of Śāṅkara. "Deussen was said to have been a Kantian and it is pretty clear that the Kantian thought is active in his interpretation of Śāṅkara's commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras* ... [I]t may well have been true that an interpretation of Śāṅkara in western terms was produced that was not true to the meaning as originally given by Śāṅkara himself," Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "General Discourse on the Subject of my Philosophy (6 of 12)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1972), 4; similarly, see Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "General Discourse on the Subject of my Philosophy (3 of 12)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1971), 7.

More surveys of Śaṅkara's non-dualist theory would follow by influential scholars such as Max Müller¹¹¹ and Rudolph Otto,¹¹² in the West, and Surendranath Dasgupta¹¹³ and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan,¹¹⁴ in the East. Merrell-Wolff only studied Deussen, though.

Deussen would have reminded him, “The fundamental thought of the Vedānta, most briefly expressed by the Vedic words: *tat tvam asi*, ‘that art thou’ (Chand. 6.8.7), and *aham brahma asmi*, ‘I am Brahman’ (Brih. 4.10),¹¹⁵ is the identity of Brahman and the Soul; this means that Brahman, i.e. the eternal principle of all Being, the power which creates, sustains and again absorbs into itself all worlds, is identical with the Ātman, the Self or the Soul, i.e. that in us which we recognize, when we see things rightly, as our very self and true essence.”¹¹⁶ If this counts as philosophy,¹¹⁷ it is perhaps best described as a (proto) psychological metaphysics. For Advaita Vedānta resorts to rational introspection in order to reach a transcendental goal, using “self-enquiry,” in search of “liberation.” As such, it, too, can be seen as a reasoned flight beyond reason.

To clarify, Brahman—the divine ground of being—is considered to be pure non-dual consciousness.¹¹⁸ Actually, Śaṅkara distinguishes *nirguṇa* from *saguṇa* Brahman, roughly, “unqualified” versus “qualified” divinity,¹¹⁹ whereby non-duality only pertains to the former. Since unqualified Brahman or non-dual consciousness is one with the *ātman* or self—as Śaṅkara is apt to remind us, over and over again¹²⁰—it is possible to

¹¹¹ Friedrich Max Müller, *Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1894).

¹¹² Rudolph Otto, *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism*, trans. B.L. Bracey and R.C. Payne, 1926 original German ed. (New York: Meridian Books, 1932/1957).

¹¹³ Surendranath Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism* (Radford: Wilder Publications, 1927/2008).

¹¹⁴ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life: Upton Lectures delivered at Manchester College Oxford 1926* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927/1954).

¹¹⁵ These are two of the four *mahāvākyaṇi*, “great sayings,” namely, one, *aham brahma asmi* or “I am Brahman,” BU 1.4.10, Patrick Olivelle, *Upanisads* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996/2008). 15. Two, *tat tvam asi* or “that is you,” CU 6.8.7., *ibid.*, 152. Three, *prajñānam brahma* or “Brahman is knowledge,” AU 3.3, *ibid.*, 199. Four, *ayam ātmā brahma*, “this self is Brahman,” MaU 1.2., *ibid.*, 289.

¹¹⁶ Deussen, *The System of the Vedanta*: 453.

¹¹⁷ See also my discussion in Chapter 2, 90, which relies again on Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1999). Like Halbfass, I view Śaṅkara's work as a *religious* philosophy that serves a soteriological rather than purely theoretical goal, Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988). 269. Merrell-Wolff also saw philosophy as a “way of life” instead of a theoretical system of “bare terms-in-relation,” Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy of Consciousness,” 345.

¹¹⁸ “[T]he real Self ... is ... Pure Consciousness (*caitanya*),” Deussen, *The System of the Vedanta*: 58.

¹¹⁹ Deussen also describes this as the exoteric and esoteric dimension of Śaṅkara's theology, *ibid.*, 102.

¹²⁰ “[Y]ou are Pure Consciousness, the witness of all experiences,” Sankara, *Shankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*: 53. In what is our most reliable source, Śaṅkara repeats that “As Pure Consciousness, the Self is self-existent ... I am one without a second ... I am the supreme Brahman, which is Pure Consciousness ... Independent of every other knowledge, of the nature of the light of Pure Consciousness and not distanced by anything, Brahman, my own nature, is always known by me ...” US 1.2.91, 2.9.3, 2.10.1, 2.15.40, Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings (Upadesasahasri): In Two Parts Prose and Poetry of Sankaracharya*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1979). 56, 108, 111, 162.

directly know reality by adhering to the advice of the *Upaniṣads*: to reflect relentlessly on the question “Who am I?”¹²¹ This religio-psychological practice of *ātma-vicāra* or “self-enquiry” demands the constant *vivēka* or “discrimination” between the real and the unreal or the absolute and the relative.¹²² Ultimately, this shift to the self will reveal what I am (consciousness) by revealing what I am not (the content of consciousness).¹²³

But why is self-enquiry necessary? According to Śaṅkara, *avidyā* or “ignorance” has brought us under the spell of *māyā* or “illusion,” which deceives us into mistaking actual unity for apparent plurality, through concealment and projection.¹²⁴ The *jñāna* or “higher knowledge” that is attained through *mokṣa*, as a result of self-enquiry, is the “liberation” from *māyā*. Although, it is actually misleading to suggest liberation can be attained. This is itself just another subtle illusion, Śaṅkara would say, because, strictly speaking, there is no-thing to attain. As Anantanand Rambachan elaborates, “Liberation in Advaita is identical with the nature of the Self, and since the Self does not have to be attained, *mokṣa* is already and always accomplished.”¹²⁵ In fact, strange as it may sound, one is liberated, even in ignorance, for there cannot be nescience without consciousness—“The Self illumines knowledge as well as ignorance.”¹²⁶ Simply put, liberation is not to become something one is not, but to realize what one always already is.

¹²¹ Take the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*—it asks, “Who is this self (*ātman*)?” AU 3.1, Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*: 198.

¹²² “This aim [of knowing the oneness of the Self (with Brahman)] the Vedānta reaches by separating from the soul (the Self, *Ātman*) everything that is not soul ...” Deussen, *The System of the Vedānta*: 58.

¹²³ In the oft-cited words of Yājñavalkya, the self is *neti, neti*, e.g. *Ibid.*, 211; who relies again on e.g. BU 4.4.22, Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*: 68. By seeing everything that I am not—“not this, not this”—I will come to see that I am sight itself, better yet, “the sight behind sight,” KeU 1.2, *ibid.*, 227. In other words, the Self is the *sākṣi* or “witness.” The difficulty lies in the diaphaneity of this witness. “As Śaṅkara says, ‘Brahman is the Unmanifest (*avyaktam*), not perceptible, because in all perception it is assumed as the witness (*sākṣi*), that is, the knowing subject of knowledge’ ...” Deussen, *The System of the Vedānta*: 213. Śaṅkara often compares it to the eye that sees, but cannot see itself. “The form is perceived and the eye is its perceiver. It (eye) is perceived and the mind is its perceiver. The mind with its modifications is perceived and the witness (the Self) is verily the perceiver. But It (the witness) is not perceived (by any other),” DDV 1, Sankara, *Drg-Drsya Vivēka: An Inquiry into the Nature of the "Seer" and the "Seen"*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Mysore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1931/2007). 1. Bringing this back to Yājñavalkya’s claim, “the Self forms the basis of both the subjective and the objective poles of experience ... [It] is the knower of all; it is the eternal witness; the ultimate subject that can never be made an object of knowledge. That is why it can only be described as ‘*neti, neti*,’” Bina Gupta, *Cit: Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). 26. And yet, the self can still know itself, for, as consciousness, it does not require another consciousness to be conscious of itself, the same way a lamp does not require another lamp to illumine itself, US 2.17.41, Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings (Upadesasahasri): In Two Parts Prose and Poetry of Sankaracharya*: 203; Sankara, *Self-Knowledge (Atmabodha)*: 144.

¹²⁴ Gupta, *Cit*: 59.

¹²⁵ Anantanand Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview: God, World, and Humanity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). 100.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 60. Rambachan cites BUBh 4.4.6, Sankara, *Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad with the Commentary of Sankaracarya*, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2004). 723-724. There, Śaṅkara explains that there is actually no distinction between liberation and bondage in the self, but that effort towards its attainment is still perfectly reasonable, as long as one has yet to understand this.

Returning to Merrell-Wolff, one finds that his Introceptualism draws from the psychological metaphysics of Vedānta. Although, he reckons, others can also be found among the Chinese and Persian mystics—like Laozi (ca. 400 BCE)¹²⁷ and Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (1207-1273)¹²⁸—“Śāṅkara stands out as the supreme exponent of the Yoga of Knowledge.”¹²⁹ Despite his scholastic dependence on the arcane Vedas, which is “not wholly satisfactory to the modern western mind,” being too theological, his is still the most cogent brand of Jñāna Yoga, he says, as it always also relies on reason.¹³⁰

“Fundamental in the technique presented by Sri Śāṅkarācārya for the attainment of Realization is the process known as self-analysis.” This “meta-psychological process” of rationally discriminating between self and not-self, Merrell-Wolff recalls, had also led him to realize he was the subject *of* consciousness that can never become an object *to* consciousness. It was part of “the self-devised yogic discipline which I had worked out during the years of searching.”¹³¹ He, too, could now say that all successful methods depend on discrimination,¹³² even though discrimination can itself only be a preparation, considering realization occurs of its own accord.¹³³ When it finally does, like it did for him, the self, indeed, proves to be the pure consciousness that stays the same throughout the incessant fluctuations of its content,¹³⁴ as Deussen’s Śāṅkara has assured. Afterwards, one *knows* the self is the only reality they can be truly certain of,

¹²⁷ Merrell-Wolff likely first encountered Laozi through Henri Borel, *Wu Wei: A Phantasy based on the Philosophy of Lao-Tse*, trans. Meredith Ianson Reynolds, 1895 original Dutch ed. (New York: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1911). But as the author says, this “should by no means be regarded as a translation or even as a free rendering of the actual work of that philosopher,” *ibid.*, v. There is also a “real” translation in Merrell-Wolff’s library, i.e. Lao Tsu, “Tao Te Ching,” (New York: Vintage Books, 1972). However, its inscription suggests it belonged to a student and so may not have been read by him.

¹²⁸ He likely read F. Hadland Davis, *The Persian Mystics: Jalal'ud-din Rumi* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1910). In addition, he also probably read Omar Khayam, *Rubaiyat*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (no date).

¹²⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Yoga of Knowledge (1 of 3),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 1. For him, the epistemology of Kant best matched with the metaphysics of Śāṅkara, which made it the most accessible eastern tradition, Merrell-Wolff, “Epistemology and Realization,” 3.

¹³⁰ Merrell-Wolff, “The Yoga of Knowledge (1 of 3),” 2; Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 243.

¹³¹ “In the self-devised yogic discipline which I had worked out during the years of searching there were three elements: one was philosophic orientation, this was material that would be found in *The Secret Doctrine* and most particularly in the philosophy of Sri Śāṅkarācārya; second, the Self-analysis which Śāṅkara developed so thoroughly; third, aspiration. All other elements of methodology played no part in it, though [under Hari Rama] I had experimented to some extent with them, such as breath culture and trying to take the postures. But I abandoned this ... I found no value coming from them,” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Meaning of Death (3 of 3),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1977), 1.

¹³² Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 182.

¹³³ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 251.

¹³⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “General Discourse on the Subject of my Philosophy (4 of 12),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1971-2), 2. Similarly, see Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 234-235; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Yoga of Knowledge (3 of 3),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970); Merrell-Wolff, “Meaning of Death (3 of 3),” 1; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Meaning of Paradox (2 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1971), 3.

he goes on to corroborate the Indian sage, “for It is presupposed as much in false as in real knowledge.”¹³⁵ In fact, “*Ātma-vidyā* (Knowledge of the Self or Gnostic Knowledge) is not merely a means to Liberation, but *is* Liberation.”¹³⁶ It reveals the illusory nature of reality. That is not to say the world literally vanishes. It simply implies that one has realized that, as a conscious witness, they are lord rather than liege of the universe.¹³⁷

Regardless of these and many other striking similarities, Merrell-Wolff felt that only his *first* fundamental realization confirmed what he considered the core claim of Advaita Vedānta, that there is “a state of identification with the pure Self [which] involve[s] the idea of entity, of permanent soul, of being at the root of things.” However, his *second* fundamental realization, apparently, revealed an even profounder state, in which “Consciousness, in a purer form, transcend[s] the notion of being, the notion of soul ...”¹³⁸ Prior to this crowning realization, he could not have imagined a consciousness separate from a subject. His introception confirmed for him that the existence of consciousness is undeniable, but the existence of an entity that “has” consciousness is not.¹³⁹ After seeing the self and the divine dissipate into consciousness, Merrell-Wolff adopted the notion of *anātman* or “non-self” and *nāstikatā* or “non-divinity.” He says, “I was transformed from an Advaita Vedāntin into a Buddhist. I saw a relative validity in the Vedāntin *Atmā-vidyā*, but a more ultimate validity in the Buddhist position. A radical implication of all this is: Pure Consciousness *is*, before any entity becomes.”¹⁴⁰

When you are dealing with Buddhist Sūtras and run across the word *śūnyatā* “voidness,” here is the key to understanding it: that [which is] considered as an existence apart from consciousness is void ... This is fundamental to understanding Buddhism—which I would say is the most fundamental point-of-view of all, even more than Advaita Vedānta, which is the next most fundamental ... Now, that consciousness is a self-existence ... Another name for it is Buddha nature.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Absolute Consciousness (2 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 1-2; for a detailed discussion, Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 177-182.

¹³⁶ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 243.

¹³⁷ So, for instance, “When Shankara speaks of destroying the universe, he does not have in mind a physical cataclysm, but a Transition in Consciousness, such that the apperceptive Subject realizes Itself as Lord over the universe instead of being a victim of it,” Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 136.

¹³⁸ “It involved also the Realization that there is no permanent subject to consciousness nor any permanent object of consciousness but only an indestructible and self-existent eternal Consciousness,” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Further thoughts on the Relation of Buddhism and the Vedanta with Special Reference to Sri Aurobindo (2 of 7),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1971), 4-5.

¹³⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Further thoughts on the Relation of Buddhism and the Vedanta with Special Reference to Sri Aurobindo (5 of 7),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1971), 7.

¹⁴⁰ Merrell-Wolff, “On the Meaning of Redemption,” 8.

¹⁴¹ Merrell-Wolff, “Sangsara, Nirvana and Parinirvana (1 of 2),” 3-4, abridged.

It was only later that he recognized he had become a “Buddhist.” He had heard of its *anātman* and *nāstikatā* doctrines, but long thought of them as a negation of a personal self and a personified God. Not until the fifties, after he came into possession of the *Buddhist Bible*¹⁴² and *Tibetan Book of the Dead*,¹⁴³ did it dawn on him there was a deeper meaning to them, reminiscent of “my own mystical discovery.”¹⁴⁴ Since these books greatly contributed to his ideas about Buddhism, a brief look at both is in order.

Just like Paul Carus’s *Gospel of Buddha*, Dwight Goddard’s *Buddhist Bible* also interprets the Mahāyāna tradition from a Christian perspective by stressing its selfless compassion and downplaying its atheism. It is portrayed as an anthology of “the favorite scriptures of the Zen sect,” in particular, whose teachings supposedly peaked in the Platform Sutra of sixth Ch’an Patriarch Huìnéng (638-713).¹⁴⁵ Most of its content is based on the translations and interpretations of D.T. Suzuki, though—to whom the editor also dedicated his book. So, the real question is: does “Suzuki Zen” qualify as Zen?

There is no doubt, Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki (1870-1966) has played a seminal role in the history of western Buddhism. In fact, until recently, he was commonly credited for having singlehandedly carried the tradition of Zen over to America. Preceded only by Shaku Soēn’s *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot*¹⁴⁶ and Kaiten Nukariya’s *Religion of the Samurai*,¹⁴⁷ his *Essays in Zen Buddhism*¹⁴⁸ were among the first informed introductions to Zen for the English-speaking world. However, after his popularity peaked, in the fifties and sixties, Suzuki would come to be increasingly criticized for the glaring

¹⁴² Dwight Goddard, *A Buddhist Bible* (Thetford: Dwight Goddard, 1932/1938).

¹⁴³ Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, ed. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead or the After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup’s English Rendering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937/2000), 96. His library has a copy from 1977, but Merrell-Wolff had to have had an earlier edition as well, for he already refers to it in the fifties, e.g. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Aims of Yoga,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1951), 2. He also cited Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935); Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, *Tibet’s Great Yogi Milarepa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928); Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation: The Method of Realizing Nirvana through Knowing the Mind, preceded by an Epitome of Padmasambhava’s Biography and followed by Guru Phadampa Sangay’s Teachings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954). I return to these books later.

¹⁴⁴ That there is no self, but only pure consciousness, Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 220.

¹⁴⁵ Goddard, *A Buddhist Bible*: 9-10.

¹⁴⁶ Shaku Soen, *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1906).

¹⁴⁷ Kaiten Nukariya, *The Religion of the Samurai: A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China and Japan* (London: Luzac & Co., 1913).

¹⁴⁸ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* (New York: Grove Press, 1927/1961); Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Second series* (London: Rider & Company, 1933/1970); Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Third series* (London: Rider & Company, 1934/1970). Merrell-Wolff owned a 1961 edition of the first series. He appears to have been primarily interested in the psychological introduction by Jung, though. In addition, he owned and most probably also read an edition of Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1934/1964). His Lone Pine library furthermore contains an introductory study by Suzuki’s wife, namely Beatrice Lane Suzuki, *Mahayana Buddhism: A Brief Outline* (New York: Collier Books, 1963).

omissions and distortions in his historical rendition of the “original” Ch’an tradition. Actually, the first signs of critique already arose in 1953, when fellow scholar Hu Shih voiced his objections to Suzuki’s restyled version of Zen. In general, he disliked what he believed to be a misplaced perception of the “lunacy” of the ancient Zen masters.¹⁴⁹

Other typical aspects of Suzuki Zen—which Shih surely would have taken issue with—are its Rinzai bias,¹⁵⁰ worldliness,¹⁵¹ perennialism,¹⁵² psychologism,¹⁵³ amoralism¹⁵⁴ and *nihonjinron* nationalism¹⁵⁵ and, above all, its exclusive focus on experience.

¹⁴⁹ The eccentricities of the masters of old, he counters, were part of a clever pedagogical method which compelled monks to travel from one master to the other, acquiring wisdom along the way, Hu Shih, “Ch’an (Zen) Buddhism in China. Its History and Method,” *Philosophy East and West* 3, no. 1 (1953): 20-24. Fellow scholars at the time tried to find a middle ground between Suzuki’s “transcendentalism” and Shih’s “pragmatism,” saying without a Shih there would be no Suzuki and without a Suzuki there would be no Shih, Ames Van Meter, “Zen and Pragmatism,” *Philosophy East and West* 4, no. 1 (1954); Arthur Waley, “History and Religion,” *Philosophy East and West* 5, no. 1 (1955): respectively. Suzuki rejected the criticism of his peers, accusing them of not grasping Zen “from the inside,” Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih,” *Philosophy East and West* 3, no. 1 (1953); Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “Zen and Pragmatism: A Reply,” *Philosophy East and West* 4, no. 2 (1954); Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “Zen: A Reply to Van Meter Ames,” *Philosophy East and West* 5, no. 4 (1956). In a later reevaluation, Sellman would argue that they could not have found any middle ground, because Shih and Suzuki were talking about two different things. One looked at the history of Zen, as a temporal tradition, the other focused on the religio-philosophical significance of Zen, as a timeless experience, James D. Sellmann, “A Belated Response to Hu Shih and D. T. Suzuki,” *Philosophy East and West* 45, no. 1 (1995). I agree.

¹⁵⁰ Suzuki mainly pitched Rinzai against Sōtō Zen. The school of Linji Yixuán (Chinese) or Rinzai Gigen (Japanese) is the most intellectual of the two. It hammers down on sudden awakening by means of the *kōan* practice of straining the mind to solve logical riddles, see Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *The Record of Linji* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009). In the Sōtō school of Dōgen Kigen, the emphasis is on *shikantaza* or *zazen*, simply “sitting,” see Hubert Nearman, *Shobogenzo: The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching* (Mount Shasta: Shasta Abbey Press, 2007). According to Suzuki, “satori or Zen experience is not the outcome of quiet sitting ... Without the *kōan* the Zen consciousness loses its pointer, and there will never be a state of satori,” Suzuki, *Essays in Zen II*: 68 & 95. Note, the other famous Suzuki—Shunryū Suzuki (1904-1971) of the San Francisco Meditation Center—belonged to the Sōtō tradition, e.g. Shunryū Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* (New York: Weatherhill, 1970/1995).

¹⁵¹ “Zen is always close to our daily experience,” Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind: The Significance of the Sutra of Hui-Neng* (London: Rider & Company, 1949). 131 & 138. “Zen reveals itself in the most uninteresting and uneventful life of a plain man in the street ...” Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen*: 45. I agree with Van Meter that, with statements such as these, “When Suzuki is stressing Zen’s immediacy and commonplaceness ... one wonders whether there is anything different here from what people experience anyway, without special aptitude or training,” Van Meter, “Zen and Pragmatism,” 26.

¹⁵² In his first book, Suzuki discerned the unchanging *spirit* from the circumstantial *form* of religion, which allowed him to argue that religious luminaries as Buddha and Christ are interchangeable figures, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Co., 1907). 23 & 29. In his later books, the “spirit of religion” becomes synonymous with Zen. “Zen professes itself to be the spirit of Buddhism, but in fact it is the spirit of all religions and philosophies,” Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen*: 44. Lifting it out of its socio-historical context would have made it easier to transplant Zen to the West.

¹⁵³ The Platform Sutra refers to *satori* as *wuxin* or *wunian*, “no-mind” or “no-thought.” By translating this as “no-consciousness,” Suzuki was able to contend that “According to Huineng, the concept of the unconscious is the foundation of Zen Buddhism,” Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind*: 57. On a related note, he mentions elsewhere that “the Zen psychologist sometimes points to the presence of some inaccessible region in our mind,” Suzuki *Introduction to Zen*, 108. Here, however, he denies this region to be a sub- or super-consciousness, because he believes the mind is “one indivisible whole.” Nevertheless, he would still allow for “the unconscious” to be used as a bridge between Zen and psychology in Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki et al., *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

For Suzuki, Zen is all about *satori*. “There is no Zen without *satori* ... Zen starts with it and ends with it. When there is no *satori*, there is no Zen.”¹⁵⁶ This religious experience is depicted in strong anti-intellectualist terms. We are told that “Zen mistrusts the intellect ... it is the antipode to logic, by which I mean the dualistic mode of thinking.”¹⁵⁷ It has “no business with ideas,” because “*satori* is a sort of inner perception”—introception, if you will—as in “an intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it.”¹⁵⁸ In sum, it is irrational.¹⁵⁹

Reminiscent of the anti-intellectual Pragmatism of William James—which was further enhanced through his friendship with Kyoto School founder Kitarō Nishida¹⁶⁰—Suzuki felt that, because of its emphasis on immediate pure experience, beyond the divisive subject-object incisions of the vicious intellect, “if anything can be called radically empirical, it is Zen ... Life itself must be grasped in the midst of its flow; to stop it for examination and analysis is to kill it, leaving its cold corpse to be embraced.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁴ Simply put, Zen flows from the unconscious, but “the unconscious cannot be held responsible for its deeds,” because it is prior to duality, that is to say, without discrimination. And since good and bad require discrimination, moral terms cannot be applied to Zen, Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind*: 115.

¹⁵⁵ “Zen is mystical. This is inevitable, seeing that Zen is the keynote of oriental culture; it is what makes the West frequently fail to fathom exactly the depths of the oriental mind, for mysticism in its very nature defies the analysis of logic and logic is the most characteristic feature of western thought ... Therefore, to understand the East we must understand mysticism; that is, Zen,” Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen*: 35. Within a single passage, Suzuki opposes mysticism to logic or reason, reifies the orientalist image of “the mystic East,” as a culture or state of mind which defies rationalization, and then equates this with Zen—not Indian Dhyana or Chinese Ch’an, but Japanese Zen—for “in Zen are found systematized ... all the philosophy, religion and life itself of the Far-Eastern people, *especially of the Japanese*,” *ibid.*, 37, italics mine. At the same time, he says Zen cannot be purely Japanese, since “It is everywhere,” Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, Winston L. King, “Conversations with D.T. Suzuki,” *Eastern Buddhist* 21, no. 1 (1988): 98. This testifies to the recurrent tension between perennialist and nationalist inclinations in his work.

¹⁵⁶ Suzuki, *Essays in Zen I*: 229-230; Suzuki, *Essays in Zen II*: 24.

¹⁵⁷ Suzuki, *Essays in Zen I*: 270; Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen*: 38.

¹⁵⁸ Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen*: 93; Suzuki, *Essays in Zen I*: 230.

¹⁵⁹ Suzuki, *Essays in Zen II*: 31.

¹⁶⁰ Nishida tried to fit eastern (Zen) religion in a continental (Neo-Hegelian) philosophical frame, e.g. Ha Tai Kim, “Nishida and Royce,” *Philosophy East and West* 1, no. 4 (1952); Matao Noda, “East-West Synthesis in Kitaro Nishida,” *Philosophy East and West* 4, no. 4 (1955); Maren Zimmerman, “Nishida’s ‘Self-Identity of Absolute Contradiction’ and Hegel’s Absolute Negation and Dialectics,” in *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*, ed. James W. Heisig (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, 2006). Especially in his early work, he depends heavily on William James’s “pure experience.” He says, for instance, that “pure experience is direct experience. When one directly experiences one’s own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified,” Kitarō Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 1911 original Japanese ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). 3-4. Contrary to James, however, Nishida did not use it to discard but to divinize “consciousness.” In finding reality, we must first search that principle which most harmonizes contradictions, *ibid.*, 57. For him, that principle is consciousness. “From the perspective of direct knowledge that is free from all assumptions, reality consists only of phenomena of our consciousness, namely the facts of direct experience,” since a purely material world outside consciousness is just an abstract belief, *ibid.*, 42 & 54. In an effort to escape the subjectivism of his theory, he considered individual consciousness as part of an absolute consciousness, which he then equates with God—“the greatest and final unifier of our consciousness.” Circling back to experience, he concludes God can be known through non-dual pure experience, *satori*, “in which there is no separation of subject and object,” *ibid.*, 158-166.

¹⁶¹ Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen*: 132. This hints at the “pure experience” of James’s Radical Empiricism.

In the wake of Hu Shih, more recently, deconstructive analyses by post-modern revisionists such as Bernard Fauré¹⁶² and Robert Sharf¹⁶³ have convincingly shown that Suzuki's Zen constitutes a brand of "Neo-Buddhism." Not denying their influence on my appreciation of his books, I tend to side with the revisionists of these revisionists, though. They seem to suggest a more balanced view. Suzuki certainly refitted Zen in a modern frame, but it is likely *because* of it that Buddhism reached such a large audience in the West,¹⁶⁴ then and now.¹⁶⁵ And his hybridization of Buddha's enlightenment with the European Enlightenment did not necessarily herald a departure from so much as an addition to the Buddhist tradition, with texts and spokespersons of its own,¹⁶⁶ including intellectuals like Dwight Goddard, Aldous Huxley, Robert Blyth, Carl Jung, Erich Fromm and Thomas Merton, who spread Suzuki Zen in Europe and America.¹⁶⁷

Merrell-Wolff never warmed up to (their) Zen, though. "I have read the reports of lectures given by the Sixth Patriarch in Goddard's *Buddhist Bible*," he says, but he did not find them appealing. Zen resorts to *kōans*—rational conundrums like "What is the meaning of one hand clapping?"—which bypass the intellect to bring about realization, he repeats Suzuki. "Is that the same thing that took such supreme effort for the Buddha, the great Buddha, to attain?" he asks. "Not for one moment do I believe it."¹⁶⁸ To him, this spelled "intellectual suicide."¹⁶⁹ But even if he had not tried it for himself and would never recommend it to others, he did accept it as a possible path for some.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶² Bernard Fauré, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993). 53-74; Bernard Fauré, "The Kyoto School and Reverse Orientalism," in *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Charles Wei-Hsun Fu and Steven Heine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Bernard Fauré, *Unmasking Buddhism* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). e.g. 79-80 (Suzuki) and conclusion (Neo-Buddhism).

¹⁶³ Robert H. Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," *History of Religions* 33, no. 1 (1993); Robert H. Sharf, "Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Revisited," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism*, ed. James H. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995); Robert H. Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42, no. 3 (1995). cf. Robert H. Sharf, "The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7, no. 11-12 (1998/2000). Here, he also contests exclusive reliance on experience in religious discourse, given its lack of discursive significance, but now in a broader context.

¹⁶⁴ Carl T. Jackson, "D. T. Suzuki, 'Suzuki Zen' and the American Reception of Zen Buddhism," in *American Buddhism as a Way of Life*, ed. Gary Strohoff and John Whalen-Bridge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 52-53.

¹⁶⁵ Thomas P. Kasulis, "Reading D.T. Suzuki Today," *Eastern Buddhist* 38, no. 1-2 (2007).

¹⁶⁶ Since it has real-world consequences, modern Buddhism is more than an orientalist image, David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). 5-6 & 20.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁶⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Contrast between Philosophy and Psychology," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 2. This should be: "what is the *sound* of one hand clapping?" There is no *meaning* to it, of course—that is the whole point of the *kōan*, which seems to have been lost on him.

¹⁶⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Mathematical Interpretation of the Buddhist Stupas," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1977), 5-6.

¹⁷⁰ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Primitive View of the World," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1979), 6.

Fortunately for him, it was not only Japanese but also Tibetan Buddhism that had found its way to the West. In this case, it was largely through the efforts of Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz (1878-1965) and Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969). Especially through his *Tibetan Book of the Dead*¹⁷¹ and her *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*,¹⁷² which fostered the western romantic phantasy of Tibet as a repository of “ancient wisdom.”¹⁷³

In comparing Introceptualism to Tibetan Buddhism, Merrell-Wolff often cited the same page from the first book—page ninety-six—where *rig-pa* is contrasted with *shes-rig*.¹⁷⁴ Normally, Evans-Wentz clarifies, in a footnote, these terms are used synonymously, but, here, they are meant to discern between noumenal and phenomenal consciousness. He renders them as “consciousness” versus “intellect” and goes on to say that “From the union of the two states of mind ... *rig-pa* [consciousness] and *shes-rig* [intellect] ... is born the state of the *Dharmakāya*, the state of Perfect Enlightenment, Buddhahood.”¹⁷⁵ This was a key passage for Merrell-Wolff, to which he repeatedly returned. He read it as a confirmation of his own realization. “Ordinarily, *shes-rig* is the power that cognizes phenomena, but when turned upon itself, I can see that it becomes what is meant by the definition of Introception.” Thus, “Absolute Unconsciousness ... becomes realized as Absolute Consciousness, when the Light of Consciousness turns upon itself towards its Source,” he says, “when *shes-rig* is united with *rig-pa*.”¹⁷⁶

To some extent, this comparison seems justified. Briefly, the *Bar dos thos grol* that Evans-Wentz, with the assistance of translator Kazi Dawa-Samdup (1868-1923),

¹⁷¹ Merrell-Wolff read the third edition, which opens with a psychological introduction by Jung, Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1927/1977). In addition, he owned a later translation, Francesca Fremantle, Chögyam Trungpa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo by Guru Rinpoche according to Karma Lingpa* (Berkeley: Shambhala Publications, 1975). Its commentary by Chögyam Trungpa's would have further influenced his interpretation toward a psychologized reading of this text.

¹⁷² It seems Merrell-Wolff did not read this book, only its companion Alexandra David-Neel, *Initiations and Initiates in Tibet*, trans. Fred Rothwell (Berkeley: Shambhala Publications, 1930/1970). In addition, he had a copy of Alexandra David-Neel, Lama Yongden, *The Secret Oral Teaching in Tibetan Buddhist Sects*, trans. H.N.M. Hardy (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1964/1969). Their content is very similar.

¹⁷³ Over the last two centuries, the western image of Tibet has gone in opposite directions, but following the invasion and occupation by China, after 1950, a romanticized stereotype has largely dominated the (popular) discourse surrounding its culture and religion, Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Introduction, e.g. 5-6.

¹⁷⁴ Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*: 96. More specifically, he will refer to the first footnote, see e.g. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Reflections on Buddhism,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1971), 2 & 5; Merrell-Wolff, “Extemporaneous Statement of my Philosophy,” 6; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “General Discourse on the Subject of my Philosophy (12 of 12),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1972), 2; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Tantra and Zen Buddhism (5 of 6),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1974), 2; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Belief Systems and the Search for Truth,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 5; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Meaning of Death (2 of 3),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1977), 1.

¹⁷⁵ Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*: 96, footnotes 1 & 3.

¹⁷⁶ Merrell-Wolff, “On the Meaning of Redemption,” 15.

reworked into “The Tibetan Book of the Dead” belongs to the Nyingma sect—said to be the oldest branch of Tibetan Buddhism, which some speculate to have historical and doctrinal ties with Ch’an Buddhism.¹⁷⁷ Supposedly, Dawa-Samdup had been trained in its *rDzogs chen* or “Great Perfection” tradition of the semi-mythical eight-century sage Padmasambhava.¹⁷⁸ As Donald Lopez tells us, in Dzogchen, mind or consciousness is the basis of reality—described in terms of “presence, spontaneity, luminosity, original purity, unobstructed freedom, expanse, clarity, self-liberation, openness, effortless and intrinsic awareness”—which is inaccessible to reason, since it transcends duality.¹⁷⁹

Going into a bit more detail, *rig pa'i tshad ma* or “open awareness” is said to be rooted in a *thig le nyag gcig* or “unbounded wholeness,” in the sense of an all-encompassing space.¹⁸⁰ Longchen Rabjampa (1308-1364), for instance, one of the most influential successors of Padmasambhava, talks about “the basic space of phenomena,” which he equates with Buddha nature.¹⁸¹ For him, pure consciousness or open awareness is that wherein all things take place—what Merrell-Wolff designates as “the Great Space” that remains unaffected by the presence or absence of subjects and objects, but on which those subjects and objects themselves depend and derived their existence.¹⁸²

Merrell-Wolff could have gleaned this term “Great Space” from Longchenpa, in the *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, where Evans-Wentz lauds him as “one of the greatest authorized initiates” of “the Great Perfection system,” whose “series of occult treatises collectively entitled ... *Heart Drops from the Great Space*” belongs to “the secret doctrines” of the “Primitive Church of Tibetan Buddhism.”¹⁸³ In fact, Merrell-Wolff believed one of the best explanations of “space” as a symbol for the primordial reality of consciousness can be found in this book, where it says that “Space is the one eternal thing that we can most easily imagine, immovable in its abstraction and uninfluenced by either the presence or absence in it of an objective Universe ...” Similar claims can be traced to *Tibetan Yoga*, but this is actually from *The Secret Doctrine*.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁷ Donald S. Lopez, “Introduction,” in *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 25. He notes that the precise ties to Ch’an remain to be investigated.

¹⁷⁸ Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*: 1 & 78.

¹⁷⁹ Lopez, “Introduction,” 25. I thank Alan Wallace for his feedback on this section; any errors are mine.

¹⁸⁰ Anne Carolyn Klein, Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, *Unbounded Wholeness: Bon, Dzogchen and the Logic of the Nonconceptual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). e.g. Chapter 2, 60-63.

¹⁸¹ Longchen Rabjam, *The Precious Treasury of the Basic Space of Phenomena*, trans. Richard Barron (Junction City: Padma Publishing, 2001). e.g. 5, 21, 33, 35, 123.

¹⁸² Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy of Consciousness,” 309-314, in particular, the last five or six aphorisms.

¹⁸³ Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga*: 277-278.

¹⁸⁴ Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy of Consciousness,” 406. He refers to Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga*: 67. But the quote is really from Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy: Volume I Cosmogony* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1888). 35.

Granted, *The Secret Doctrine* is allegedly based on ancient scriptures that have been preserved in Tibet, which Blavatsky claimed to have studied under the tutelage of the Mahatmas of “the Great White Brotherhood.”¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, scholars have not been able to corroborate her claim—most are actually skeptical.¹⁸⁶ But Merrell-Wolff never doubted it. He deemed *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Voice of the Silence*, *The Mahatma Letters* as well as *The Key to Theosophy* reliable sources on “esoteric Bud(d)hism.”¹⁸⁷

Around 1950, he penned down the thirty-page essay “Is Theosophy Authentic?” in which he explores “the relationship between Theosophy and traditional Buddhistic teaching.”¹⁸⁸ Concretely, he ponders “Was H.P. Blavatsky a ‘phony’?”¹⁸⁹ and “Is Theosophy what it claims to be?”¹⁹⁰ He concluded that Theosophy does not correspond to exoteric Buddhism, or any other religion, but that it does express its esoteric core, and that of every other religion, with an explicit, but not exclusive, “Buddhist coloring.”¹⁹¹

And yet, what Merrell-Wolff believed to be “Buddhist coloring” was itself based on Theosophical or similar sources by western-educated intellectuals like Alfred Percy

¹⁸⁵ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine I*: xxiii & xxiv.

¹⁸⁶ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005). 124 & 128. For a brief but fair appraisal of its *possibility*, based on primary and secondary sources, see Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*: 50-51, including endnotes 11 & 12, pp. 234-236.

¹⁸⁷ Sinnett—the Anglo-Indian editor of the well-read national Indian newspaper *The Pioneer*—was the principle recipient of the so-called “Mahatma letters,” which he used as the basis for his book on Theosophy. Merrell-Wolff owned a copy of both, A.T. Barker, *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett from the Mahatmas M. & K.H.* (New York: Rider & Co., 1923/1948); Alfred Percy Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1884/1887). HPB made a correction to Sinnett’s “excellent work,” by insisting that the title should have been spelt with one “d,” not two, because “then *Budhism* would have meant what it was intended for ... ‘Wisdomism’ (Bodha, bodhi, ‘intelligence,’ ‘wisdom’) ...” see Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy: Ethics, Science and Philosophy for the Study of which the Theosophical Society has been Founded, with Copious Glossary of General Theosophical Terms* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1889). His library has a 1910 copy of this work as well.

¹⁸⁸ Around 1948, he wrote it as a response to a letter. In 1961-2, it was printed, in seven installments, in *The Bulletin of the Assembly of Man*, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Is Theosophy Authentic?,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, ca. 1948). In a shorter follow-up talk from 1979, he tries to explain (away) theoretical discrepancies within the Theosophical canon, by applying Einstein’s relativity theory from the realm of physics to epistemology in the realm of metaphysics, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Is the Theosophia Authentic and Reliable?,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1979).

¹⁸⁹ He asks this with “the Coulomb affair and the SPR [Society for Psychical Research] report” in mind, which had branded her a fraud, see e.g. Scott J. Barton, “Miracle Publics: Theosophy, Christianity, and the Coulomb Affair,” *History of Religions* 49, no. 2 (2009); Gary Lachman, *Madame Blavatsky: The Mother of Modern Spirituality* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2012). Chapter 8, “Crisis in Adyar”. He rejects the allegations, solely based on the biased response of an insider whom he had met at the United Lodge of Theosophists, namely John Garrigues, *The Theosophical Movement, 1875-1925* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1925). Chapter 5 & 6. I refer to Merrell-Wolff, “Is Theosophy Authentic?,” 5 & 25-26.

¹⁹⁰ What it claims to be, according to Merrell-Wolff, “is a formulation of a portion of the Esoteric Doctrine *common* to the great religions and philosophies,” including but not limited to Buddhism. Despite its garbled language and outdated science, especially as far as the *Mahatma Letters* go, “the writer finds them an unexhausted source of knowledge and wisdom, of more worth than the total of all exoteric Vedāntic and Buddhistic literature which he has read,” Merrell-Wolff, “Is Theosophy Authentic?,” 27-30.

¹⁹¹ “*The Key to Theosophy* is clear on this point ... Theosophy is not Buddhism,” but “As one reads *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Mahatma Letters* one receives the impression of a predominant, but not exclusive, coloring from Buddhistic thought,” *ibid.*, 2. This alludes to Blavatsky, *Key to Theosophy*: 12-15.

Sinnett (1840-1921), Subhadra Bikshu (Friedrich Albert Oswald Zimmermann, 1852-1917) and Paul Carus.¹⁹² Actually, the Theosophical influence ran a lot deeper than that.

In later talks like his “Reflections on Buddhism” and “Absolute Consciousness,” in which he tries to lend credence to Theosophy’s idealist metaphysics of a primordial consciousness by comparing it to Tibetan Buddhist doctrines,¹⁹³ Merrell-Wolff, again, relies entirely on Evans-Wentz’s *Tibetan Book of the Dead, Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* and *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*. Because of his affinity with (psychological) self-analysis, he is particularly drawn to “the Yoga of Introspection” of the last book.¹⁹⁴ He finds that their common inward turn to an absolute consciousness coincides with his own introception of consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject. This would seem to vote for a kinship between Introceptualism and Tibetan Buddhism—except that “there is very little ‘Tibetan’ about [Evans-Wentz’s] books.”¹⁹⁵

As a teenager, young Walter had found some of Blavatsky’s works in his father’s library. Later, he joined the American section of the Theosophical Society. Throughout his life, he remained committed to their ideology. And as Lopez rightly points out, one cannot truly understand his Theosophically reworked translations without recognizing this commitment.¹⁹⁶ In fact, one cannot understand most of the above-cited books on Buddhism from Merrell-Wolff’s library, without recognizing their ties to Theosophy—chiefly those of Evans-Wentz, but also David-Neel and even Suzuki.¹⁹⁷ It is safe to say that most of the sources that significantly contributed to Merrell-Wolff’s reception of Buddhism—be it Japanese Zen or Tibetan Dzogchen—are (partly) related to Theosophy.

¹⁹² In this specific essay, for instance, besides references to “real” scholars like William McGovern and, indirectly, also to Thomas Rhys-Davids [in Sinnett] and Samuel Beal [in Blavatsky], Merrell-Wolff sees these three as Buddhist authorities, William Montgomery McGovern, *An Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism with especial Reference to Chinese and Japanese Phases* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1922); Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*; Bhikshu Subhadra, *A Buddhist Catechism: An Outline of the Doctrine of the Buddha Gotama in the Form of Question and Answer, compiled from the Sacred Writings of the Southern Buddhists for the use of Europeans* (New York: Brentano’s, 1920); Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha* (Chicago: Open Court, 1894/1909). Subhadra based his own book again on another Theosophical classic on Buddhism, Henry Steel Olcott, *The Buddhist Catechism* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1881/1947). This one can also be found in Merrell-Wolff’s library.

¹⁹³ Merrell-Wolff, “Reflections on Buddhism; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Absolute Consciousness (1 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975).

¹⁹⁴ Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book of Great Liberation*: 214-216.

¹⁹⁵ Donald S. Lopez, “Foreword,” in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead or the After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup’s English Rendering*, ed. Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1927/2000), g.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, b & g; Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*: see also 49, 55, 65.

¹⁹⁷ David-Neel had had Theosophical training, Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*: 52 & 53. Suzuki shared some ideas with Blavatsky and, together with his wife, even founded a Theosophical Lodge in Kyoto, in the 1920s, Thomas A. Tweed, “American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism: Albert J. Edmunds, D. T. Suzuki and Translocative History,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 32, no. 2 (2005): 264-265.

This may be an inflation of the facts. After all, Merrell-Wolff also had access to other—more reliable—sources, including books by some of the first Tibetan Buddhist teachers in America, namely Tarthang Tulku (b. 1934) and Chögyam Trungpa (1939-1987).¹⁹⁸ He even became personally acquainted with the former, who visited him once in Lone Pine and went on to exchange letters and writings with him afterwards.¹⁹⁹ In addition to his own work, Tulku would forward him some of the first critical essays on and translations of Tibetan Buddhism by Herbert Vighnāntaka Guenther (1917-2006), for further study. However, it is unlikely Merrell-Wolff (closely) read these books, because he rarely refers to any of them,²⁰⁰ while continuing to quote from Evans-Wentz.

But if he *did* consult them, his unwitting modern western biased understanding of Buddhism would not have been fundamentally challenged. On the contrary, Tulku, Trungpa, even Guenther, reinforced it. Especially the first two modernized Dzogchen in the way Vivekananda had modernized Vedānta, Khan had modernized Sufism and Suzuki had modernized Zen—as a secularized intellectual system with an emphasis on an anti-intellectual experience of reality as non-dual consciousness. Tulku would have sanctioned his “Great Space” as a sign for consciousness as both singularity and whole of existence—“Point-I” and “Space-I.”²⁰¹ Trungpa would have corroborated his concern that oriental and occidental traditions can be combined, but are inclined to corruption.

¹⁹⁸ His private collection includes Tarthang Tulku, *Kalachakra: The Cycle of Time* (Berkeley: Dharma Press, 1971); Tarthang Tulku, *Reflections of Mind: Western Psychology meets Tibetan Buddhism* (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1975); Tarthang Tulku, *Gesture of Balance: A Guide to Awareness, Self-Healing and Meditation* (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1977); Tarthang Tulku, *Time, Space and Knowledge: A New Vision of Reality* (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1977); Chögyam Trungpa, *Meditation in Action* (Berkeley: Shambala Publications, 1969/1971); Chögyam Trungpa, *Cutting through Spiritual Materialism* (Berkeley: Shambhala Publications, 1973). It also contains Anagarika Govinda, *Creative Meditation and Multi-Dimensional Consciousness* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1976); Anagarika Govinda, *Psycho-Cosmic Symbolism of the Buddhist Stupas* (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1976). However, “Lama Govinda” was Ernst Lothar Hoffmann (1908-1985), whose proclaimed Buddhist credentials are not reliable, Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*: 60-61.

¹⁹⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Holistic Aphorisms,” (Aphorisms & Poetry: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (586), no date). The letters show that he felt “a deep sympathy with [him] and all the Tibetans, since the land had been invaded by the Marxist Chinese,” with “a real concern for the preservation of the Dharma”—so much so that he even offered Tulku part of his land to build a monastery, *ibid.*, 1 & 3.

²⁰⁰ Over the years, he would receive Herbert Vighnāntaka Guenther, Leslie Sumio Kawamura, *Mind in Buddhist Psychology* (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1975); Herbert Vighnāntaka Guenther, *Kindly Bent to Ease Us: Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa Part One: Mind (Sems-nyid ngal-gso) from The Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease (Ngal-gso skor-gsum)* (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1975); Herbert Vighnāntaka Guenther, Chögyam Trungpa, *The Dawn of Tantra* (Berkeley: Shambhala Publications, 1975); Herbert Vighnāntaka Guenther, *Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective: Collected Articles of Herbert V. Guenther* (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1950-1975/1977). Yet, he only cites Herbert Vighnāntaka Guenther, “Absolute Perfection,” in *Crystal Mirror* (Berkeley: Dharma Press, 1971), 31.

²⁰¹ Tulku talks about space, albeit only twice on “Great Space,” in Tulku, *Time, Space and Knowledge*: 5 & 13. He goes into “Great Space” more in Tarthang Tulku, *Knowledge of Time and Space* (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1990). 241-255. However, this title Merrell-Wolff did not and could not have read.

Trungpa himself called this “spiritual materialism.”²⁰² Ironically, his signature “crazy wisdom”²⁰³ was sometimes suspected of doing just that, corrupting Tibetan Buddhism by westernizing it.²⁰⁴ Finally, Guenther would have encouraged him in his conviction that “true religion” is not only a religious *experience*, but also a noetic *understanding*, of oneness, which recognizes the importance of religion, philosophy and psychology.²⁰⁵

The lure of Mahāyāna Buddhism at this time is neither unusual nor surprising. After the Second World War—even with the strict immigration laws intact—Buddhism in America grew steadily. Exotic temples emerged along the West Coast, in places such as San Diego, Oxnard and Gardena.²⁰⁶ As Thomas Tweed and Theodore Roszak tell us, from the fifties to the seventies, disillusioned with its country’s nationalism, militarism and technocratic rationalism, the American Beat and Counterculture generations were drawn to oriental religions—especially the irrational lunacy of the ancient Zen masters of Suzuki and the crazy wisdom of modern-day Dzogchen luminaries like Trungpa.²⁰⁷

²⁰² In an early article, Trungpa warned about the dangers of letting the ego indulge in mere superficial fascination with the “magic and mystery” of Egypt and Tibet, for instance, like in Theosophy, Chögyam Trungpa, “Cutting Through,” in *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa*, ed. Carolyn Rose Gimian (Boston: Shambhala, 1972/2003). He elaborated on this pitfall of “spiritual materialism,” in one of the books that “placed him on the map of the American spiritual scene,” which then attracted an audience of Beat poets and sandal-clad hippies, the editor recalls, Carolyn Rose Gimian, “Introduction to Volume Three,” in *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa*, ed. Carolyn Rose Gimian (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), ix, xii-xiii; Chögyam Trungpa, “Cutting through Spiritual Materialism,” in *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa*, ed. Carolyn Rose Gimian (Boston: Shambhala, 1973/2003), e.g. 7, 10, 15-22. As an antidote, he prescribed the perfect meditative “acceptance and openness” of the “natural and spontaneous” ordinary mind, Chögyam Trungpa, Rigdzin Shikpo, “The Way of Maha Ati,” in *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa*, ed. Carolyn Rose Gimian (Boston: Shambhala, ca. 1968/2003), 461-464.

²⁰³ “The essence of crazy wisdom is that you have no strategized programs or ideals anymore at all. You are just open,” Chögyam Trungpa, “Crazy Wisdom,” in *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa*, ed. Carolyn Rose Gimian (Boston: Shambhala, 1991/2004), 43. He relates it as a spontaneous and unself-consciousness perception of whatever arises, which—in his case, flamboyantly—flouts convention, but not for the sake of an unintelligent licentiousness, e.g. *Ibid.*, 123-133. For some, his drinking bouts and sexual flings with students seemed more crazy than wise, Samuel Bercholz, “Publisher’s Foreword,” in *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa*, ed. Carolyn Rose Gimian (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), xvii; Sandra Bell, “‘Crazy Wisdom,’ Charisma, and the Transmission of Buddhism in the United States,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 2, no. 1 (1998): 63, 65, respectively.

²⁰⁴ “[W]hat was originally known as ‘westernization’ no more belongs to the West—it is purely ‘modernization.’ The machines, inventions and technological knowledge that have developed in the world do not belong to any of the continents, but are just part of the modern age, the New Age. Equally, for that matter, the spiritual knowledge also does not belong to any particular place, and this does not mean that the wisdom has to be simplified or modified as if one were making it into a neat sort of packed lunch. We can’t really *popularize* anything in fact,” Chögyam Trungpa, “The New Age,” in *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa*, ed. Carolyn Rose Gimian (Boston: Shambhala, 1969/2003), 468. This could be read as a (preemptive) strike against typical charges of changing “original” Tibetan Buddhism.

²⁰⁵ Guenther, *Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective*: 139-140.

²⁰⁶ Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992/2000). 158. Many Buddhists traveled to America, after the immigration quotas were finally dropped, in the Immigration Act of 1965.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 160; Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969). 1 & 4; cf. Stephen Prothero, “On the Holy Road: The Beat Movement as Spiritual Protest,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 84, no. 2 (1991): 216-218; McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*: 19, 85, 118-119, 123 & 142-144.

It is impossible to single out one underlying cause. I agree with Roszak that “the remembered background of economic collapse in the thirties, the grand distraction and fatigue of the war, the pathetic if understandable search for security and relaxation afterwards, the bedazzlement of the new prosperity, a sheer defensive numbness in the face of thermonuclear terror and the protracted state of international emergency during the late forties and fifties, the red-baiting and witch-hunting and out-and-out barbarism of the McCarthy years” all added to the appeal of “strange” new ideologies.²⁰⁸

There surely was no shortage of new groups with new ideas. In fact, Franklin and Sherifa’s Assembly of Man was one of them. Its following had grown steadily, as people heard about Merrell-Wolff’s talks or stumbled on his first book and decided to become students. Since the thirties, the most dedicated among them convened in Lone Pine at an annual summer school, to study together, to continue the work on the Ashram and to formally celebrate their teacher’s realization, in the second weekend of August, on “Convention Sunday.”²⁰⁹ In the forties, a few of them even moved there to live on “the Ranch,” which Franklin and Sherifa had recently purchased. Nevertheless, soon after, in the fifties, their “colony” disintegrated again. Sherifa’s health was fast deteriorating and so Franklin had decided to move her closer to the fresh sea air, to Santa Barbara.²¹⁰

As their activity grinded to a halt, their ideology received renewed attention. The Order of Avalokiteśvara that had become the Assembly of Man was again renamed, as “the Holistic Assembly,” with similar but rephrased mission statements and articles of faith.²¹¹ In these constitutional documents, they (re)established themselves as a “non-profit religious organization” with a holistic worldview—laid down in its “rules, regulations and discipline” or “ecclesiastical polity”—which aimed to “preserve and promote human welfare, individually and collectively,” by “facilitating [personal] Realization” and “achieving [social] wholeness based on Holistic Principles of Healing and Health.” In their own words, its primary purpose was “to carry on and promote religious work,”

²⁰⁸ Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture*: 23.

²⁰⁹ Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” Chapter 19.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.6-7.

²¹¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Holistic Assembly,” (Group Work: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (591), 1953). Merrell-Wolff was clearly preoccupied with “holism,” in the early fifties, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Holistic Lecture Series,” (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (84), 1952); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Definitions (re Holism),” (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (588), 1952); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Questions (re Holism),” (Lecture Notes: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (589), 1952). See also Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Meditations on the Holistic,” (Essays: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (75), no date); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Two Poises of the Holistic,” (Essays: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (92), no date); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Holistic,” (Essays: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (585), no date); Merrell-Wolff, “Holistic Aphorisms.” The dated texts were all written in 1952 or 1953, so it is safe to assume the undated ones also stem from the early fifties.

through religious as well as educational, charitable and recreational activities. These activities would be presided over by a board of trustees, who also had to see to the “ordination of Holistic Ministers” and “certification of Holistic Healers and Teachers.”²¹²

I submit that, just like in the late twenties, this reconfiguration of their identity and ideology in the early fifties was—at least, in part, consciously or unconsciously—motivated by a rise (in awareness) of similar religious fringe groups, which had itself been motivated again by a loss of and a subsequent search for meaning, in the wake of the social crisis of a war.²¹³ The founders of the Assembly not only intended to distance themselves from socio-religious conventions, which struck them as bankrupted,²¹⁴ but also from others who were doing the same. For “difference or ‘otherness’ may be perceived as being either *like-us* or *not-like-us*, [but] it becomes most problematic when it is *too-much-like-us* or when it claims to *be-us*”—or the other way around, when we are seen as “too-much-like” them—because “The deepest intellectual issues are not based upon perceptions of alterity, but rather of similarity, at times, even of identity.”²¹⁵

Franklin and Sherifa intellectually distanced their “unique” identity from others they admired as well as others they disliked. Given Franklin’s background, which comes across clearly throughout his early and later lectures, it is telling, for instance, that his two main books all but lack references to Theosophical sources. Though several factors contributed to this—like his wish to be taken seriously academically, which would have been undermined by ties to a criticized religious fringe group—he likely also left them out so not to be popularly seen as an extension of Blavatsky or LaDue. In a similar vein, he deliberately avoided references to Śāṅkara and Advaita, *because* he felt so connected to him and did not want to be taken as “merely a continuer” of his tradition.²¹⁶ But above all, Franklin and Sherifa would have wanted to set themselves apart from what they had once polemically described as “pseudo-occult organizations,” which, in their eyes, advocated seemingly similar but nevertheless false or even fraudulent ideologies.

The Assembly still seemed like one of the many similar new groups with similar new ideas. Maybe more so, when Gertrude “Laksmi Devi” Adams took over the helm.

²¹² Merrell-Wolff, “The Holistic Assembly,” 3-4, 6-7 & 17.

²¹³ Some have argued *against* this social unrest theory, since new religions have also arisen long after a war, e.g. John Gordon Melton, “Another Look at New Religions,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 527(1993): 108-111. However, I would argue for a ripple or snowball effect.

²¹⁴ Not social approbation, but social reprobation, had become its own seal of approval, Merrell-Wolff, “The Holistic Assembly,” 9.

²¹⁵ Jonathan Zittel Smith, “Differential Equations: On Constructing the Other Relating Religion,” in *Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 245.

²¹⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Purpose, Method and Policy of this Work (11 of 15),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1976), 1.

After Sherifa had suffered a series of strokes, slipped into a coma and then out of life in 1959, Merrell-Wolff sunk into a depression—entertaining suicidal thoughts, in a state of bleak desolation, which felt like a form of bleeding. “It was not a bleeding of ordinary blood, but a subtle kind of bleeding,” as he vividly remembers, many years later. “The impression I had was that it was a flowing away of the life principle itself.”²¹⁷

Around certain women—“only a few out of the whole”—this bleeding stopped. A friend suggested to look for a spiritual “replacement” for Sherifa. He even came up with a suitable candidate, who, in the end, proved incompatible, because “she already belonged to another quasi-religious group called the Fountain of the World.” More followed, some of whom were already married. After that, they decided on three strict criteria for their search: one, any eligible candidate had to be able to halt his spiritual hemorrhaging; two, they had to be uncommitted to someone or something else; and three, not unimportant, they had to be able and willing to live with him permanently.²¹⁸

Within six months, they found the right person, a middle-aged lady who ticked all the boxes. She was a devoted member from the Chicago branch of the Assembly. Her name, Gertrude Adams. “I was not in love with her,” Merrell-Wolff dryly recalls, “so far as I know, she was not in love with me.” It was a different type of relationship. In his own words, Sherifa and he had been “co-gurus” in their work and to their students—whom she looked upon as her spiritual children²¹⁹—while Gertrude was his closest “chela.”²²⁰ Theirs was a rational agreement, meant to enable him to continue his work.

After a trial period, they got married—in a civil as well as a symbolic ceremony—and from then on lived together, on purely platonic terms.²²¹ After a short period in Santa Barbara, they sold their property and relocated to the Ranch in Lone Pine. For about three years, they occupied themselves with practical matters, like rerouting the water stream for irrigation, creating terraces on the hill and building their new house. Once these menial tasks were mostly completed, they (re)turned to spiritual matters. By far, the sixties and seventies would prove to be Merrell-Wolff’s most productive years.

²¹⁷ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Autobiographical Material: My Life with Gertrude (1 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 2-3.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²¹⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “In Memoriam: Sherifa,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1961), 2. Their students, in turn, often addressed Sherifa as “Mother”—Franklin as “Yogi” or “Doctor.”

²²⁰ “In the beginning, I merely liked her. In the end, I profoundly loved her,” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Autobiographical Material: The Feminine Side of my Experience (2 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1982), 5.

²²¹ “[T]he relationship was never biological ... I was not seeking a wife ... I was seeking a companion, who would render it possible to continue the work upon which I had been engaged,” Merrell-Wolff, “My Life with Gertrude (1 of 2),” 5-7.

In the memorial service for Sherifa, Merrell-Wolff impressed upon his students that, after years of “considerable decline,” due to circumstances, “The problem we face this year, and the problem which we continue to face, at least, for the near future, is the reactivation of the Assembly.” He stressed, “we cannot afford to become stale,” with the rising competition of “other racial [new religious] groups” as well as “others who have been in similar lecture activities.” He planned to give it renewed impetus, through the publication of a second book and the establishment of “a permanent headquarters at their Ranch,” as “our prime center of activity,” where members could also retire.²²²

He went on to lecture, but now by recording tapes in the privacy of his home, which he would later play for students, during the weekly meetings.²²³ Gertrude also carried her part in the reactivation of the Assembly, “Not because she contributed to the ideological portion of it—I did all that—but because she made it possible for me to produce,” Merrell-Wolff elaborates.²²⁴ This shortchanges her contributions. She made no real additions or alterations to its theory,²²⁵ yet took on the equally important task of reifying the group’s identity through her work on the newsletter—first issued as the monthly “Bulletin,” in 1960, but later rebranded as the quarterly “Seeker,” in 1967.²²⁶

In this “religio-philosophical” pamphlet, Gertrude combined her own editorials with her husband’s essays, published side by side with excerpts from different—mostly Theosophical—texts as well as the occasional book review and household notices. This would have (re)established the sense of a shared identity within the Assembly of Man, as it was once again called, by creating a story about its past, present and future, which tacitly tied it to the Theosophical tradition, while retaining its own “unique” character.

For instance, looking back, the Assembly is made out to be a reincarnation or a culmination of the Temple of the People.²²⁷ It, too, belongs to the ancient wisdom religion—“Dedicated to that which the Buddha called ‘Enlightenment,’ Śāṅkara called ‘Liberation’ and Christ called ‘the Kingdom of Heaven.’”²²⁸ As such “Divine Wisdom,” it clearly aligns with Theosophy, but diverges on “certain interpretations and details.”

²²² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Memorial Service for Sherifa,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1960), 1-2.

²²³ Merrell-Wolff, “The Feminine Side (2 of 2),” 5-6.

²²⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “On the Place Gertrude had in this Work,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 2.

²²⁵ She did leave an eighty-page manuscript on human evolution from a clearly Theosophical viewpoint, Gertrude Adams, “Man Evolving,” (Getrude: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (659, 409), 1957-1958).

²²⁶ Gertrude Adams (ed), “Bulletin,” (Group Work: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (389), 1960-1967). It was discontinued in 1968, until Doroethy Briggs would take up the editor’s role, in the late seventies.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1960(1), 5.

²²⁸ This subtitle was later added to the newsletter heading, it seems, after the fourteenth issue, in 1962.

For just “as Christianity is divided into its sects, so does Theosophy stand divided,” whereby the Assembly goes back to the doctrine of Blavatsky and Judge, because of its “logical analysis” and “appeal to reason.”²²⁹ And in bridging present and future, the passing of “our precious Mother Sherifa” is seen as the start of another cycle, with the bright prospect of a renewed yearly convention, (summer) school and colony or commune.²³⁰ It is safe to say, then, Getrude was more than merely Merrell-Wolff’s muse.

His real muse, during this period, was Erma Pounds (1925-2011). Merrell-Wolff met her through his step-granddaughter. Doroethy Briggs—Sherifa’s son’s daughter—had just relocated her family to Tuscon, where she joined a Theosophical group, at her grandfather’s suggestion, which brought her in contact with, then, Erma Hamilton.²³¹

Briggs tells us that Erma had hinted at being a reincarnation of Blavatsky, first only to her, but later also to Merrell-Wolff and his students. While she herself quickly grew weary of the visitor’s grandiose claims, the Assembly—including Franklin and Gertrude—took her word at face value.²³² Transcripts of meetings with Erma do show a Merrell-Wolff who is unusually susceptible—one might even say, gullible—towards Erma’s unsubstantiated statements regarding unseen forces or entities in nature and about her own impressive range of prophetic, clairvoyant and channeling abilities.²³³

Circling back to the cultural context, it is interesting that Erma, too, was aware of the many new groups with new ideas that were emerging. But it bothered her that many of them started with “something very, very real,” which they would then forget, while still thinking of themselves as a privileged group of “esotericists.”²³⁴ Her implicit message, of course, was that yet other groups were required, like the one she had just founded, led by people who had not lost sight of that “something real,” like herself.²³⁵

All of this shows that, once America recovered from another war, a new “period of emergence” began, which was building a religious momentum that would culminate a decade later. One could argue that the fifties sparked the fuse for the “cult explosion”

²²⁹ Adams, "Bulletin.", 1960(1), 7-9.

²³⁰ Gertrude speaks of a “re-awakening” or “Renaissance,” *ibid.*, 1960(1), 10-11; 1960(4), 6; 1963(18), 6.

²³¹ For biographical details, I rely on her memoirs, see Briggs, "Franklin Merrell-Wolff," Chapter 24.

²³² *Ibid.*, 24.1-3.

²³³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Discussion with Franklin Merrell-Wolff, Erma Pounds and Others (1 of 2)," (Conversations: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1969), 3 & 11-16; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Discussion with Franklin Merrell-Wolff, Erma Pounds and Others (2 of 2)," (Conversations: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1969), 6-7, 9 & 13-14; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Conversation with Erma Pounds and Others," (Conversations: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1969), 2, 4-6 & 7.

²³⁴ Merrell-Wolff, "Discussion with Franklin Merrell-Wolff, Erma Pounds and Others (1 of 2)," 10.

²³⁵ Erma appears to have started an eclectic religious community, in the sixties, which—after her death, in 2011—has reorganized itself into a Tibetan Buddhist society called the “Kunzan Choling of Phoenix.”

that first lit up the sixties and then spread like a wildfire during the seventies.²³⁶ After McCarthyist suspicions of new ideologies dwindled and immigration restrictions were rescinded, in the mid-sixties, the emergence of (local) religious groups accelerated and attracted increasing (national) attention. Their ideologies were really *not* that new, but their level of exposure was. The rise of television, for instance, served their marginal views and doings to mainstream audiences across the country and around the world.

Scholarly interest followed. One of the first theories came from Martin Marty, who took his cue from the earlier “church-sect” debate of Weber and Troeltsch. Max Weber had introduced the ideal-types of “church” and “sect” to distinguish dominant religious institutions that recruit by obligation (birth) from small religious groups that do so by voluntarily association (choice).²³⁷ In almost Schleiermacherian fashion, Ernst Troeltsch later added the more individualized and more privatized “mysticism” (experience).²³⁸ Their discourse was carried to America by Richard Niebuhr, who turned its strict contrast into a more fluid continuum, which classifies groups based on their attitude towards secular culture.²³⁹ Finally, our current notion of a “cult,” as a deviant but fleeting socio-religious fringe group, seems to have come from Howard Becker.²⁴⁰

Marty argued that negatively-oriented “sects” derive their appeal from isolating people from competing value systems in an increasingly complicated world, whereas positively-oriented “cults” do so by presenting a charismatic leader as a surrogate for meaningful interpersonal contact in what feels like an increasingly depersonalized society.²⁴¹ His examples suggest that one are well-organized splinter cells of established churches with a strict adherence to traditional beliefs, while the other are more loosely-structured ephemeral assemblies with an often eclectic commitment to pluralistic beliefs. Simply put, sects dissent *within* and cults dissent *beyond* the limits of the main religious tradition of their host society. Something to this effect had also been argued by Milton Yinger, whose view had been adopted by many of his peers, at this time.²⁴²

²³⁶ Philip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Chapter 8.

²³⁷ Karl Emil Maximilian Weber, Colin Loader (translator), "'Churches' and 'Sects' in North America: An Ecclesiastical Socio-Political Sketch," *Sociological Theory* 3, no. 1 (1906/1985).

²³⁸ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. 1 trans. Olive Wyon, 1912 original German ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992). 331-343.

²³⁹ Helmut Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1929). 17-21.

²⁴⁰ Howard Paul Becker, *Systematic Sociology on the Basis of the Beziehungslehre and Bildungslehre of Leopold von Weis* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1932). 624-628.

²⁴¹ Martin Emil Marty, "Sects and Cults," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 332(1960): 129-130.

²⁴² John Milton Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individual* (New York: Macmillan, 1957). 154-155.

Despite the differences, both sects and cults are a response to the loss of physical and psychological boundaries between individuals and their ideologies, due to the growing population, communication and mobility in the West, Marty said. In a culture where mainstream religions conform to common ideals for recognition, these sidestream religions segregate themselves to curb this trend toward homogenization and retain their alleged uniqueness.²⁴³ As we shall see, this anticipates (part of) my explanation for the growing intellectualization of the anti-intellectual ideologies of religious fringe groups.

Toward the seventies, cult-sect theories were critiqued and adapted accordingly. Benton Johnson, for instance, objected to the socio-historical contingencies of Weber-Troeltschian typologies and suggested to look for a single defining feature, which, for him, reminiscent of Niebuhr, was a religious group's acceptance (church) or rejection (sect) of their secular environment.²⁴⁴ Erich Goode rejected *all* church-sect typologies, including that of Johnson, considering every one of the proposed definitions, empirical correlates and correlation among defining features for sects were still not universally applicable.²⁴⁵ And regarding cults, Geoffrey Nelson agreed with his peers that they, unlike sects, drew inspiration from sources other than the dominant religion of their host society, but, contrary to his peers, concluded that not all of them were as ephemeral and disorganized as they had been made out to be.²⁴⁶ Still, its members could often be characterized as "seekers," who look outside the confines of conventional traditions, at different places, at the same time—"floundering about among religions," as John Lofland and Rodney Stark put it—which *did* limit the life span of most of those groups.²⁴⁷

In the early seventies, combining these theories, Colin Campbell made a crucial contribution to the debate, with his concept of a "cultic milieu." In sum, he said, cults equate with Troeltschian mysticism or with socio-religious heterodoxy or with both.

²⁴³ Marty, "Sects and Cults," 128 & 131-132. Actually, Marty said "cults" tend to comply with middle-class values, like denominations, but I extend his remarks about "sects" to *both* religious fringe groups.

²⁴⁴ He first pointed out the lack of universal applicability of the Weber-Troeltsch ideal types in Benton Johnson, "A Critical Appraisal of the Church-Sect Typology," *American Sociological Review* 22, no. 1 (1957). In a follow-up article, he reiterated this problem, but now gave his own solution to it, for which see Benton Johnson, "On Church and Sect," *American Sociological Review* 28, no. 4 (1963): 542. In a later revisit, he added an often overlooked nuance, that sects can turn into churches and vice versa, not only by conforming to their milieu, but also by having their milieu conform to them, Benton Johnson, "Church and Sect Revisited," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 10, no. 2 (1971): 130.

²⁴⁵ He even concluded that church-sect was a dead concept, Erich Goode, "Some Critical Observations on the Church-Sect Dimension," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6, no. 1 (1967): 76-77.

²⁴⁶ Geoffrey K. Nelson, "The Spiritualist Movement and the Need for a Redefinition of Cult," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 8, no. 1 (1969): 158. Anticipating Campbell, it is important to point out that he did not focus on one particular Spiritualist cult, but rather the Spiritualist milieu in general.

²⁴⁷ They further noted that many of these seekers entertained the notion of a "New Age," John Lofland, Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," *American Sociological Review* 30, no. 6 (1965): 868-870. This shared notion led to a "movement," see Chapter 4.

The constant process of their creation and collapse suggests they move within a larger milieu that is always giving birth to new ones, absorbing the remains of dead ones and raising the next generation of seekers to maintain the high membership turnover. Even when cults come and go, the cultic milieu stays, like an underground counterculture.²⁴⁸

James Webb called it an *occult* underground. Reason had died by 1865, he said. After that, the Age of Reason of the seventeenth and the eighteenth-century Enlightenment had been gradually replaced by the Age of Unreason of the nineteenth-century Occult Revival, as a logical reaction to too much logic. While God was on his deathbed and Nietzsche was about to erect his tombstone, people in the West were suffering a “crisis in consciousness,” as they began to feel the full weight of their human condition—being responsible for their own fate.²⁴⁹ Searching answers to questions conventional science and religion were unable to resolve, they sought refuge in the magic and mystery of Spiritualism, Theosophy, New Thought, countless (not so) eastern cults, pseudo-sciences and numerous other sources of superstition. According to Webb, this “flight from reason” soared in the twentieth century—reaching new heights after each World War—in what he describes as a battle between the forces of reason and unreason.²⁵⁰

By using tainted terms like “superstition,” “magic” and “occult,” as the other of scientific rationality—orientalizing western esotericism, as it were—Webb exposed his own Enlightenment bias.²⁵¹ This makes his claims outworn, but not necessarily wrong—more one-sided than misguided. As Richard Kyle explains, heralding a second “New Age,” both the Beat bohemians of the fifties and Counterculture hippies of the sixties were indeed drawn to occult and oriental traditions, since they satisfied their desire for a non-rational religion that allowed them “to experience a reality beyond the intellect,” but in a way that “does not reject science or rational thought; [but] transcends it.”²⁵²

²⁴⁸ He speculated that this process was the result of secularization, which had lowered the role of the churches as custodians of truth and raised science to that position. But because the scientists lacked the desire and ability to repress heterodox views with the same zeal as the priests, deviant ideologies could flourish, Colin Campbell, “The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization,” in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5, ed. Michael Hill (London: SCM Caterbury Press, 1972), 119-121, 122, 129-134.

²⁴⁹ James Webb, *The Occult Underground* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1974). 5, 8, 10-12. Among the many similar views of this time, Christopher Evans, for instance, concluded that the “cults of unreason” were emerging, because “Man has kicked away from under his feet the bases of his age-old truce with the unknown—the multiple belief systems which we know of as religion,” without having another substantial belief system in its place, Christopher Evans, *Cults of Unreason* (London: Harrap, 1973). 258-259.

²⁵⁰ James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1976). Introduction, 7-19. Though, talking about an epic fight between (hidden) forces of reason and unreason arguably has its own occult ring to it. For a similar but less dramatic observation, cf. Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture*: 141.

²⁵¹ See Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). for the terminology, 156-191, for Webb, 355.

²⁵² Richard Kyle, *The New Age Movement in American Culture* (New York: University Press of America, 1995). 58 & 84. This rarely cited book is one of the best introductions to New Age in America.

To get his point, one need only look at the “mystics” and “sages” at that time,²⁵³ many of whom we have already come across, like anti-guru guru Jiddu Krishnamurti, Neo-Hindu Ramana Maharshi or Neo-Buddhist Chogyam Trüngpa, but also Neo-Sufi and self-avowed avatar Meher Baba (1894-1969), Trappist monk turned Zen student Thomas Merton (1915-1968) and “headless” thinker Douglas Edison Harding (1909-2007). Briefly, Krishnamurti insisted that only a patient mind that is able to watch itself can have a radical transformation, for “without knowing the ways of one’s thinking ... it is not possible to understand and go beyond this whole process of thinking.”²⁵⁴ After all, “Intellect is only an instrument of the Self,” Ramana agreed. “It cannot help you to know what is beyond itself ... The purpose is that it should show the way to realize the Self.”²⁵⁵ And for realizing the Self meditation alone will not cut it. That path is too one-sided, Trungpa would add, considering “It leaves no room for sharpening the intellect or for disciplining the mind,” which is also necessary to understand spiritual experiences.²⁵⁶ Of course, “Spiritual experience involves more than can be grasped by mere intellect,” Baba said. Because of that, “Mysticism is often regarded as something anti-intellectual,” but he believed there was nothing irrational to it. “All that is meant is that it is not accessible to the limited human intellect until the intellect transcends its limits and is illumined by direct realization of the Infinite.” In a word, “Thought has to be made use of in order to overcome the limitations set up by its own movement ... *This* amounts to the process of going beyond the mind.”²⁵⁷ Harding would describe it again as the recognition that “*this* head [of “mine”] is not a head, but a wrong-headed idea.”²⁵⁸ Using a Buddhist vocabulary, he further refers to it as the realization that the self cannot be anything but a “lucid and immaculate Void,” “Nothingness” or “Space.”

But it was not merely charismatic religious leaders who were asserting that the intellect is required to transcend the intellect. Many “scholars” were arguing the same.

²⁵³ “A mystic seeks direct experience of, and communion with, the divine; his whole life centres around this purpose. He tends to be solitary and to communicate his understanding through books. A sage, on the other hand, is a wise man who is perceptive, discerning and thoughtful about life in general. He, too, pivots himself on the wish to experience the truth of existence and he, too, may write a lot of books. But he tends to be more outward-turned than the mystic and more taken up with teaching and advising; he originates methods and attracts disciples,” Anne Bancroft, *Modern Mystics and Sages* (New York: Granada Publishing, 1976/1978). viii. This would make Merrell-Wolff more of a “sage” than a “mystic.”

²⁵⁴ Jiddu Krishnamurti, “As One Is: To Free the Mind from All Conditioning: Ojai Public Talks, 1955,” (unknown: Hohm Press, 2015).

²⁵⁵ Ramana Maharshi, *Talks with Ramana Maharshi: On Realizing Abiding Peace and Happiness* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1955/2006). 601.

²⁵⁶ Trungpa, “Crazy Wisdom,” 124-125.

²⁵⁷ Meher Baba, *Discourses* (Myrtle Beach: Sheriar Foundation, 1967/1995). 5-6 & 48.

²⁵⁸ Douglas Edison Harding, *On Having No Head: Zen and the Re-Discovery of the Obvious* (London: Arkana, 1961/1986). e.g. 10, 11, 18-19.

Starting with Aldous Huxley, “the use and purpose of reason is to create the internal and external conditions favorable to its own transfiguration by and into spirit. It is the lamp by which it finds the way to go beyond itself.”²⁵⁹ Esoteric Buddhist Christmas Humphreys told his readers that “Zen is the path ... which leads beyond the intellect,” yet, “the intellect, for all its limitations, is essential and must be developed to the full before it can be transcended.”²⁶⁰ His famous pupil and self-proclaimed philosophical entertainer Alan Watts also professed that Zen is “by no means an anti-intellectualist exclusion of thinking,” but, nevertheless, entails a way to “act and think, live and die from a source beyond all ‘our’ knowledge and control.”²⁶¹ For as Jungian mythologist and magnificent storyteller Joseph Campbell said, even our loftiest thoughts of angels and Gods are psychological lures whose only function is to facilitate a jump by analogy and to “transport the mind and spirit, not *up to*, but *past* them, into the yonder void ... to cart the unadroit intellect away from its concrete clutter of facts and events,” which serve as “mere symbols to move and awaken the mind and to call it past themselves.”²⁶²

Clearly, these seminal figures from the fifties and sixties were not supporting a flight *from* reason so much as a *reasoned* flight *beyond* reason. To them, the intellect is a jumping board or a stepping stone, useful in its own right, to realize an immediate anti-intellectual state or experience of whatever is considered the highest (non-dual) verity or reality—be it God, Being, Tao, Brahman, Mind, Self, Consciousness—which is claimed not to discard but to transcend (the duality of) reason. As such, reason takes on a transpersonal function, which is not *irrational*, but *transrational*. “The real office of mind is to serve the end of man’s transcendence of himself,” Merrell-Wolff agrees.²⁶³

But looking at the socio-religious hustle and bustle of the younger generations around him, during the post-war decades, Merrell-Wolff noticed a very serious issue: “[H]e who has reached to the level of rational mind [idealism] and then turns into an orientation toward life [vitalism],” in his eyes, has “stepped back, has regressed to an earlier position—a position that is more in harmony with the animal, the savage and the infant. And this explains a great deal of what we see in the movement of the New Left and among these revolutionary students generally; they act like spoiled brats.”²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ Aldous Leonard Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1945/1947). 163.

²⁶⁰ Christmas Humphreys, *Zen Buddhism* (London: William Heinemann, 1949). 18-19.

²⁶¹ Alan Wilson Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957/1989). 140.

²⁶² Joseph John Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949/2004). 167 & 240.

²⁶³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Philosophy and the New Left (3 of 5)," (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 4.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

PHILOSOPHY

In the present work [*Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object*], I shall devote the primary attention to the philosophical implications, with the psychological and religious aspects occupying only a subsidiary position ... personally, the problem of transformation has always appeared as primarily a question for philosophy, with the religious quale present as undertone. The ... psychological interest in the transformation developed mainly after the event [of introception] ... No proper philosophical orientation may ignore or disparage the functions of logic. However, philosophy is more than bare logic ... The philosopher, perforce, must think and produce within the framework of logic ... though he may carry into this structure extralogical components of unlimited richness and variety.²⁶⁵

In his second book, Merrell-Wolff resorts to Einstein's scientific pragmatism to widen Perry's philosophical spectrum. In *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, Perry subdivides modern western thought into Naturalism, Realism, Pragmatism and Idealism.²⁶⁶ Merrell-Wolff had studied this textbook in university and found that every one of the four theories contains some authentic aspect of human consciousness, so that none can be entirely neglected.²⁶⁷ For him, "there is no such thing as a wholly false philosophy."²⁶⁸

He reviews the strengths and weaknesses of each theory, before adding his own. Briefly, *Naturalism*, according to Merrell-Wolff, explains reality in natural terms that, theoretically, often depend on materialism and, methodologically, on positivism, which reduces it to physical falsifiable facts. As a heuristic principles, this merits "a salutary protection against overly imaginative and superstitious tendencies and attitudes." But it becomes malicious when "raised to the dogmatic thesis that nature is the all in all."²⁶⁹

Realism explains reality in a way that does not include or depend on consciousness, which reduces it to logical relations in a neutral region that belongs neither to the body nor the mind. The appeal of—especially modern—realism, for Merrell-Wolff, lies in its strong reliance on logic. But it falls short in its depreciation of consciousness.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ Merrell-Wolff, "Introceptualism," 2-3.

²⁶⁶ Ralph Barton Perry, *Present Philosophical Tendencies: A Critical Survey of Naturalism, Idealism, Pragmatism and Realism, together with a Synopsis of the Philosophy of William James* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1912). vii. Note, I am using the sequence in which Merrell-Wolff orders them.

²⁶⁷ Merrell-Wolff, "Introceptualism," 12.

²⁶⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Philosophy and the New Left (1 of 5)," (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 1.

²⁶⁹ Merrell-Wolff, "Introceptualism," Chapter 2, e.g. 13-14 & 16.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1, 19; Chapter 3, e.g. 22, 25-26 & 28.

Pragmatism is more of a method than a theory for explaining reality, which reduces it to the practical consequences of desire driven actions instead of their intellectual significance. Especially in its vitalist or voluntarist form, which values action over reflection, Merrell-Wolff reckons, it deserves applause for fueling positive change and progress, but still warrants caution for its lack of any moral maxim—besides success.²⁷¹

Idealism explains reality as a relative or phenomenal expression of an absolute or noumenal consciousness. Given his intellectual affinity with it—which I discuss, in more detail, momentarily—he is hard pressed to find a downside to this theory. True, the idealists cannot prove there is (only) consciousness, which makes them vulnerable to realist criticism, he admits, but neither can the realists prove there is (only) something outside the confines of consciousness. In fact, the former seem to have the upper hand, as their claim is, at least partly, affirmed in its very denial by the latter.²⁷² Nonetheless, Merrell-Wolff did find a subtle point of contention, based on the extra-logical component of introception, which, he felt, justified the invention of a new philosophy.

German Idealism

[Kant's] philosophy clears the Way in the Occident in a sense analogous to that achieved by the thought of Śāṅkara in the Orient, but, unlike the latter, it is incomplete on the metaphysical side. Hegel partially completed this structure, but the whole of this falls short of the completeness of the pure Advaita Vedānta. Still, within this idealistic structure is to be found the best of genuinely spiritual Knowledge-Wisdom indigenous to the West ... Hegel [is] the greatest of the idealist thinkers ... [Marx] affirms a dialectical movement in nature and society that is explicitly conceived in the materialistic sense ... [which] is taken from the philosophy of Hegel, but given a radically inverted meaning ... The would-be destroyers of Hegel are, in effect, the destroyers of religious insight, regardless of whether they are [materialist] Marxians, naturalists, pragmatists or realists.²⁷³

Looking for a middle ground between subject-oriented rationalism and object-oriented empiricism, Merrell-Wolff often recounted,²⁷⁴ Kant distinguished the *Ding-an-sich* or “thing-in-itself” from its *Erscheinung* or “appearance”—noumenon and phenomenon.

²⁷¹ Ibid., Chapter 4, e.g. 38, 41, 44 & 47.

²⁷² Ibid., Chapter 5, e.g. 84, 95; Chapter 6, e.g. 97-99.

²⁷³ Merrell-Wolff, "Pathways through to Space," 33; Merrell-Wolff, "Introceptualism," 118 & 15.

²⁷⁴ For a typical example of his standard summary of the history of western (idealist) philosophy, see e.g. Merrell-Wolff, "Introceptualism," 83-89; Merrell-Wolff, *Mathematics, Philosophy & Yoga*: 28-31.

Our mind can merely experience noumenal reality indirectly, via (external) sensory intuition, which it converts into a phenomenal representation by use of its (internal) cognitive categories. According to Kant, our knowledge of reality, therefore, is always a combination of sensational perception and rational conception. As his famous dictum states, “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”²⁷⁵

But if knowledge is, by definition, only based on perception and conception, his critics protested, the divine slips out of reach. If the notion of “God” as well as that of a free and immortal “self or soul” is reduced to a product of pure reason—imagined end points of the mind’s own chains of deduction—then they are not derived from nor required for experience.²⁷⁶ So, the difficulty with Kantian philosophy is that it discredits itself. For if we cannot know noumenal reality, our phenomenal relation to it becomes problematic—if it exists at all—which becomes even more complicated with matters beyond perception. The only way to know God, for instance, would be “directly through the mind, without sensory mediation.”²⁷⁷ But, for Kant, such an *Anschauung* or “intellectual intuition” is hypothetical. The human mind is confined to phenomenal reality.²⁷⁸

Despite an undeniable reverence for Kant, Merrell-Wolff held an obvious preference for his idealist successors Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854). He felt their “*transcendental act of contemplation, inner sense, peculiar, direct, inner intuition and intellectual intuition* refer to essentially what I mean by introception.”²⁷⁹

Like Fichte before him, who saw “Intellectual intuition [as] the only firm standpoint for all philosophy,”²⁸⁰ Schelling argued that “The ultimate ground of all harmony between subjective and objective could be exhibited in its original identity only through intellectual intuition.”²⁸¹ His search for such a foundation for a balance of opposites—

²⁷⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1781/2000). 193-194. Merrell-Wolff was well informed about Kantian philosophy. He owned two translations and a critical interpretation, namely Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1781/1902); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Friedrich Max Müller (New York: Anchor Books, 1781/1966); Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*; George Sylvester Morris, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: A Critical Exposition* (Chicago: S.C. Griggs & Co., 1882/1886). He had, furthermore, followed advanced classes on the *Critique* in particular, both at Stanford and Harvard, during his early twenties.

²⁷⁶ Frederick C. Beiser, *Hegel*, Routledge Philosophers (New York: Routledge, 2005). 54; Dudley, Will, *Understanding German Idealism*, ed. Jack Reynolds, *Understanding Movements in Modern Thought* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2007/2008). 29.

²⁷⁷ Dudley, *Understanding German Idealism*: 18-19.

²⁷⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*: 361.

²⁷⁹ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 194.

²⁸⁰ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, ed. Peter Heath and John Lachs, 1794-5 original German ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). 41.

²⁸¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath, 1800 original German ed. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001). 232.

typical of his Romantic generation—culminated in the notion of a non-dualist absolute, which he referred to as a “point of indifference”—another name for (the experience of) God.²⁸² This point of indifference seems similar to Merrell-Wolff’s “high indifference.”

However, his favorite German idealist, Hegel, rejected the notion of the absolute in those terms. For him, the “darkness of non-cognition” which accompanied Merrell-Wolff’s high indifference²⁸³ would have come across like a “night in which all cows are black.”²⁸⁴ As Frederick Beiser explains, “[his] Absolute is not only identity, but also the identity of identity and non-identity.”²⁸⁵ The whole idea underlying Hegel’s signature dialectic method—which he, strictly speaking, derived from Fichte and Schelling²⁸⁶—is that the absolute should *include* the relative, if it is to be regarded as truly absolute.²⁸⁷

“The absolute” is a philosophical synonym for what is popularly referred to as “God.”²⁸⁸ This implies that, for Hegel, philosophy and religion are “one in content, but different in form.”²⁸⁹ He did not consider these disciplines identical, though. Religion actually stops short of the true “absolute knowing” that can be attained in philosophy.

Briefly, absolute knowing is the self-knowledge of the absolute. “Self-knowledge requires a way for the self to return to itself. This return must be the grasping by the self of itself and not the presentation of itself to itself.”²⁹⁰ In religion, on the one hand, the absolute is presented with an image of itself. Though this might appear to be self-knowledge, it is not, since there remains a subtle duality between the subject and the object. In philosophy, on the other hand, the absolute attains true self-knowledge, by thinking itself, whereby the self as subject (thinker) and object (thought) become one.

Like Blavatsky,²⁹¹ Merrell-Wolff saw an esoteric side to this, which he ascribed to the influence of mystics like Meister Eckhart and Jacob Böhme.²⁹² Based on the—admittedly, controversial—research by Glenn Alexander Magee, he may have been right.

²⁸² Dudley, *Understanding German Idealism*: 136; Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 183.

²⁸³ Merrell-Wolff, “High Indifference,” 4.

²⁸⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, 1807 original German ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). 9.

²⁸⁵ Beiser, *Hegel*: 65.

²⁸⁶ Michael Forster, “Hegel’s Dialectical Method,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 159.

²⁸⁷ Beiser, *Hegel*: 142.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁸⁹ Stephen Rucker, “The Integral Relation of Religion and Philosophy in Hegel’s Philosophy,” in *New Perspectives On Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion*, ed. David Kolb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 29.

²⁹⁰ Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel’s Absolute: An Introduction to Reading the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). 92.

²⁹¹ Like Merrell-Wolff, she compared German idealism to Advaita, Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine I*: 50.

²⁹² Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 86.

Magee places Hegel in the western esoteric “Hermetic” tradition.²⁹³ According to him, the gist of Böhman esotericism is that the divine ground of being is not a mechanically operating transcendent God, but an organically developing immanent God, who requires creation to complete himself.²⁹⁴ Stirred by the desire to reveal himself to himself, God commences a process of othering that ends with his becoming self-conscious in man. Magee suggests this Hermetic pattern is also found in Hegel’s philosophy. He supports his claim with a phrase from the *Philosophy of Spirit*,²⁹⁵ where Hegel writes that “God is God only so far as he knows himself: his self-knowledge is, further, his self-consciousness in man and man’s knowledge of God, which proceeds to man’s self-knowledge in God.”²⁹⁶ Elsewhere, Magee rephrases this statement in simplified terms, saying that “For Hegel, human beings are *the self-consciousness of existence itself*.”²⁹⁷

In his lecture on “Absolute Consciousness”—mentioned earlier—Merrell-Wolff not only ties modern Theosophy to Tibetan Buddhism, but also to a Böhman Hegelianism. Following the Hermetic motto “as above, so below,” he stresses that by knowing the microcosm, through self-analysis, one can also come to know the macrocosm. After all, “The whole purpose of an evolution of worlds and men is the effort of Absolute Consciousness to become progressively conscious of itself.”²⁹⁸ Reminiscent of Böhme’s othering of God and Hegel’s dialectic history of the absolute,²⁹⁹ he maintains that this progressive process needs existential experience. “Experience brings pain so that consciousness may be gradually awakened to Self-Realization,”³⁰⁰ which is another way of saying that the absolute or existence requires the relative to become conscious of itself.

²⁹³ Magee’s *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* is an informed and original study that posits a weak and a strong claim: Hegel is *influenced* by the Hermetic tradition (weak) and Hegel is *part of* the Hermetic tradition (strong). The sheer amount of circumstantial evidence convinced me of the first, but lack the punch of hard facts to also persuade me of the second. In a later *précis* of his book, Magee presents the same conjectural arguments, talking about “tantalizing speculations,” “no hard documentary evidence” and “plausible, but pure speculation,” drawing far-reaching conclusions based on texts his peers, by his own admission, are wary of relying on, Hegel’s authorship being inconclusive, Glenn Alexander Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2001). 17; Glenn Alexander Magee, “Hegel and Mysticism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-century Philosophy*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), e.g. 254-256, 268.

²⁹⁴ Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*: 38; Magee, “Hegel and Mysticism,” 257.

²⁹⁵ Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*: 26; Magee, “Hegel and Mysticism,” 267.

²⁹⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind: Translated from the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace, 1817 German ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1894). 176.

²⁹⁷ Glenn Alexander Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary* (New York: Continuum, 2010). 2. In more Hegelian terms, this means the whole of the Absolute culminates in the realization of Absolute Idea—as thought thinking thought—in Absolute Spirit, which is Spirit or human consciousness becoming conscious of itself in art, religion and, above all, philosophy, by mirroring itself in the reconciliation of contradictions through speculative reasoning about the dialectical course of history, *ibid.*, 19, 21, 23, 29, 73, 221, 226.

²⁹⁸ Merrell-Wolff, “Absolute Consciousness (1 of 2),” 8; Merrell-Wolff, “Absolute Consciousness (2 of 2),” 7.

²⁹⁹ Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*: 38.

³⁰⁰ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” 191. Of course, this is reminiscent of a Buddhist worldview as well.

Elsewhere, in a lecture series on revolution and evolution, though mainly talking about political progress, Merrell-Wolff adds a few remarks about human development in general that are again reminiscent of Hegel. The whole cosmos is not manifest at any one time, he elaborates, but comes into creation in phases.³⁰¹ He considers its manifestation circular (revolution) and linear (evolution). Together, these revolutions and evolutions lead “from a state of consciousness that is not conscious of itself to a state in which consciousness becomes fully self-conscious.” And with a Spencerian evolutionist twist, he adds that it is the unfolding of “an inchoate, indeterminate wholeness into a highly differentiated, articulate, integrated and differentiated wholeness.”³⁰²

The parallel between (a Hermetic reading of) Hegelianism and Introceptualism is that noumenal consciousness must pass through the phenomenal consciousness of man to turn upon itself toward its source and become self-conscious. This sounds like a fundamental agreement. And yet, Merrell-Wolff polemically distanced himself from German idealism, in the same way that he had distanced himself from Indian idealism, because, he says, strictly speaking, the German idealists or spiritualists turned to the spiritual entity that is conscious, whereas his transcendental philosophy actually turns to consciousness as such. “It is because of this distinction that I have separated my own conception from traditional Idealism and have called it Introceptualism!”³⁰³

Despite this perceived distinction, Merrell-Wolff still believed that, like himself, “Hegel stood essentially in alignment with Buddha, Śaṅkara and Christ.” His triadic dialectic was not “a clever creation of [his] intellect,” he insists, but must have resulted from “a deep mystical insight.”³⁰⁴ It means that he felt that Hegel’s Absolute Idealism, similar to his own Introceptualism, “essentially does not originate in the intellect, but is impressed upon the intellect from something which I shall call the ‘Beyond.’”³⁰⁵

But every light brings its shadow. “This shadow is now dominant in the world,” Merrell-Wolff deplored, in the form of the Marxist materialism and Freudian psychology of the New Left. Instead of a flight *beyond* reason toward super-consciousness, it is a descent into “that which lies *below* mind and reason” toward sub-consciousness.³⁰⁶

³⁰¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Revolution and Evolution (1 of 3)," (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 2.

³⁰² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Revolution and Evolution (2 of 3)," (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 1.

³⁰³ Merrell-Wolff, "General Discourse (1 of 12)," 8.

³⁰⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Student Revolt with Special Reference to the New Left: Further Thoughts (Introduction)," (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 2.

³⁰⁵ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "An Abstract of the Philosophy (2 of 14)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 3.

³⁰⁶ Merrell-Wolff, "Student Revolt (Introduction)," 2, italics mine.

Even more than the bohemian “beatniks” of the fifties, the long-haired “hippies” of the sixties and seventies fused political engagement with their generation’s religious consciousness.³⁰⁷ The beats had paved the road for civil rights, anti-war, feminist, gay and lesbian and black power groups,³⁰⁸ which culminated in a series of countercultural movements that challenged government (foreign) policies, popular opinion on gender and sexuality and the relation between white and colored people³⁰⁹—be it sometimes in vulgar and violent ways, especially by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).³¹⁰

This movement of movements called itself “the New Left.” According to Roszak, Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) and Norman Oliver Brown (1913-2002) were adopted as its intellectual heroes and their *Eros and Civilization*³¹¹ and *Life against Death*³¹² as required literature³¹³—though, the former in particular questioned whether any of his adherents had really read his work. Both were social theorists who combined Marxist materialism and Freudian psychology to proclaim an “illuminated politics,” as Webb calls it, which perceives society’s goal as liberation from psychological repression.³¹⁴

Merrell-Wolff was uncharacteristically critical towards these New Left thinkers and their “reasoned flights *below* reason,” if you will, based on rather limited information. Besides the media, his sole sources seem to have been a few personal experiences with “longhairs”³¹⁵ and one introductory textbook about Marcuse by Robert Marks.³¹⁶

³⁰⁷ Especially in the Californian Bay Area, Robert N. Bellah, “The New Consciousness and the Berkeley New Left,” in *The New Religious Consciousness*, ed. Charles Y. Glock and Robert N. Bellah (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), e.g. 77, 80. cf. Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture*: 124-125.

³⁰⁸ Though later vilified for its conservatism, the fifties actually started the exploration of social taboos and of underground religions from the growing spiritual marketplace that would come to be celebrated about the sixties, Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*: 4; Jamie Russell, *The Beat Generation* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2002). 7; Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997). 125-131.

³⁰⁹ Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*: 2-6.

³¹⁰ Bellah, “The Berkeley New Left,” 84-85. Gosse warns not to equate the New Left with the SDS, since that would put young, white students at the center of the narrative and marginalize other demographic groups whose protest movements played an equally important part, Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*: 5.

³¹¹ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

³¹² Norman Oliver Brown, *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1959).

³¹³ Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture*: Chapter 3.

³¹⁴ According to Webb, in the wake of the Occult Revival, ideas about freedom in the twentieth-century West often entailed “a conception of personal ‘liberation’ from *the condition of being human*,” which is clearly a mystical or occult liberation, he says. “This ‘pure’ form of ‘secular Gnosticism’ is found among the ‘Counterculture,’ the ‘Youth movement’ and parts of the ‘New Left,’” among others, in the works of both Marcuse and Brown, see Webb, *Occult Establishment*: Chapter 7, particularly 417-419 & 474-476.

³¹⁵ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Report on the Longhairs,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970).

³¹⁶ Very openly, but no less problematically, he “must confess that I have not read Marcuse extensively, but base my understanding primarily upon the exposition of Dr. Robert W. Marks,” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy and the New Left (4 of 5),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 4. He refers to Robert W. Marks, *The Meaning of Marcuse* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970).

In 1970, Merrell-Wolff dedicated a significant amount of time and attention to socio-political topics. He had done so, once before, in 1940, when he commenced but never completed “The Vertical Thought Movement”—both a psychologized analysis of the leftist tendency as well as an apology of the supposed rightist legacy of American society—except, this time, he did not commit his thoughts to paper, but recorded tape.

One of these first tapes takes up collectivism and individualism. Continuing his earlier line of reasoning, he negatively compares the alleged leftist inclination toward (social) feeling with the rightist inclination toward (religious) thinking, which, for him, equals vitalist pragmatism versus rationalist idealism. He regards the shift to socialism in America—symbolized by the unkempt students of the New Left—as “a sign of very real degeneration,” since it fully repudiates “our fundamental political philosophy.”³¹⁷

Once again pulling a socio-political discussion into a metaphysical frame—based on the tacit assumption that material progress is a product of spiritual development, not the other way around—he says, what the individual receives from the divine “may be for the good of the collectivity, but it is not brought forth out of the collectivity.” It requires the activation of the “transcendental modulus”—a latent faculty or function of cognition through which the absolute can realize itself in relative consciousness—on a personal rather than on a social level.³¹⁸ I come back to this transcendent function later.

In a related five-part lecture series, he goes into New Left ideology. “[T]he anti-rationalism of the New Left is a simple carrying out of the anti-intellectualism and pro-vitalism that is so characteristic of that school of philosophy known as Pragmatism ... exemplified most completely by Henri Bergson.”³¹⁹ His first two lectures contextualize this school within the history of modern western thought, as summarized above, before turning to Marcuse, in the third. Even more than Bergson, Marcuse appeals to the New Left, Merrell-Wolff speculates, because his vitalism affords them “a very real apology for a movement in the direction of a degraded and degrading sensuality.”³²⁰

In his eyes, “Marcuse ... applies the same [Hegelian] technique [as Marx] to the Freudian thesis concerning sexuality and repression and arrives ... at what he purports to believe is a logical necessity for the removal of repression—which I prefer to call restraint—and let everything flow forth in an uncontrolled, uninhibited salaciousness.”³²¹

³¹⁷ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Collectivism and Individualism,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 4 & 7. Ironically, he thought of himself as a socialist, when he was a student himself.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

³¹⁹ Merrell-Wolff, “New Left (1 of 5),” 1.

³²⁰ Merrell-Wolff, “New Left (3 of 5),” 8.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

This, too, is a rationalization of intuition, Merrell-Wolff reckons, but of a lower vitalist intuition instead of a higher idealist intuition.³²² Though generally people of superior intelligence, he goes on to lament, by modeling their lives on this Marxist philosophy of licentiousness of Marcuse and Brown, the long-haired youth are contributing to the materialist “uglification of the mental process.”³²³ The SDS are worse than the actual Marxists, he says, for they reject *any* rational ideology—“It rejects discipline. It rejects the notion of norm. It rejects reason.”³²⁴ As the opposites of the Puritans, who repressed feeling in favor of thinking, they repress thinking in favor of feeling. By discarding rational and moral restraint, “The New Left rejects the whole of our culture.” This can, indeed, be seen as a dialectic response, Merrell-Wolff argues, but it just shows, against Marcuse, that the negation (antithesis) of the status quo (thesis) does not necessarily result in a higher state (synthesis).³²⁵ In this case, the New Left students did not invoke a virtuous vertical movement, he argues, but a vulgar horizontal one instead. Being a “convinced conceptualistic idealist,” better yet “introceptualist,” and “a radical anti-materialist all the way down the line,” he finds their sensational revolts revolting.³²⁶

Merrell-Wolff unfairly conflates Marcuse’s ideas with its New Left adaptations, based on an exaggerated simplification of his philosophy, beyond its already simplified critical reading by Marks. Marcuse does bring Hegel to bear on Marx and Freud. And yes, in doing so, he resorts to the Hegelian notion of being or truth as the “negation of negation,” whereby the destruction of a situation moves into its opposite to a higher state. Hegel distinguished noumenal being from phenomenal reality, Marks explains, whereby “Being relates to appearance and is not real; Reality relates to essence and is not perceived.”³²⁷ If unseen potentiality is more real than visible reality, then apparent facts could be said to negate the very things they signify and, therefore, need to be negated themselves, to realize their essential truth. Or as Merrell-Wolff reads it, “We produce a world by negation and we attain Realization by a negation of that negation.”³²⁸

³²² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy and the New Left (2 of 5),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 6-7.

³²³ Merrell-Wolff, “Longhairs,” 4. His “uglification” is actually derived from Marcuse, though he used it for the industrialization against which the youngsters were rebelling, Marks, *Meaning of Marcuse*: 58.

³²⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Student Revolt with Special Reference to the New Left,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 2.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6; Merrell-Wolff, “New Left (3 of 5),” 9-11.

³²⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Three Fundamentals of Introceptive Philosophy (4 of 16),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1973), 1.

³²⁷ Marks, *Meaning of Marcuse*: 25 & 28.

³²⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Further thoughts on the Relation of Buddhism and the Vedanta with Special Reference to Sri Aurobindo (4 of 7),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1971), 2.

Marks goes on to elaborate that “Marcuse, abstracting Hegel, asserts that everything that exists is essentially different from what it could be if its potentialities were realized.”³²⁹ Given that Hegel sees potentialities as ideas—products of reason—humans, as rational beings, are the only creatures that can become conscious of their hidden potential and strive to realize it. But only by paradoxically striving “not to be what is.”³³⁰

Like Marx, Marcuse made this Hegelian dialectic of the continuous negation of actuality as a transition into its opposite to a truer potentiality into a social materialist process. Unlike Marx, however, Marcuse considered modern industrialized countries, like America, to be “one-dimensional” societies, since the capitalist establishment has absorbed—subtly enslaved—its proletarian counterpart. Its workers have relinquished part of their freedom—unhappily toiling for the system, becoming increasingly alienated from life—under the luring promise of safety, survival and material abundance.³³¹

Like Freud, Marcuse considered civilization a subtle form of repression. “Freud argued that the methodical sacrifice of libido and its strictly enforced deflection to socially useful activities is the basis of culture.” Marks adds that Marcuse assumes, with Freud, that our evolution from animal to human being coincided with this ability to substitute the desire for immediate satisfaction (pleasure principle) for postponed or sublimated satisfaction (reality principle) as the price for security. In modern western society, however, the rewards no longer justify their costs. This irrational “surplus repression” goes above and beyond what is necessary to meet the pressures of nature.³³²

To summarize, then, Marcuse does state that individual and collective freedom require us “to seize to rationalize the irrational” and liberate ourselves from *excessive* inhibition. But this is obviously not the same as giving in to “uncontrolled, uninhibited salaciousness,” as Merrell-Wolff suggested. And even though Marks rebukes him for not coming up with any concrete solutions, Marcuse does hint at the need for an elite of “philosopher-kings,” who shall be able to balance conflicting social forces and adds that the rebellious hippies and revolting students may well anticipate this new class.³³³

Given Merrell-Wolff’s affinity with “rightist” idealism and aversion to “leftists” vitalism, his dismissal of Marx, Freud, Marcuse and Brown does not come as a shock. But his emotional severity definitely does. Completely out of character, he demonizes them as “apostles of darkness,” whose followers are “the excreta of the dung beetles of

³²⁹ Marks, *Meaning of Marcuse*: 29.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 38, 48, 70-71, 89-90, 128.

³³² *Ibid.*, 41-42, 62.

³³³ However, he distances himself from their vulgar and violent excesses, *ibid.*, 92-93, 99, 101, 124, 126.

humanity.”³³⁴ Now, ironically, this may have been due to what Freud referred to as a “narcissism of minor differences.”³³⁵ Notwithstanding very real rifts—such as a liberal idealist versus a social vitalist bent—Merrell-Wolff and Marcuse both resort to Hegel, both are critical of modern western culture, *including* its excessive social restraints on personal freedom, both paint a psychologized path to individual and collective liberation and both believe this is best facilitated by the balanced rule of philosopher-kings.

PSYCHOLOGY

The Human Potential Movement

There has just come out a book called *Simulations of God* by Dr. John Lilly ... Dr. Lilly gives a substantial number of belief systems ... held by human beings, which occupy a position equivalent to that of the belief in God by certain forms of religious people. In this connection the conception of God is to be taken in the psychological sense referred to by Dr. Jung, namely as meaning the supreme value. God in this sense is not to be taken as a determination of a metaphysical existence, but simply as the supreme value in the actual life of the individual.³³⁶

The New Left was not the only sign of changing times. After the “long fifties”—as Cold War concerns about domestic communism lost their sharp McCarthyite edge, lending a lot more leeway to criticism on conventional American culture and to indulgence in alternative ideologies and lifestyles—a third “Great Awakening” had emerged,³³⁷ which gained momentum at the peak of the Vietnam War, in the “Summer of Love” of 1967.³³⁸

According to Don Lattin, the countercultural “sixties” covered not one but two decades. It started in early 1961 and ended in late 1978, bookmarked between a great

³³⁴ Merrell-Wolff, “Student Revolt,” 4. That he was not always the calm and collected person we hear on tape is confirmed by his family, who have told me Franklin would often sit in his chair, watching the news about the horrors around the world, rocking angrily back and forth, shouting “Satan!” at the TV.

³³⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 1930 original German ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961). 61. Double ironically, Marcuse and Brown heavily relied on this work again.

³³⁶ Merrell-Wolff, “Belief Systems and the Search for Truth,” 1. And the book he is referring to is John Cunningham Lilly, *Simulations of God: The Science of Belief* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975/1976).

³³⁷ Building on a similar observation by Tom Wolfe, Anderson finds “The word *awakening* feels right, even though it does invoke other, more specifically religious, upheavals—especially that curious period in colonial history called the Great Awakening, when a spontaneous wave of spiritual fervor, a stampede in pursuit of direct religious experience, swept the land. It seems far-out to suggest a parallel between the 1960s and the 1740s, but when I return occasionally to the history books I am struck by the similarities ... its itinerant preachers travelling the lecture circuit, its excesses and its charlatans. It was also strongly individualistic ... its detractors settled for dismissing it as an outburst of ... *enthusiasm*,” see Tom Wolfe, “The “Me” Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” *New York Magazine* 1976; Walter Truett Anderson, *The Upstart Spring: Esalen and the American Awakening* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1983). 7. Both note the narcissistic tendencies of this “Third Awakening.”

³³⁸ Particularly in the Haight Ashbury of San Francisco, California, Anderson, *The Upstart Spring*: 145.

inaugural speech and a gruel mass-murder suicide. President John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917-1963) held out a promise of social change that set the stage for the political and spiritual dreams of the sixties, which collapsed in a collective nightmare through the crimes of cult leader James Warren Jones (1931-1978),³³⁹ to whom I will return later.

As Lattin says, “something happened between 1961 and 1978.” One of the main happenings was the start of the Esalen Institute, a “growth center” founded in 1962 by Stanford graduates Michael Murphy (b. 1930) and Richard Price (1930-1985), at Big Sur, California—close to the Ventana Wilderness, where Merrell-Wolff had planned to build a colony, fifty years earlier. Many see it as “the birthplace of the human potential movement and the spot where Sixties spirituality took root on the California coast.”³⁴⁰

Reminiscent of Darmstadt and Eranos, equally disenchanted with conventional science and religion, Esalen entertained alternative methods and theories that challenged established beliefs and practices. But in contrast to its European precursors, it was never reserved for the social and intellectual elite. As Marion Goldman explains, Esalen did much to democratize the “spiritual privilege” of personal growth and transformation through psychological and religious exploration for middle-class seekers.³⁴¹

Esalen resembled Darmstadt and Eranos, initially, in its almost exclusive focus on intellectual discussion—“a couple of dozen people seated in wooden chairs, listening to a professor from Stanford talking about opening up new resources in the human soul.” But this soon changed. By the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies, the pendulum went full swing from an overly intellectual to an overtly anti-intellectual extreme. Looking back, Walter Truett Anderson tells us many educated middle-class Americans felt that life in general and psychotherapy in particular had become strapped in a straitjacket of rationalization and that a little bit of anti-intellectualism could deliver a healthy antidote. But, he adds, “moderation was not in the air at Big Sur.”³⁴²

In his massive study of the growth institute, Jeffrey Kripal confirms that Esalen took a turn toward “the enlightenment of the body,” whereby Asian enlightenment and the European Enlightenment merged into something said to be more integral, “beyond belief” as well as “beyond reason,” in other words, “something fundamentally gnostic.”

³³⁹ Don Lattin, *Following our Bliss: How the Spiritual Ideals of the Sixties Shape our Lives Today* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004). 3.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 & 9.

³⁴¹ Marion S. Goldman, *The American Soul Rush: Esalen and the Rise of Spiritual Privilege* (New York: New York University Press, 2012). 1-2, 73-77 & 161. Goldman rightly notes, however, that its success still significantly relied on the access to “elite seeker networks” of its privileged founders, *ibid.*, 56.

³⁴² Anderson, *The Upstart Spring*: 69 & 293.

He, furthermore, submits that its “democratic mysticism” or “religion of no religion” represents “America as a mystic idea(l),” whose movements into the human potential rely on the uniquely American arrangement of the constitutional separation of church and state.³⁴³ Though this reads like a reiteration of American exceptionalism, but one that reverses the reverse orientalist rhetoric of “the mystic East” to its own advantage again, Kripal rightly highlights the mainstream turn to an embodied religion at Esalen.

Theoretically, this anti-intellectual turn to the body discarded the mechanistic reductionism of the “first force” of psychiatry and the “second force” of behaviorism, in favor of a vitalist intuitionism, which took hold in the humanistic “third force” and transpersonal “fourth force” psychology of, say, Abraham Harold Maslow (1908-1970), Carl Ransom Rogers (1902-1987) and Friedrich Salomon Perls (1893-1970).³⁴⁴ Practically, it took shape in soma-centered therapies like the “Bioenergetics” of Alexander Lowen (1910-2008)³⁴⁵ or the “Rolfing” of Ida Pauline Rolf (1896-1979).³⁴⁶ All of them were, more or less, influenced again by the body armor theory and other increasingly controversial ideas of the post-Freudian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957).³⁴⁷

Like Marcuse and Brown, the human potentialists voiced “a vitalistic critique of the isolation of reason from life”—criticizing the nurtured habit of inhibiting natural experiences because society demands people rationally control their desires and conform to the dictates of morality.³⁴⁸ They said that “self-realization cannot be attained by intellect or rationality alone,”³⁴⁹ that “the totality of my experience ... is wiser than my intellect”³⁵⁰ and that one should “go out of your mind and come to your senses.”³⁵¹ Unlike Marcuse and Brown, who thought individual and collective liberation requires a negation of reality, they felt freedom was found in a complete acceptance of what is.

³⁴³ Jeffrey John Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). 456 & 463. Albanese has similarly suggested that “Esalen understood the human potential to reside in the enlightened body-self,” Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). 372.

³⁴⁴ Lawrence D. Plumb, *A Critique of the Human Potential Movement* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993). e.g. 5-6, 48, 54, 72-77, 199 & 212.

³⁴⁵ Alexander Lowen, *The Language of the Body* (New York: Collier Books, 1958/1971).

³⁴⁶ Ida Pauline Rolf, *Rolfing: Reestablishing the Natural Alignment and Structural Integration of the Human Body for Vitality and Well-Being* (Rochester: Healing Art Press, 1977/1989).

³⁴⁷ e.g. Wilhelm Reich, *Character Analysis*, trans. Vincent R. Carfagno, 1933 original German ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972).

³⁴⁸ Plumb, *Human Potential Movement*: 7-8, 11, 68, 79, 84, 107.

³⁴⁹ Abraham Harold Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (unknown: Harper & Row, 1954/1970). 271.

³⁵⁰ Carl Ransom Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961). 22-23.

³⁵¹ Perls in Plumb, *Human Potential Movement*: 86. And to accomplish this, a mix of both theories and exercises are offered in Frederick Perls et al., *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (London: Souvenir Press, 1951/2006).

Despite right-wing charges of being part of an international communist conspiracy,³⁵² the human potential movement went on to grow. Key to its popularity was its attempt to replace religion.³⁵³ As Donald Stone explains, “Throughout history, new religious movements have sprung up during periods of rapid social change” and “To the extent that this [human potential] movement increasingly provides experiences of transcendence, cosmic consciousness, the Self beyond the self or of nothingness, it may be considered religious”—better yet, “spiritual.”³⁵⁴ Indeed, Olav Hammer adds, it belongs to the history of gnosis and western esotericism in general and the mind cure tradition of Mesmerism and New Thought in particular.³⁵⁵ Its “transpersonal psychology” traded “mystical experiences” for natural “peak experiences,”³⁵⁶ only to offer “a [more] respectable entree into the occult,”³⁵⁷ much like Jung had done before. In fact, Jungian psychology was being rediscovered by American readers, during this time.³⁵⁸

Take John Cunningham Lilly (1915-2001), one of the many famous names connected to Esalen, known for his consciousness studies on LSD and sensory deprivation and interspecies communication with dolphins. Stone describes him as “a noted brain researcher and audacious explorer of inner spaces,”³⁵⁹ while Kripal ranks him among the “[then] major players of the alternative religion scene.”³⁶⁰ In *Simulations of God*, Lilly sees Jung’s “synchronicity” as “an intuitive source of knowledge” that is written off as “illogical, irrational, psychotic, superstitious, occult, esoteric, religious, or what have you,” today, but may well prove to be one of the frontiers of science, tomorrow.³⁶¹

In the seventies, reading references like these, Merrell-Wolff would also revisit psychological subjects such as synchronicity, two types of thinking and the collective unconscious as well as reflect on Jung’s overall life and teaching in relation to his.³⁶²

³⁵² Plumb, *Human Potential Movement*: 213.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 7, 214, 216 & 228. It offered a secular “new ideology for white middle-class society,” *ibid.*, 204.

³⁵⁴ Donald Stone, “The Human Potential Movement,” in *The New Religious Consciousness*, ed. Charles Y. Glock and Robert N. Bellah (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 114 & 95, respectively.

³⁵⁵ Olav Hammer, “Human Potential Movement,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 572-574.

³⁵⁶ Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*: 164-165.

³⁵⁷ Stone, “Human Potential Movement,” 111.

³⁵⁸ Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). 137.

³⁵⁹ Stone, “Human Potential Movement,” 97.

³⁶⁰ Kripal, *Esalen*: 287.

³⁶¹ Lilly, *Simulations of God*: 136-141.

³⁶² See respectively, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “On Synchronicity,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1974). Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Two Kinds of Thought,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970). Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Challenge to the Concept of the Unconscious (1 of 2),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1980); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Challenge to the Concept of the Unconscious (2 of 2),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1980). Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Concerning Dr. Carl G. Jung (1 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff

Here, his focus on a concept from Jung's "Seven Sermons to the Dead" is most relevant.

Based on his—biased—study of this mysterious text, Stephen Hoeller finds that Jung was a contemporary Gnostic. Like the ancient Gnostics, he says, "the wizardry of the modern Swiss Hermes" does not draw from scientific knowledge or philosophical truth, but from religious intuition. Of course, Jung was able to turn his intuitions into sophisticated psychological theories. As such—I actually agree with him—Jung can be seen as a "supremely rational anti-rationalist," who contributed to what Hoeller deems the "two great liberating periods" of "the 1920s and the early portion of the 1930s and the later 1960s and early 1970s."³⁶³ The point is that Merrell-Wolff interpreted Jung along similar lines. He, too, believed the psychologist had a "feeling for the Beyond."³⁶⁴

Commenting on the events surrounding the writing of the sermons,³⁶⁵ Merrell-Wolff says that Jung saw it as "definitely numinous, that is, involving the presence of a factor related to that which is commonly called the divine. It is evidently the same as that which I have called the transcendental component."³⁶⁶ In his early work, he called it a cognitive "butterfly valve" that regulated the psychophysical "current of ambrosia"—an electromagnetic-like force which, he said, accompanied his realization and could even be invoked in others through "induction." In his later work, he renamed this as a "transcendental modulus" or "transcendental function."³⁶⁷ This is evidently the same again as Jung's own "transcendent function," which he would have surely read in the *Psychological Types and Commentary on The Tibet Book of the Great Liberation*.³⁶⁸

Like Jung,³⁶⁹ Merrell-Wolff believed that his most important work was the outcome of a close collaboration between his intellectual and the transcendental function.

Fellowship, 1975); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Concerning Dr. Carl G. Jung (2 of 2)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975). Lastly, also see his seven part Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Jungian Psychology and Personal Correlations," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1977).

³⁶³ Stephan A. Hoeller, *The Gnostic Jung and the Seven Sermons to the Dead* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1982). 5, 11, 32, 213. Despite the fact that Hoeller attributes religious and I ascribe historical significance to them, it is worth noting that we mention the exact same periods with regards to what I call reasoned flights beyond reason in contemporary western (religious) culture.

³⁶⁴ Merrell-Wolff, "Conversation with Dr. Rein'l (1 of 2)," 2.

³⁶⁵ "It was an unconscious constellation whose peculiar atmosphere I recognized as the numen of an archetype," see Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston, 1962 original German ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1963/1989). for more details, 190-191.

³⁶⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "On Jung's "Seven Sermons to the Dead"," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1976), 1.

³⁶⁷ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "An Abstract of the Philosophy (14 of 14)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 7.

³⁶⁸ Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychological Types or the Psychology of Individuation*, trans. H. Godwin Baynes, 1921 original German ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953); Carl Gustav Jung, "Psychological Commentary on *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*," in *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, ed. Read Herbert, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958). Merrell-Wolff owned and quoted from both.

³⁶⁹ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*: 192.

One supplied the transcendental “intuition”—a wholly *conscious* intuition³⁷⁰—for the intellectual production of the other, whereby higher “formless [imageless] thought” was fitted into a lower rational frame.³⁷¹ This usually went along with “a sense of presence” of a “highly valued companion”—a divine other which gave direction—like the “daimon” of Socrates, the “God” of the Christian, the “Allah” of the Muslim, the “higher self” of the Theosophist and the “spirit of guidance” of Inyat Khan, among others.³⁷²

Most psychologists of religion have observed this phenomenon, he said. “[B]oth James Leuba and William James correlate the mystical Realization of Presence with a ‘sense of presence,’ fairly frequently experienced, wherein the subject feels that someone or something is somewhere in his or her vicinity.” Like many of the mystics themselves, James related this immediate religious experience to a “higher power,” whereas Leuba considered this already an *interpretation* of the actual experience itself—which he compared to the “trance consciousness” of drug-induced ecstasy or epileptic fits.³⁷³

Like James, Merrell-Wolff maintained there was a noetic side to these mystical experiences of a felt presence.³⁷⁴ In fact, he saw in his own realization all four signs listed by James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. “The immediate content of the state was ineffable. It had a most positive noetic value. The periods of penetration were temporary ... There is a flow of consciousness that is autonomous, such that even when in the personal sense I initiated a thought, it developed of itself without intellectual labor.”³⁷⁵ He also agreed with James that these experiences are commanding only for the individual who has them. “They are authoritative for me, but I do not ... imply that they carry authority for anyone else who has not had the same ... Realization.”³⁷⁶

³⁷⁰ “From a [Jungian] psychological point of view, intuition is not only an immediate perception, but it is a perception such that only the final product falls within the field of consciousness, while the process leading to the product lies wholly in the psychological unconscious,” Merrell-Wolff, “Concerning Intuition,” 1. cf. Jung, *Psychological Types*: 567-568. Introception is immediate, like intuition, but unlike intuition, not perceptive nor are only its end products conscious. It is a “progressive elimination of intuition” even, for it gradually brings unconscious content into consciousness. Thus, it is “occult knowledge, since it is knowledge of that which is generally hidden,” Merrell-Wolff, “Concerning Intuition,” 2.

³⁷¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Purpose, Method and Policy of this Work (6 of 15),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1976), 2-4 & 6.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 1-2. cf. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Three Fundamentals of Introceptive Philosophy (3 of 16),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1973), 6. Curiously, he forgets to mention the “Philemon” of Jung, who also represented superior insight, Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*: 183.

³⁷³ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” Chapter 14, 294 & 296-297. cf. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 1902/2004). lecture xx, e.g. 392; James H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (New York: Harcourt, 1925). Chapter II & VIII-XI. This anticipates the debate between perennialists and social constructivists, see Chapter 4.

³⁷⁴ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” Chapter 12.

³⁷⁵ i.e. ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity, *ibid.*, 225; cf. James, *The Varieties*: 295-296.

³⁷⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “General Discourse on the Subject of my Philosophy (7 of 12),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1972), 1; cf. James, *The Varieties*: 327-332.

Unlike Leuba, Merrell-Wolff denied that all altered “trance” states of consciousness are alike, whereby mystical experiences are merely misread psycho-physiological phenomena.³⁷⁷ The part of this “anti-noetic argument” he takes most issue with is the equation of their immediate content of a “sense of presence” with the idea of a personal God.³⁷⁸ On this, he does agree with Leuba, against James, that “It is not necessary to interpret Presence as meaning something beyond itself,” that it is its own meaning.³⁷⁹

Returning to the transcendent function, Merrell-Wolff claimed it played a key role in most religions, many philosophies and some psychologies.³⁸⁰ Jung, Lilly and Hoeller would have agreed with him. Lilly even mentions Merrell-Wolff himself as an example of it. In Chapter Nineteen of his *Simulations*—“God as Consciousness-without-an-Object”—he tells us that he had found his “probably the most abstract and yet the most satisfying way of looking at the universe that I have come across anywhere.”³⁸¹

Lilly first encountered Merrell-Wolff in the fall of 1971. Someone had lent him a copy of the *Pathways*, because they had observed striking similarities between their teachings. This set him off on a search for its author. At first, unsuccessfully. But a year later, after one of his workshops at Esalen, a couple approached him; they had heard he was looking for Merrell-Wolff and gave Lilly his address. Weeks after that, Lilly and his wife drove to Lone Pine, where they finally landed at the doorstep of “Dr. Wolff.”³⁸²

In the discussion that followed, they touched upon (re)printing the *Pathways through to Space* and *Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object*. Watching the restless youth around him, Lilly “very strongly felt that the time for the republication of *Pathways* had arrived ... that literally hundreds of thousands of young adults were now ready for the ideas, experiences and philosophy expressed therein ...” With the book(s) in mind, he said that “there are thousands of people, where there were only a few hundred, in 1944, who are in need of confirmation of their own experience and in need of a showing of a pathway basically ‘*jñana*’ or the head trip route to higher states.” In his own lectures and workshops, Lilly had observed “increasing numbers of people with mental properties similar to Dr. Wolff’s and mine,” who can reach higher states of

³⁷⁷ Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” Chapter 13.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 14.

³⁷⁹ “James, in his search for the unassailable kernel of mystical consciousness, found what he called a ‘higher power,’ which possessed, overshadowed or enveloped the mystic ... Leuba points out that in the conception of higher power we have more than pure immediacy. There is also involved a judgment of comparison as between something lower and higher. This criticism is valid,” *ibid.*, 289, 294, 296-298.

³⁸⁰ Merrell-Wolff, “Purpose, Method and Policy of this Work (6 of 15),” 1.

³⁸¹ Lilly, *Simulations of God*: 166.

³⁸² John Cunningham Lilly, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” in *Pathways through to Space: A Personal Record of Transformation in Consciousness* (New York: Julian Press, 1973/1983).

consciousness “by the right reading material.”³⁸³ In other words, what Lilly witnessed was an increasing mainstream demand for—literary—reasoned flights beyond reason.

In 1973, largely through Lilly’s efforts, Julian Press answered this cry for more intellectual lectures and literature, by publishing a second edition of the *Pathways* as well as the first edition of section one and two of the *Philosophy*—parts three and four were later privately published by Doroethy Briggs, under the title of *Introceptualism*, in 1975. Both were well received, although most reviewers did warn about their difficult scholarly content and style. “Reading Merrell-Wolff will prove hard work for most readers,” Paul Severson wrote, “but it will be worth the time and effort.”³⁸⁴ Being on the *jñāna* path, “his approach to the Awakening is intellectual,” Rufus Mosely and Doug Knott observed, most suited for “those with an intellectual leaning toward philosophy and metaphysics.”³⁸⁵ For the Lone Pine sage speaks the language of the “western intellectual,”³⁸⁶ who expresses his realization “as reasoned thought and rational clarity.”³⁸⁷

In 1974, one reader in particular not only took notice of the two books, but also took the time to inform Merrell-Wolff about it. “I have long intended to write you of my enthusiasm for your work,” he starts his letter. “In fact, I have just finished a work on the same subject and I feel our experience-thoughts so overlap that correspondence with you would prove most fruitful.” Despite the overlap in their “experience-thoughts” regarding non-dual consciousness, the budding author had run into some obstacles in getting his own work out there. Most publishers, including Julian Press, had declined it, because they believed it would be “too difficult for the average reader.”³⁸⁸ The publication of the *Pathways* and *Philosophy* had probably given him renewed hope, that the American people were now ready for a more intellectually challenging spirituality.

The letter writer was Kenneth Earl Wilber (b. 1949) and his work *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, which would finally be published by the Theosophical Quest Books, in 1977.³⁸⁹ Even a passing look at this book proves Wilber was right. The parallels between his intellectual methods and theories and those of Merrell-Wolff are striking—

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ He already considered the *Pathways*, by far, the easiest of the two, “not ... an easy book to read and understand,” Paul Severson, “Review of *Pathways Through to Space*,” *Fate*, no. March (1974); Paul Severson, “Review of *The Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object*,” *Fate*, no. unknown (1974).

³⁸⁵ Rufus Mosely, “Review of *Pathways Through to Space*,” *The A.R.E. Journal*, no. November (1974).

³⁸⁶ Doug Knott, “Review of *Pathways Through to Space*,” *The Whole Earth Epilog*, no. September (1974).

³⁸⁷ Anonymous, “Review of *The Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object*,” *The Beacon*, no. unknown (1974).

³⁸⁸ Ken Wilber, “A Letter to Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” (1974).

³⁸⁹ Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1977/1985).

too many to discuss here. The most important similarity is summarized in a *précis* of his work from 1975, where Wilber professes there is a “perennial psychology,” which expresses the same insight as “perennial philosophy,” but in more cognition based—western—terms. Specifically, he says there is a spectrum of consciousness, built on the premise “that human personality is a multi-leveled manifestation or expression of a single Consciousness” that goes by various names—God or Godhead, Allah, Brahman, Tao, Dharmakaya—but which he refers to as a spaceless and timeless “Mind.” Even if this single consciousness or non-dual mind is the one true noumenal reality, the illusion of *māyā* has created a phenomenal duality, whereby eastern and western religion, philosophy and psychology address different levels of the same truth. “[O]n their own levels they are *all* correct and taken together they form a complementary approach to consciousness that spans the entire Spectrum,”³⁹⁰ he argued, which is the perennialist assumption that underlies his later “integral psychology”³⁹¹ or “integral spirituality.”³⁹²

Spectrum would launch Wilber as a “New Age teacher-prophet,” who “place[d] transpersonal psychology on a New Age intellectual map,” with an inclusivist message derived from an approved (not so) short-list of many of the same eastern and western teachings Merrell-Wolff had relied on.³⁹³ Wilber himself, however, never liked being linked to “New Age.” As Frank Visser explains, he takes issue with the rationalism and materialism of mainstream western culture, like New Age, but then is just as skeptical of the irrationalism of the New Age counterculture. He agrees with its critics that a lot of it is a manifestation of the superficial self-centered narcissism symptomatic of the “me decade.”³⁹⁴ I have more to say on the New Age “movement,” in the next chapter, but focus on the reason underlying Wilber’s rejection of (most of) its ideologies, here.

Reminiscent of Merrell-Wolff’s criticism on the regression of the “spoiled brats” among the long-haired hippies, Wilber reckons most New Agers are guilty of what he calls the “pre/trans fallacy.” Often inspired by Jung’s problematic distinction between

³⁹⁰ Ken Wilber, “Psychologia Perennis: The Spectrum of Consciousness,” *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 7, no. 2 (1975): 105-106, 110-111, 114 & 130.

³⁹¹ Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000).

³⁹² Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World* (Boston: Integral Books, 2006).

³⁹³ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*: 506. Albanese mentions, for instance, Maharshi, Trungpa and Tulku. However, their list of common sources, furthermore, includes Bergson, Blavatsky, Böhme, Brown, Bucke, Buddha, Suzuki, Eckhart, Evans-Wentz, Freud, Govinda, Guenther, Hegel, Jung, Lilly, James, Longchenpa, Marcuse, Northrop, Otto, Śāṅkara, Vivekananda, Weiner and many, many others.

³⁹⁴ Frank Visser, *Ken Wilber: Thought as Passion*, 2001 original Dutch ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003). 2 & 106. Following this book, Visser has become increasingly critical of Wilber.

the ego (individual consciousness) and the self (collective consciousness),³⁹⁵ he says, they conflate *prepersonal* and *prerational* with *transpersonal* and *transrational* states and stages of development—one being magical and mythical, the other transcendental and mystical—given that both are *non-personal* and *non-rational*. They are convinced the alternative to conventional rationalism is countercultural irrationalism, which devalues the logical and rational and overvalues the emotional and physical. Wilber responds to this that there are not two but three planes: prerational, rational and transrational. He even sees the transrational sage closer to the rational scientist than to the prerational youngster, who rationalizes his self-involved stance, considering “Spirit is translogic, not anti-logic; it embraces logic and then goes beyond ...”³⁹⁶ For Wilber—as for Merrell-Wolff—wisdom is not a reasoned flight *from* or *below* but *beyond* reason.

However, as Visser clarifies, the history of religious movements has repeatedly illustrated that attempts to transcend the personal can descend into the pre-personal, especially when a charismatic leader regresses into a dangerously infantile indulgence in grandiosity. And that is also precisely what happened deep in the jungles of Guyana, in 1978. “According to Wilber, the tragedy at Jonestown shows how a religious movement can undergo a complete regression, descending as far as it is possible to go.”³⁹⁷

Running ahead of our discussion—in anticipation of the next chapter—I agree with Eileen Barker that “No new religion would be regarded in quite the same light or treated in quite the same way, after Jonestown.”³⁹⁸ Jonestown was a colony in Guyana, built by members of the People’s Temple, a religious fringe group established by Jim Jones in 1953. Jones launched his movement in the conservative Midwest, but then went to the more liberal West Coast, where it further flourished in San Francisco. According to Doyle Johnson, Jones later moved his Temple to South America, in an effort to sustain his precarious charismatic authority over the rapidly growing community.³⁹⁹

An isolated environment abroad seemed appealing at first, because it removed most threats he had experience in America, but soon posed challenges of its own. The close living quarters of the compound, hard daily labor and lack of outside opposition

³⁹⁵ For more details about Wilber’s criticism regarding Jungian depth psychology, see *ibid.*, 265-267.

³⁹⁶ Ken Wilber, *Grace and Grit: Spirituality and Healing in the Life and Death of Treya Killam Wilber* (Boston: Shambhala, 1991/2001). 267-268. For a summary, see Visser, *Ken Wilber*: 117-120.

³⁹⁷ Visser, *Ken Wilber*: 140 & 142. Ten years later, Wilber would co-edit a semi-academic book about (controversial) religious movements such as Jonestown, Ken Wilber et al., eds., *Spiritual Choices: The Problems of Recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation* (New York: Paragon House, 1987).

³⁹⁸ Eileen Barker, “Religious Movements: Cult and Anticult since Jonestown,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 12(1986): 330.

³⁹⁹ Doyle Paul Johnson, “Dilemmas of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of the People’s Temple,” *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 4 (1979): 320.

drained people's enthusiasm and chipped away at his power. To maintain their emotional commitment to the group and its leader, Jones came up with a suicide ritual which required members to sip a poisoned punch to prove their dedication. Of course, everyone, rightly, assumed their drink did not contain actual poison—until it did, in 1978.⁴⁰⁰

Congressman Leo Ryan visited Jonestown to check up on its US citizens. When it became clear some of them wanted to return with him to their home country, Jones and his guards shot the politician and his entourage, at the airstrip. Back at the compound, Jones staged another suicide ritual. But this time, the Kool-Aid was laced with cyanide. By the end of that fateful day, more than nine-hundred people were dead.⁴⁰¹

Merrell-Wolff was aware of Jonestown. From this time on, whenever he speaks of his past association with LaDue and Dower, he would add that “The Temple of the People is quite a different entity from that of the People's Temple, which has been in the news recently.”⁴⁰² Yet, it was not this dramatic loss of nine hundred lives far away, but that of two people nearby, which would sent him reeling back into a depression.

The first had occurred a few years earlier. His stepson James Briggs had fallen seriously ill. They first thought of a stomach cancer, then an ulcer. Tests later showed it was lupus. After a six-year struggle, James died, in 1974, at age sixty-six.⁴⁰³ He was survived by his wife Helen, their daughter Doroethy and their son Robert, but also his stepfather, confidant and teacher Franklin—who never thought he would have to bury both a wife and a son and so was deeply struck by this loss of his closest male friend.⁴⁰⁴

But the second loss hit him even harder. In early 1978, his closest female friend, disciple and companion Gertrude suffered a stroke and passed soon after, at age sixty-seven. It left him broken. Sherifa's death had been a shock, but she was twelve years his senior and suffered from health issues, so he always knew he may survive her. But Gertrude being twenty-four years younger, he never thought he would outlive her, too.

Given Gertrude's original task to replace Sherifa as his feminine counterpart, it is fascinating that Franklin pays so much attention to her “masculine qualities,” in his eulogy.⁴⁰⁵ Perhaps it is an early sign of his own “feminine turn,” during his final years.

⁴⁰⁰ Regardless whether the members ever thought of actual suicide, the rituals would have desensitized them to it, making them much less likely to resist once the act was really demanded of them, *ibid.*, 321.

⁴⁰¹ Barker, “Cult and Anticult since Jonestown,” 330.

⁴⁰² Merrell-Wolff, “Philosophy and Psychology,” 6.

⁴⁰³ Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” 26.6. Franklin still talks about an ulcer, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Memorial for Jim Briggs (1 of 2),” (Conversations: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1974), 5.

⁴⁰⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Memorial for Jim Briggs (2 of 2),” (Conversations: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1974), 3.

⁴⁰⁵ Based on stereotypes, he lauds her technical, architectural and navigational skills, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Memorial Service for Gertrude,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 1-2.

CHAPTER 4
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ROUTINIZATION

No longer a philosopher. When his second wife Gertrude died, something in Merrell-Wolff was set in motion that apparently hurled him in the opposite direction of which he had been headed during his entire life. “[T]hrough all my life my center of focus has been in a philosophical, mathematical or scientific line of emphasis, I have gone over into a state in which the principle of feeling has taken precedence,” he noticed. To his own surprise, he now spoke “in terms of drama rather than in terms of philosophy.”¹

In uncharacteristically dramatic terms, indeed, he would go on to compare his own grief to the passion of the Christ, claiming that “The crucifixion through which I passed was the death of Gertrude, which involved a passage through states of feeling far greater than that of the ordinary human experience, when one loses a beloved.”²

Influenced by talks with Jungian analyst Robert Johnson (b. 1921)³ and doctor turned self-proclaimed clairvoyant therapist William Brugh Joy (1939-2009),⁴ Merrell-Wolff believed this “enantiodromia”⁵ from thinking to feeling had been anticipated by a prophetic dream, fifty years ago—rather, the second of two “major dreams,” wherein a sage cut short the hypnotic dance of Mephisto with a young lady in an empty theater.

¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Running Commentary Following Gertrude’s Death (3 of 53),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 1 & 4.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ Robert A. Johnson, *Inner Work: Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986/2009; repr., 2009). References suggest Merrell-Wolff had only read Robert Johnson, *He* (King of Prussia: Religious Publishing Co., 1974); Robert Johnson, *She* (King of Prussia: Religious Publishing Co., 1976).

⁴ His best known work is William Brugh Joy, *Joy’s Way: A Map for the Transformational Journey: An Introduction to the Potentials for Healing with Body Energies* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1979).

⁵ Merrell-Wolff explains, “The word ‘enantiodromia’ is a psychological term meaning a transition in an individual from one type psychology to another,” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Autobiographical Material: My Life with Gertrude (1 of 2),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 3. He derived it again from Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychological Types or the Psychology of Individuation*, trans. H. Godwin Baynes, 1921 original German ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953). 541-542.

According to Jungian psychology, he said, the woman represented the repressed unconscious feminine qualities in the male individual or the anima; Mephisto the negative side of the intellect, which he regarded as excessive rationality rather than irrationality; and the sage the transcendental component. With those archetypal roles in mind, he concluded the intellect was prevented from becoming the supreme ruler.⁶

He granted another conclusion may be drawn, one he denied, “namely, that the victory of the transcendental component meant the ascendancy of the irrational factor in the psychology or psyche of man over the rational factor. It is not that,” he stressed, considering the transcendent denotes a non-dual state *beyond* reason and unreason.⁷

Contrary to what Jung claims,⁸ the intellect is not the devil—“I find [this] really quite baffling ... I don’t follow Dr. Jung at all, here.” As an instrument or a method for reaching realization, Merrell-Wolff had actually found the yoga of knowledge or road of rational discrimination very effective.⁹ However, he did recognize that the intellect *could* become evil, if it is not complemented by compassion. Complete enlightenment requires both the wisdom of the head as well as the love of the heart, he conceded.¹⁰

Anticipant of Ken Wilber’s spectrum of consciousness, Merrell-Wolff adapted a Theosophical doctrine about various levels of individual and collective evolution and claimed that there is the (prerational) “proto-human,” (rational) “intellectual human” and (transrational) “introceptual, spiritual, divine human,” whereby the introceptual individual stands closer to his intellectual than to his proto-human peer.¹¹ Most people identify with the first or second, but only when the animal, human and divine levels are interconnected, can one speak of a “fully developed yogic Awakening,” he said.¹²

⁶ Johnson considered the dance of Mephisto and the lady as “the dance of life,” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Report of Major Dreams,” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 5-6 & 8. Franklin deemed it “the dance of thought,” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Running Commentary Following Gertrude’s Death (1 of 53),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 1. They agreed about the rest.
⁷ It was not the destruction but the subordination of the intellect, Merrell-Wolff, “Major Dreams,” 6-7.

⁸ “No doubt, the intellect is the devil, but he is ‘the whimsical son of chaos’ to whom we would soonest grant the capacity to deal effectively with his mother ...” see Carl Gustav Jung, *The Integration of the Personality*, trans. Stanley M. Dell, original German ed. (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939). 126.

⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Is the Intellect the Devil? (1 of 4),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1980), 2, 3 & 5-6. He bends over backwards, trying to make sense of Jung, only to suggest—unconvincingly—he lacked affinity with (a certain type of) intellectual abstraction, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Is the Intellect the Devil? (3 of 4),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1980), 6.

¹⁰ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Impromptu Statement of my Present Condition,” (Conversations: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 4.

¹¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Is the Intellect the Devil? (2 of 4),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1980), 2; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Is the Intellect the Devil? (4 of 4),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1980), 5-6.

¹² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Triune Nature of Man (1 of 2),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 8; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Triune Nature of Man (2 of 2),” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 1.

Combining these insights, it dawned on him that he was standing on the brink of a transition to a more integral psychology or spirituality, whereby his long ignored “feminine” or feeling side would fully merge with his “masculine” or thinking side.¹³ His therapist friends reified this conviction. Joy argued his big dream had anticipated *this* period, in which he was challenged to “release this domination of the intellect.”¹⁴ And Johnson agreed, though he saw this as one of three possible paths that presented themselves to Merrell-Wolff. One, he could commit suicide. Two, he could look for another female companion. Three, he could indeed “take ... off to a realm of consciousness or a kind of Enlightenment which is beyond any masculine or feminine, rational or irrational ... or any other pair of opposites ...” which he obviously encouraged him to do.¹⁵

But even if they arrived at the same conclusion about his current predicament, Merrell-Wolff felt little affinity for the exclusive focus on sensational experience and flagrant neglect of conceptual judgment of Joy’s—Zen inspired—solution.¹⁶ And in the wake of Gertrude’s death, “the actual life I have been living follows neither [sic] of the three courses outlined by Robert Johnson ... Dr. Brugh Joy recommended the solitary path and that indeed is what I have been following—not from choice, but necessity.”¹⁷

Meanwhile, old age was catching up with him. Physical and psychological ailments started to creep in. Especially after a brief hospitalization—due to a pneumonia and congestive heart failure—his conditioned worsened, from which he only partially recuperated. “I found myself in a state of mental confusion,” unable to tend to daily chores. Not only that, “I am not as stable on my feet as I formerly was.” He knew it had become too dangerous to live alone and needed someone to take full-time care of him.¹⁸

¹³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “On the Awakening of the Heart Chakra (First Draft),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 6-8. Needless to note, this is an outdated gendered contrast.

¹⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Dialogue with Brugh Joy (1 of 21),” (Conversations: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978), 4, 7 & 15. Joy and Johnson had even suggested that Gertrude may have been “deliberately removed from the scene” by benign hidden forces, to bring about the events of his dream. If it was not only an accident, Merrell-Wolff wondered whether it could also have been hostile powers, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Running Commentary Following Gertrude’s Death (26 of 53),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1979), 2-3.

¹⁵ Merrell-Wolff, “Major Dreams,” 8.

¹⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Reflections upon the Dialogue with Brugh Joy (7 of 7),” (Conversations: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1979), 1.

¹⁷ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Running Commentary Following Gertrude’s Death (44 of 53),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1981), 1. Of course, he had the choice to commit suicide, but he did not, since Erma had allegedly channeled a request from one of the “Brothers” for him to stay alive, e.g. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Running Commentary Following Gertrude’s Death (27 of 53),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1979), 1; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Running Commentary Following Gertrude’s Death (32 of 53),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1981), 1-2.

¹⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Running Commentary Following Gertrude’s Death (35 of 53),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1981), 1-2; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Running Commentary Following Gertrude’s Death (45 of 53),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1981), 1.

Several family members and close students stepped in, taking turns as his caregiver.

Even in these final fragile stages, visitors still found their way to his doorstep, including other self-professed spiritual writers and teachers of non-duality. Next to Tarthang Tulku, John Lilly, Robert Johnson and Brugh Joy, quantum physicist and quasi-mystic Amit Goswami (b. 1936),¹⁹ former Hollywood producer Joel Morwood (ca. 1948)²⁰ and ex-physician Richard Moss (ca. 1948) became his friends or even his students.²¹ However, arguably, the most important visitor was Ron Leonard (b. 1945).

In 1974, at the start of his doctoral studies in philosophy—at the University of Waterloo, in Ontario, Canada—Leonard had come across a publication notice of the *Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object*, on the bulletin board in the student lounge. He ordered it, read it, loved it and even used it as a textbook for his class on philosophy of religion. A few years later, he also found the *Pathways through to Space* in a book store. Assuming the author was dead, he reached out to John Lilly instead, who had written its foreword, to see if Merrell-Wolff had produced anything else. Lilly relayed his request to Lone Pine. One of the students responded to Leonard, inviting him to come over and study with the aging sage himself—which he did, in early 1982.

Before setting off to meet his “spiritual hero,” Leonard alleges to have had a “big dream” of his own. In this dream, he found himself at an annual Assembly convention, amidst a group of around thirty-five people, with Franklin walking up to them, wearing one of his customary suits, and his step-granddaughter Doroethy welcoming him with a warm smile, telling him he was “meant to be here”—both looking like they did in real life. He recalls, “The effect of the dream was to confirm the correctness of my choice of thesis,” namely to study the transcendental philosophy of Franklin Merrell-Wolff.²²

During his actual seven-month research visit, Leonard conversed with Merrell-Wolff, listened to his recorded lectures and courted—later married—his step-granddaughter. He contemplated staying as a caregiver, but decided the greatest service to his teacher would be to finish his doctoral thesis. He completed *The Transcendental Philosophy of Franklin Merrell-Wolff*,²³ in 1991, and would see it published, in 1999.

¹⁹ e.g. Amit Goswami, *The Self-Aware Universe: How Consciousness creates the Material World* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1993/1995).

²⁰ e.g. Joel Morwood, *The Way of Selflessness: A Practical Guide to Enlightenment based on the Teachings of the World's Great Mystics* (Eugene: Center for Sacred Sciences, 2009).

²¹ e.g. Richard Moss, *Inside-Out Healing: Transforming your Life through the Power of Presence* (Carlsbad: Hay House, 2011).

²² Ron Leonard in Doroethy Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff: An American Philosopher and Mystic,” (Phoenix: unpublished, 2012), 26.6-7 & 9.

²³ Ron Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy of Franklin Merrell-Wolff* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

Though this book—which I review later—shaped Merrell-Wolff's legacy, by presenting him in a certain way, in a certain context, this legacy began with Merrell-Wolff himself.

Well over ninety, Merrell-Wolff knew there was “a real prospect that I might go in, in the near future.”²⁴ He became “concerned with the problems of the transition,” as he faced the prospect of death with a mixture of anxiety and anticipation.²⁵ It was time to pass on the mantle, which he did to step-grandchildren Robert and Doroethy—his only family—in a formal ceremony, during the Convention of 1982.²⁶ Though the former was the “ultimate choice on my part to continue my work,”²⁷ Bob would prove reluctant to do so, leaving Doroethy to take responsibility for their step-grandfather's intellectual and material heritage. But that would take place after Merrell-Wolff died.

In the final decade or so before his death, Merrell-Wolff recorded a number of—repetitive—lecture series in which he delivers a “general discourse,” an “abstract,” the “fundamentals” or otherwise “purpose, method and policy” of his “philosophy.” They all follow roughly the same rhetorical pattern: Introceptualism is based on “states of consciousness ... known in the literature as Realization or Enlightenment,” which are not reducible to perception or conception, but what he calls introception.²⁸ This latent organ of cognition does not entail knowledge-by-acquaintance or knowledge-about, but knowledge-through-identity, whereby the subject and object of consciousness become one. The intellectual framework built around introception—laid down in his books and lectures—is “the culminating fruit of a lifetime of thought,” which is neither eastern nor western, but a *unique* blend of both, he argues, given that “the essential substance of the thought is East Indian [religious] metaphysics, but ... the [philosophical] form and [psychological] method is typically more Western ...”²⁹ It can be distilled into three key propositions, namely that consciousness is original, self-existent and constitutive of all things, that the subject to consciousness transcends the object of consciousness and that there are not two but three fundamental faculties or functions of cognition.³⁰

²⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Running Commentary Following Gertrude's Death (20 of 53),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1979), 1; he often repeats his concern with death, e.g. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Concept of Voidness,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1981), 1.

²⁵ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Running Commentary Following Gertrude's Death (52 of 53),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1983), 1.

²⁶ Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” 26.10. Leonard informed me this may also have been 1983 or 1984.

²⁷ Merrell-Wolff, “Running Commentary Following Gertrude's Death (20 of 53),” 1.

²⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “An Abstract of the Philosophy (1 of 14),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 1-2.

²⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “General Discourse on the Subject of my Philosophy (1 of 12),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1971), 1, 3-4.

³⁰ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Three Fundamentals of Introceptive Philosophy (1 of 16),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1973), 1.

Though, a couple of other premises were also considered true, such as the concept of evolution and its law of periodicity and logical corollaries of karma and reincarnation.³¹

In the very last years, the sparse recordings Merrell-Wolff produced were often autobiographical.³² In one of his few ideological lectures, which carries the fitting title of “Capstone Statement,” he concludes—what was long clear by now—that Introceptualism can be placed between (Advaita) Vedānta and (Tibetan) Buddhism, albeit with a (Jungian) psychological rather than metaphysical approach, much like Theosophy.³³

With these ruminations on his own life and teaching, it is almost as if he wanted to set the tone for his posthumous memory—plotting the general course in which his legacy was supposed to be steered by posterity. In sum, he saw his message as “deeply religious,” yet still wanted others to remember him as a “philosopher” and his work as a psychological “philosophy,”³⁴ since he did not wish to be associated with the perceived ritualism and dogmatism of established religions. Some less than others, he contends, but in general “traditional forms of religion have failed egregiously.”³⁵ By contrast, “I employ the term ‘religion’ in what may be called the psychological sense, as involving all of those actions and attitudes that render possible Realization or Enlightenment.”³⁶

³¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Purpose, Method and Policy of this Work (1 of 15)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1976), 1-2.

³² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: A Recollection of my Early Life and Influences," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: My Academic Life and Embarking upon my Spiritual Quest," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1982); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: A Recollection of my Early Work with Sherifa," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978); Merrell-Wolff, "My Life with Gertrude (1 of 2); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: My Life with Gertrude (2 of 2)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1978); Merrell-Wolff, "Impromptu Statement of my Present Condition; Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: The Feminine Side of my Experience (1 of 2)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1982); Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: The Feminine Side of my Experience (2 of 2)," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1982).

³³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Capstone Statement," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1980), 2-4. Of course, based on Albanese, Introceptualism is most definitely “metaphysical,” Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). 13-15.

³⁴ “The goal of religion is Enlightenment ... In that deep sense, [my work] is religious; but my vehicle is philosophy ... I definitely avoid hieratic speech or dogmatic statement. Dogmatic statement is characteristic of far too much religiosity, particularly the Ben-Israel group of religions—that means Judaism, Christianity and Moslemism ... it is true, as Dr. Jung has pointed out, that the transcendental function, with which he was personally acquainted, tends to speak in hieratical ... priest-like forms ... Many people enjoy having formulas forced upon them so that they do not have to think ... I insist that everyone should think for himself ...” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Convention 1974: Preliminary Words on the Purpose of My Work," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1974), 3. Seeing institutional religion as dogmatic faith and philosophy as critical reason—typical of his time—is obviously debatable.

³⁵ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Pathways through to Space," in *Experience and Philosophy: A Personal Record of Transformation and a Discussion of Transcendental Consciousness*, ed. Eliott Eisenberg (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1944/1994), x.

³⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Random Thoughts on Spontaneous and Directed Thinking and the Problem of Evil," (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1975), 7.

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Without a sense of something not being right in the life as we find it manifested in this world, there would be no meaning in the programs of the religious movements as we actually find them. So, we may say that the typical religious and religio-philosophical problems grow out of a condition which may be designated ... pathological. Consequently, when this condition is cured ... [one] transcends the need of any religion, in the sense that “religion” is more commonly understood ... the God-Realized Men are superior to all religions in this sense. While it is true that such Men may become founders of [new] religious movements, They are no longer the mere followers of already given religious disciplines.³⁷

Cults, New Religions, Emergent Traditions

Clearly, there is an ambiguity in Merrell-Wolff's relation to religion. He deemed himself religious, but, at the same time, distanced himself from “traditional” religion. Still, it is safe to say that he counted himself among the “God-realized men”—mystics who allegedly transcend regular religiosity. He also figured he may indeed be the founder of a new religious movement. In the West, since the turn of the century, he noticed, “old religious forms [are] losing their vitality; new religious forms [are] coming in.”³⁸ Thus, “It is entirely possible that the material I have put down in written form or oral form that has been recorded may lead, after I depart from this plane, to the formation of a philosophical school or a religious movement or even ... a combination of the two.”³⁹

With this in mind, Leonard will write that “Even though it is rooted in mystical realization, Wolff emphatically insists that Introceptualism is not, nor must it ever become, a religion.”⁴⁰ And Briggs stresses that “Franklin was careful to admonish that the group [philosophical school cum religious movement] that forms around him will not become a cult.” She also points out that physics professor Melvin Mael (1913-2014)—a student of Merrell-Wolff, but also of Indian guru's Swami Muktananda (Krishna Rau, 1908-1982) and of Bhagwan “Osho” Shree Rajneesh (Chandra Mohan Jain, 1931-1990)—had similarly warned the group against cults, based on a list of warning signs.⁴¹

³⁷ Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 173.

³⁸ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “On the Meaning of Realization (13 of 16),” (Lectures: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1951), 3.

³⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Precaution against Misinterpretation of the Philosophy,” (Phoenix: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 1970), 1.

⁴⁰ Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* 19.

⁴¹ Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” 25.9 & 14; and Daniel Jay Goleman, “Early Warning Signs for the Detection of Spiritual Blight,” *Newsletter of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology* (1985).

Their growing concern for being seen as a cult—which, I have found, continues to this day—makes sense within their cultural context. Picking up on the “church-sect” debate of the previous chapter, for instance, we find that most scholars of religion were *also* increasingly abandoning the term “cult,” as “new religion” or “new religious movement” were gaining currency in academic discourse. Granted, every aspect of this label can be contested, given that most of the designated groups were not that new, did not think of themselves as a religion and were not so much a movement as a small-scale and loosely-knit network. Still, following Eileen Barker, it suffices, if we regard them as “new” in so far as they have become visible in their contemporary form, in the wake of the Second World War, “religious” in so far as they are dealing with ultimate questions and a “movement” in so far as they identify with and take part in the same collective.⁴²

The notion of “new religion” or “new religious movement” was carried over from post-war studies about Japan and America, where the same social crisis had spawned a host of metaphysical movements, which, despite their cultural differences, displayed significant similarities. Think of the presence of a *charismatic leader*, whose authority almost exclusively relies on a claim to *divine revelation or realization*, which is used to legitimate a *syncretic doctrine* with an often *apocalyptic* but always *mystical* bent.⁴³

Many of these movements actually go back (half) a century before the war and merely revitalized after it, yet, this is when they first caught the public and academic eye. In Japan, the (imposed) modernization described in Chapter One had contributed to a reinterpretation of older religions as well as a reinfatuation with “new” religions, a number of which would in turn make their way to America. And in America itself, the (criticized) modernization described in Chapter Two had produced a similar situation, except that, here, the public had witnessed several “destructive cults” by now, whose crimes had been widely publicized. The killing spree of the Manson Family, in 1967, the kidnapping of Patty Hearst by the Symbionese Liberation Army, in 1974, and—*more than anything*—the Jonestown murder-suicides of the People’s Temple, in 1978, (mis)

⁴² Eileen Barker, “The Not-So-New Religious Movements: Changes in ‘the Cult Scene’ over the Past Forty Years,” *Temenos* 50, no. 2 (2014): 236-239; cf. Eileen Barker, “New Religious Movements: Their Incidence and Significance,” in *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, ed. Bryan Wilson and Jamie Cresswell (London: Routledge, 2001), 16.

⁴³ For Japan, see Horace Neill McFarland, “The New Religions of Japan (Continued),” *Contemporary Religions in Japan* 1, no. 4 (1960): 60; Henri J.J.M. van Straelen, “The Japanese New Religions,” *Numen* 9, no. 3 (1962): 230-238; H. Byron Earhart, “The Interpretation of the ‘New Religions’ of Japan as Historical Phenomena,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 37, no. 3 (1969): 237. For America, see Jacob Needleman, *The New Religions* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 1970/2009), especially Chapter 1. Although Needleman touches on many relevant topics for our study, including the influx of Buddhist, Hindu and Sufi teachings in combination with occult or western esoteric traditions, his approach (deliberately) defies what he himself would describe as the European idea of “objectivity.”

guided their opinions about all new religions by association.⁴⁴ In sum, cults were bad.

Though scholars of religion like James Richardson and Barend van Driel noted that it was not a typical example,⁴⁵ most media took the People's Temple in particular as a stereotype, uncritically projecting its characteristics onto *all* religious "cults."⁴⁶ As a result, *every* new religion was now seen as a potential threat in the eyes of the public.

In the seventies and eighties, a clash between cult and anti-cult sentiments culminated in the "cult wars."⁴⁷ Religiously motivated—Christian—anti-cult groups had been around longer, but a broader based secular anti-cult movement did not emerge until 1972. It started with the "Parents Committee to Free our Sons and Daughters from the Children of God" (FREECOG), which became the "Volunteer Parents of America" (VPA), which evolved again into the "Citizen Freedom Foundation" (CFF), out of which emerged the "Cult Awareness Network of the Citizens Freedom Foundation" (CAN).⁴⁸

As Anson Shupe and David Bromley already noted early on, this counter movement originally consisted of concerned parents who wanted to save their offspring from what they deemed dangerous—strange, new, often foreign—religions, which had lured their kids away from their normal lives.⁴⁹ But because only a small number of children was involved, most of whom were adults, there were no legal grounds for intervention. They had to turn their familial problem into a larger social problem, such that it would mobilize the media and general public as well as the political and judicial authorities.

⁴⁴ e.g. Eileen Barker, "Religious Movements: Cult and Anticult since Jonestown," *Annual Review of Sociology* 12(1986): 329-332; for an update, see Barker, "The Not-So-New Religious Movements," 236.

⁴⁵ It attracted lower-class black families more than middle-class white youth and advocated a socialist instead of an individualist stance, James T. Richardson, "People's Temple and Jonestown: A Corrective Comparison and Critique," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 19, no. 3 (1980): 242-243, 248.

⁴⁶ A study of NRM related publications in national newspapers and magazines between 1973 and 1984 proved that in their articles on cults and sects, "anti-cultists definitions were much more prevalent than social-scientific insights," Barend van Driel, James T. Richardson, "Categorization of New Religious Movements in American Print Media," *Sociological Analysis* 49, no. 2 (1988): 181. A follow-up survey among journalists revealed the same discrepancy between popular media and social-scientific research in their view of new religions, with deviant groups generally being discredited and delegitimized by the former without references to the latter, James T. Richardson, Barend van Driel, "Journalists' Attitudes toward New Religious Movements," *Review of Religious Research* 39, no. 2 (1997). In a nuanced reply, religion scholar and former journalist Mark Silk noted, among other things, that journalists never just report what is "out there," but always have to shape their material into culturally significant narratives, and that scholars often rely on the cooperation of cult members for their research, which suggests their own interpretations are equally prone to a certain degree of bias, Mark Silk, "Journalists with Attitude: A Response to Richardson and Van Driel," *Review of Religious Research* 39, no. 2 (1997): 137 & 141.

⁴⁷ Philip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Chapter 9. He looks at the anti-cult responses between 1976 and 1981.

⁴⁸ John Gordon Melton, "Critiquing Cults: An Historical Perspective," in *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America*, ed. Eugene V. Gallagher and Michael Ashcraft (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), for the religious and secular movement, see respectively 126-130 & 130-131.

⁴⁹ Anson D. Shupe, David G. Bromley, "The Moonies and the Anti-Cultists: Movement and Counter-movement in Conflict," *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 4: 330-331. Some separate aggressive "anti-cult" from more moderate "counter-cult" collectives, Barker, "The Not-So-New Religious Movements," 242.

And so they came up with a brainwashing theory and deprogramming method. Cults are pseudo-religions, they argued, which disguise as religions for legal and fiscal benefits. They exist solely to fulfill the selfish desires of egotistical charlatans, who mislead youngsters for financial, sexual and other personal gains. Their victims do not go through a real process of conversion, but of manipulation, which robs them of their free will. This programming renders them into mindless pawns of a deranged leader, which is no less deleterious to themselves as to those around them. So, their only reasonable hope of a return to normal life, then, is to—sometimes forcibly—deprogram them.⁵⁰

This stereotype gained credibility, when psychologists such as Margaret Singer weighed in with “scientific” explanations. Drawing on the work of Robert Lifton,⁵¹ she confirmed that cult leaders use thought reform techniques of “coercive persuasion”—reminiscent of Chinese Communist brainwashing practices—which changed the self-identity of their followers in a way that molded them into deployable agents for their movement.⁵² Singer even testified to such, as an expert witness, in several court cases.

Eventually, the academic community would correct itself, first scrutinizing and later renouncing the brainwashing theory of Singer and consorts as unscientific. This banned it from the courts,⁵³ but not from the media.⁵⁴ The negative image surrounding “cults” continued to lodge itself in popular culture, which—based on biased sources—came to foster an unshakable anti-cultist attitude towards new religious movements.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, scholars of religion were debating the details of these movements.

⁵⁰ Shupe, Bromley, "Moonies and Anti-Cultists," 331. “Rhetorical mystiques about mind control have the consequence of implying that cultist involvements are involuntary and that devotees are not fully capable of making rational choices. In consequence, these arguments serve as a rationale for legitimating social control measures which treat devotees *as if they were mentally incompetent* without formally labeling them as such ...” Thomas Robbins, "Constructing Cultist 'Mind Control'," in *Cults and New Religious movements*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 176. Cult participation is seen as an individual flight from reason with potentially grave collective consequences.

⁵¹ Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961/1989).

⁵² Margaret Thaler Singer, Janja Lalich, *Cults in our Midst: The Continuing Fight against their Hidden Menace* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995/2003); for a summary of her theory, see Margaret Thaler Singer, "The Process of Brainwashing, Psychological Coercion and Thought Reform," in *Cults and New Religious Movements*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), Chapter 9.

⁵³ Melton, "Critiquing Cults," 136-139.

⁵⁴ For examples from popular newspapers and magazines, see van Driel, Richardson, "Categorization of New Religious Movements in American Print Media; for a telling example from a popular talk show, see Eugene V. Gallagher, "'Cults' and 'New Religious Movements'," *History of Religions* 47, no. 2/3 (2007): 207; for examples from various tv shows, Lynn S. Neal, "'They're Freaks!': The Cult Stereotype in Fictional Television Shows, 1958-2008," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 14, no. 3 (2011); and Joseph Laylock, "Where Do They Get These Ideas? Changing Ideas of Cults in the Mirror of Popular Culture," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 1 (2013).

⁵⁵ James T. Richardson, "Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative," *Review of Religious Research* 34, no. 4 (1993).

They started with case studies of exotic⁵⁶ or eccentric⁵⁷ or both⁵⁸ types of “cults,” but soon turned to more theoretical reflections on “new religions”⁵⁹—though, some (also) continued to collect concrete facts about new religious movements to inform people.⁶⁰

The list of contributors has grown so long that it is perhaps most enlightening to focus on one typical example. Robert Ellwood was among the first academics to take “cults” seriously. According to Ellwood, “The birth and childhood crises of each cult is a reenactment of the origin of every religion.”⁶¹ In addition, especially the cult scene of the youth culture⁶² is a social laboratory that offers a barometer of psychological shifts in (a significant part of) American society,⁶³ he suggested. For one thing, their search for the divine through higher states of consciousness⁶⁴ spelled the emergence of a “new spiritual era” and a “new spiritual man” that have long been associated with the East.⁶⁵

For Ellwood, new religions are groups that have arisen or arrived in America, in

⁵⁶ Thomas Robbins, Dick Anthony, "Getting Straight with Meher Baba: A Study of Mysticism, Drug Rehabilitation and Postadolescent Role Conflict," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 11, no. 2 (1972); Charles S. J. White, "The Sai Baba Movement: Approaches to the Study of Indian Saints," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 31, no. 4 (1972).

⁵⁷ Roy Wallis, "Scientology: Therapeutic Cult to Religious Sect," *Sociology* 9, no. 1 (1975); William Sims Bainbridge, Rodney Stark, "Scientology: To Be Perfectly Clear," *Sociological Analysis* 41, no. 2 (1980).

⁵⁸ Christopher Evans, *Cults of Unreason* (London: Harrap, 1973); Anne Bancroft, *Modern Mystics and Sages* (New York: Granada Publishing, 1976/1978). A particularly visible example at the time, the Unification Church of Reverend Moon, combines “exotic” and “eccentric” traits, with its Korean leader yet Christian teaching, e.g. Eileen Barker, "Living the Divine Principle: Inside the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church in Britain," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 23, no. 45.1 (1978).

⁵⁹ This shift occurred towards the end of the eighties, Charles L. Harper, Bryan F. Le Beau, "The Social Adaptation of Marginal Religious Movements in America," *Sociology of Religion* 54, no. 2 (1993): 171.

⁶⁰ Barker reports that she founded the Information Network Focus on Religious Movement (INFORM) to fairly balance unreliable anti-cultist propaganda, Eileen Barker, "Stepping out of the Ivory Tower: A Sociological Engagement in 'The Cult Wars'," *Methodological Innovations Online* 6, no. 1 (2011): 23.

⁶¹ Robert S. Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973). xiv. On a related note, D. James Atwood, Ronald B. Flowers, "Early Christianity as a Cult Movement," *Encounter* 44, no. summer (1983). Even conventional traditions started as a new religion.

⁶² Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*: xiv. Initially, many scholars restricted cult participation largely to the youth. Some scholars argued that new religions may function as a half-way-house between alternative and conventional culture, assisting dropouts to reintegrate into society. For an informative case study, see e.g. Thomas Robbins, "Eastern Mysticism and the Resocialization of Drug Users: The Meher Baba Cult," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 8, no. 2 (1969); for a more general view of this resocialization hypothesis, see Thomas Robbins et al., "Youth Culture Religious Movements: Evaluating the Integrative Hypothesis," *Sociological Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (1975).

⁶³ Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*: xiv. New religious movements are still often seen as a reflection of or a reaction to society, Barker, "Cult and Anticult since Jonestown," 336-337; Lorne L. Dawson, "The Meaning and Significance of New Religious Movements," in *Teaching New Religious Movements*, ed. David G. Bromley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116; James A. Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003/2008). 171-172.

⁶⁴ Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*: xiv. This would often be related to or equated with a larger (religious) “consciousness reformation” in the West, e.g. Robert J. Wuthnow, ed. *The Consciousness Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Donald Stone, "New Religious Consciousness and Personal Religious Experience," *Sociological Analysis* 39, no. 2 (1978).

⁶⁵ Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*: xiv-xv. A similar observation has led Campbell to submit a rather questionable claim, Colin Campbell, "The Easternisation of the West," in *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, ed. Bryan Wilson and Jamie Cresswell (London: Routledge, 2001). For a critical discussion of his so-called “easternization thesis,” see Chapter 1, 42-43.

the last two centuries, during times of social stress, frustration or transition, starting with movements such as Transcendentalism, Theosophy and New Thought. They are religious in their theoretical, practical and sociological focus on “the means of ultimate transformation,” but many will deny being a religion, because of its dogmatic—Judeo-Christian—connotations.⁶⁶ Based on Becker and Yinger, Ellwood further defines them as small ephemeral groups around a charismatic leader, entertaining divergent ideas that syncretize traditional and novel religions with modern science, to take on existential questions in an “individualistic,” “pseudo-rational” and “metaphysical” manner.⁶⁷

These new religions did not emerge out of nowhere. According to Ellwood, they are the most recent additions to what he calls the “alternative reality tradition” of the West, which centers on “the belief that consciousness is the fundament of existence ...”⁶⁸ Like the Eranos scholars,⁶⁹ he speaks about a hidden counter-history behind our mundane history—sensing the “sacred” underneath the “profane,” if you will⁷⁰—which can be traced from ancient times through the middle ages to our contemporary era.⁷¹

Since the nineteenth century—notably, after the World Parliament of Religions—this tradition has been enriched by “eastern imports,” he says, with modern variants of Vedānta, Sufism and Zen and Tibetan Buddhism proving particularly popular among western seekers, because of their promise of “the experience of radical non-dualism.”⁷²

⁶⁶ Having said that, Ellwood still finds that “*Cult* is of course a subcategory of religion. We will speak of it as a group derived from the experience of one or a few individuals who are able to enter (or are fascinated by the possibility of entering) a superior, ecstatic state of consciousness in which contact and rapport with all reaches of a non-historical and impersonal universe are possible with the help of intermediaries,” Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*: 2-5, 10, 25 & 299. He deems Transcendentalism and New Thought religious doctrines rather than actual religions, *ibid.*, 32, 70, 80.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 21 & 23. Ellwood adds fifteen typical traits of American new religions, that is: (1) a founder who has or knows the secret to ecstatic states of consciousness; (2) an interpretation of those experiences as possession or marvelous interior or exterior exploration; (3) a band of supernatural helpers; (4) a desire to be modern, using “scientific” natural-law-like language; (5) a rejection of religious and scientific orthodoxy; (6) an eclectic and syncretic ideology; (7) a non-dualist impersonal ontology; (8) an optimistic take on evolution; (9) a focus on healing; (10) an affinity for magical techniques, in the sense of using non-empirical means for empirical ends; (11) a simple but definite process of initiation; (12) in some cases, the creation of a sacred center; (13) an emphasis on psychic powers; (14) a tendency to attract individuals more than families and (15) an increasing accentuation of group participation, *ibid.*, 28-31.

⁶⁸ He claims, it has offered “an alternative [non-dualist] view and experience of reality,” *ibid.*, 43 & 74.

⁶⁹ Regarding their “history of religions,” see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁷⁰ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Harcourt: New York, 1957/1987).

⁷¹ Among others, he lists Gnosticism, Pythagoreanism, Hermeticism and its “intellectual spine” of Neo-Platonism, Kabbalism, Paracelsianism, the Christian Theosophy of Böhme, Freemasonry, Swedenborgianism and Mesmerism, Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*: Chapter 2.

⁷² Among others, he mentions the Ramakrishna Mission, the Vedānta Society of Vivekananda, the Self-Realization Fellowship of Paramahansa Yogananda, the Transcendental Meditation of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness or “Hare Krishnas” of Swami Bhaktivedanta, the Sai Baba as well as the Meher Baba movement and Suzuki Zen, *ibid.*, 81-82, Chapter 7-8.

Today, scholars refer to (the study of) this alleged alternative lineage as “western esotericism” and its latest incarnation as the “New Age movement.” Both concepts are much contested, on an emic as well as etic level.⁷³ Some even contest the insider-outsider distinction itself, because new religions have adopted an academic vocabulary to identify their actions and ideas and academics have adopted their popular ideology and terminology to identify these new religions again.⁷⁴ Despite the blurry boundary, a historical survey of “etic” theories will help to put Ellwood’s claims into perspective.

Though preceded by scholars such as Jung and Eliade, they had been inclined to approach their subject from an insider perspective, while Frances Yates was arguably the first to study western esotericism from a more “objective” outsider point of view. In 1964, she introduced the “Hermetic tradition”—a self-contained counterculture, rooted in magic—which she said to have been crucial for the rise of the scientific revolution.⁷⁵

In the nineties, Antoine Faivre suggested this Hermetic tradition can be headed under the historical construct of “western esotericism.” Despite his participation in the Eranos circle, Faivre took up a more empirically falsifiable position than his peers. He suggested a typology of western esotericism as a collection of traditions and currents stemming from the Renaissance, which share certain family resemblances that can be studied as a *forme de pensée*. This “form of thought” consists of four intrinsic and two relative features. It supposes that, one, there are *correspondences* among all parts of the universe, seen and unseen; two, a *living nature* permeates reality; three, through the *imagination and mediation* of rituals, symbols and spirits one can access a higher knowledge; four, this higher knowledge contains the key to a personal *transmutation*; five, there is a common core or *concordance* among all religions; six, by way of secret *transmission*, this common core is historically passed on from master onto disciple.⁷⁶

⁷³ Hanegraaff’s survey of the study of western esotericism shows that it has come a long way, but is still plagued by theoretical and methodological differences and instances of staggering ignorance, Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, “Textbooks and Introductions to Western Esotericism,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2012).

⁷⁴ Bergunder argues that if there is no distinction between “a subject definition [emic] and the religious studies concept of this subject [etic],” discussions about western esotericism become “precarious,” as it leaves open the door to esotericist agendas in religious studies research, Michael Bergunder, “What is Esotericism? Cultural Studies Approaches and the Problems of Definition in Religious Studies,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 22(2010): 10. But the fact that there are constant reciprocal exchanges between popular and academic *epistemes* pleads for the deconstruction of a distinction between emic and etic altogether, von Stuckrad responds. A term is “etic,” because scholars use it, which means that labelling something as such could function as “a rhetoric device to give an emic term scholarly power and blessing,” Kocku von Stuckrad, “Reflections on the Limits of Reflection: An Invitation to the Discursive Study of Religion,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 22, no. 2-3 (2010): 162.

⁷⁵ Frances Amelia Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964). e.g. Chapter 8.

⁷⁶ Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). 10-15.

Despite his own rejection of essentialist criteria,⁷⁷ Faivre's "form of thought" has been criticized for being a no less circular⁷⁸—at once, inconsistent and temporally and geographically restricted⁷⁹ as well as historically and culturally detached,⁸⁰ in sum, essentialist—typology. It does not consider *that*, let alone *how*, "esotericism" might have changed after the Renaissance, due to seminal modern phenomena like secularization and globalization⁸¹—as if none of these developments could have led to any doctrinal innovations—which curiously suspends it in time. In order to avoid this pitfall of temporal and geographical essentialism, key contributors to this debate now tacitly seem to agree *not* to define "esotericism," but to take different "approaches" to it instead.⁸²

Wouter Hanegraaff has gone beyond the "quasi-autonomous counterculture of magic and mysticism" of Yates⁸³ as well as the "quasi-essentialist form of thought" of Faivre,⁸⁴ seeing western esotericism as an imaginal construct resulting from a mnemo-historical anti-image polemics that goes back to the origins of monotheism, which he designates the "grand polemical narrative."⁸⁵ He considers esotericism the dimension of the marginalized "other" in the imaginative consciousness of conventional western society, against which (the "establishment" in) occidental culture has been construing its own identity, whereby "the domain of images is a—arguably even *the*—central one."⁸⁶

However, there is a tension between his observation about the study of western esotericism parting with the "simplifications" of the "grand narratives of modernity," with increasing attention for "the complexity of western culture as a pluralistic field of competing religious and ideological identities," on the one hand, and his simplified—arguably, simplistic—"grand polemical narrative," on the other. Indeed, it is no long-

⁷⁷ Antoine Faivre, Karen-Claire Voss, "Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions," *Numen* 42, no. 1 (1995).

⁷⁸ Arthur McCalla, "Antoine Faivre and the Study of Esotericism," *Religion* 31, no. 4 (2001): 443-444.

⁷⁹ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). 48-49.

⁸⁰ Bergunder, "What is Esotericism?," 15.

⁸¹ Henrik Bogdan, "New Perspectives on Western Esotericism," *Nova Religio* 13, no. 3 (2010): 99.

⁸² Egil Asprem, Kennet Granholm, "Introduction," in *Contemporary Esotericism*, ed. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (New York: Routledge, 2012), 23-24.

⁸³ Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, "Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericism between Counterculture and New Complexity," *Aries* 1, no. 1 (2001): 17.

⁸⁴ Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, "The Trouble with Images: Anti-Image Polemics and Western Esotericism," in *Polemical Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and Its Others*, ed. Olav Hammer and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 107-108.

⁸⁵ Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, "Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Academic Research," *Aries* 5, no. 2 (2005). His distinction between the "factual" history of historiography versus the "remembered" history of mnemohistory is derived from Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997/1998). 8-15.

⁸⁶ "... from the [dominant] perspectives both of biblical monotheism and of Greek rationalism, images are 'trouble,' and it [is] my argument here that by exploring why this is the case, we get to the very core of what the Grand Polemical Narrative is all about," Hanegraaff, "The Trouble with Images," 109 & 113.

er convincing to define western esotericism as a quasi-coherent counterculture pitted against conventional “Christian theology, rational philosophy, or empirical science.”⁸⁷ But it is equally unconvincing to define it as the butt of a recurrent quasi-coherent anti-occult polemics across the centuries,⁸⁸ which strikes me as the flip side of the same coin.

I am being admittedly polemical myself, here. Because not only has Hanegraaff abandoned or moderated his grand narrative, the very book in which he has gone on to recover the historical intricacies of its polemics—in an academic context—is anything but simplistic and if anything very convincing.⁸⁹ Taking his cue from James Webb, he still defines western esotericism as a waste-basket of “rejected knowledge,”⁹⁰ but not in terms of a single suspiciously homogenous scheme anymore, but a complex of always changing othering strategies—with significant intellectual and terminological shifts.⁹¹

For us, the most interesting shift he describes is one that took place in the wake of the Enlightenment. With references to Weber, Hanegraaff explains that increasing intellectualization had caused the “disenchantment of the world,” whereby reality lost its “magic” and “mystery.”⁹² Everything came to be perceived as—in principal—within the reach of rational comprehension and control. This, in turn, sparked a reaction towards a “re-enchantment,” among eighteenth and nineteenth-century amateurs⁹³ and early-mid-twentieth-century academics,⁹⁴ who demarcated the boundaries of the field of rejected knowledge that has recently been conceptualized as “western esotericism.”

Egil Asprem has put the problem—rather than the process—of disenchantment at the center of the discussion. Late modern figures from different cultural domains refused the “intellectual sacrifice” that was deemed necessary for the irrational *faith* in anything transcendent of religion, but irreconcilable with the *reason* of natural science,

⁸⁷ Ibid., 108-109.

⁸⁸ Of course, the perceived religious and scientific “fringes” were actually products of the polemic itself.

⁸⁹ I am referring to Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁹⁰ Hanegraaff, “Forbidden Knowledge,” 226; Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*: 221. At the end of his book, he does suggest two unchanging characteristics for “western esotericism,” namely the idea of the presence of the divine in the world and the suprarational possibility of access to a supreme spiritual reality, which can be summarized as the belief in “cosmotheism” and “gnosis,” *ibid.*, 370-372.

⁹¹ He deconstructs different othering strategies, devised at different times, by different actors, like the creation of “heresy” by the “orthodox” Church, “paganism” by “truly Christian” Protestantism, “superstition, magic and occultism” by the “rational” academy or the transition of “superstition” from “religious sin” to “intellectual error,” Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*: 221 & 230. He backs away from grand narratives so much, that his “radical historicism” is now at the risk of running into its very opposite; falling prey to historical diffusion and contingency, Olav Hammer, “Deconstructing ‘Western esotericism’: On Wouter Hanegraaff’s *Esotericism and the Academy*,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013): 242.

⁹² Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*: 253-254.

⁹³ Ibid., 218-222 & 255.

⁹⁴ Ibid., Chapter 4.

either by resorting to a transrational kind of knowledge through an exalted experience of *gnosis* or by expanding reason towards an “open-ended naturalism,” which assumes divine agents can be uncovered, understood and controlled by human agents through rational and empirical means.⁹⁵ Indeed, like Taves, he has forcefully undermined the common fallacy of contrasting a rational elite versus an irrational popular culture and also that of separating the histories of “science,” “religion” and “esotericism,”⁹⁶ whereby discourses surrounding the third could be said to incorporate those of the first and the second. By his own admission, Asprem fits in between Hanegraaff and von Stuckrad.⁹⁷

Kocku von Stuckrad has suggested a different approach from Hanegraaff.⁹⁸ Following a programmatic article⁹⁹ and textbook¹⁰⁰ in 2005, he has defended a discursive approach with increasing confidence. Simply put, von Stuckrad sees “the esoteric” not as a distinct object, but an element of discourse of the twofold pluralism in the history of religion in western culture, which converges on *claims* to a secret higher knowledge and the *means* of making this knowledge available—often via immediate experience.¹⁰¹

Significant for this discursive approach is the socially constructed nature of our (knowledge about) reality. “Discourse analysis, from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, aims at reconstructing the processes of social construction, objectification, communication and legitimization of meaning structures,” in a certain community, at a given time, based on repeatable observations.¹⁰² When applied to western esotericism,

⁹⁵ Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900-1939*, Numen Book Series (Leiden: Brill, 2014). see in particular the Introduction and Part I, e.g. 4-9.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-10. He means Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). See Chapter 1, p. 16.

⁹⁷ Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*: 547.

⁹⁸ This is actually a sensitive subject of discussion. In their reviews of his second book, several scholars have noted that Hanegraaff’s approach is very similar to the discursive perspective of von Stuckrad, see especially “Hanegraaff is a discourse theorist *par excellence*,” Bernd-Christian Otto, “Discourse Theory trumps Discourse Theory: Wouter Hanegraaff’s *Esotericism and the Academy*,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013): 233. I do agree with Hanegraaff that if there is any truth to this claim, which I think there is, he would be a “discourse historian” instead of “discourse theoretician,” Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, “The Power of Ideas: Esotericism, Historicism, and the Limits of Discourse,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013): 254.

⁹⁹ Kocku von Stuckrad, “Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation,” *Religion* 35, no. 2 (2005).

¹⁰⁰ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005).

¹⁰¹ “Put in a nutshell, ‘esoteric discourse in Western culture’ is an analytical framework that helps to identify genealogies of identities in a [twofold] pluralistic competition of knowledge,” between different religions, on the one hand, and different societal domains, on the other hand, Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge*: 59-64; cf. Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*: 9-10. According to his definition, “discourse” stands for “the social organization of tradition, opinion and knowledge,” *ibid.*, 6. For a more elaborate discussion of his (historical) discourse (analysis),” see also Kocku von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion: A Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800-2000* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014). 11.

¹⁰² Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion*: 4 & 11. In a related article, von Stuckrad adds that academic reflections on a discourse are part of that same discourse and thus reflections on these reflections could—should—be included in its analysis, Stuckrad, “Reflections on the Limits of Reflection; Kocku

discourse analysis can be used to look at the underlying structures behind “accepted” and “rejected” knowledge in the history of (religion and science in) western culture.¹⁰³

The importance of this socio-epistemological dimension for the study of western esotericism has been dismissed or at least diminished—to varying degrees—especially by Anglo-American scholars in this field, in favor of a perennialist *sui generis* religion.

One of the principal proponents of this essentialist perspective is late professor Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke. Indeed, “Stuckrad’s analysis essentially proposes a socio-cultural explanation and definition of the esoteric in which all forms of knowledge are socially constructed.” However—and I think it best to quote him at length here—“My own perspective ... is that definitions of ‘the esoteric’ in terms of discourse, social constructions and legitimacy lack a hermeneutic interpretation of *spirit and spirituality as an independent ontological reality*.” What bothers him is that “By seeking to define the esoteric in terms of human behavior and culture, it becomes a reflective cultural category rather than a philosophical or spiritual insight”—feeling or intuition—“which [to him] remains the *essential component* of any claims to real or absolute knowledge.”¹⁰⁴

In a similar “religionist” vein, Arthur Versluis brings a badminton racket to a tennis game, as Hanegraaff would say,¹⁰⁵ by placing western esotericism between magic and mysticism or cosmological versus metaphysical gnosis, defined as “areas of study that by their very nature are not entirely reducible to objects of rationalist discourse,” but “open into dimensions of life that remain partially veiled to us, unless we enter into them for ourselves.” Key to it is “a claim to gnosis or direct spiritual insight,” he says.¹⁰⁶

von Stuckrad, “Discursive Transfers and Reconfigurations: Tracing the Religious and the Esoteric in Secular Culture,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, ed. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (New York: Routledge, 2012), 233. This is also what I have been trying to do in my analyses, throughout this study.

¹⁰³ I bracket religion and science, because the whole point von Stuckrad makes is that “esotericism” in western culture consists of “discursive knots,” which transcend binaries and bring together discursive strands from different social domains into new meaningful constellations, Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion*: 12 & 178-182. See also Stuckrad, “Discursive Transfers and Reconfigurations; Kocku von Stuckrad, “Secular Religion: A Discourse—Historical Approach to Religion in Contemporary Western Europe,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 28, no. 1 (2013). There, he depicts the discursive transfers of esoteric discourse—between “science” and “religion”—as clear cases of “secular religion.” See below.

¹⁰⁴ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). 12-13, italics mine.

¹⁰⁵ “Religionist scholars who approach the study of western esotericism on the basis of spiritual agendas but still wish to be accepted in the academy are like badminton players who wish to be accepted on a tennis court, but refuse to accept the rules of tennis ... My point is that a religionist study of esotericism may be a legitimate intellectual pursuit in principle, but that the academy is based on the rules of a different game,” Hanegraaff, “Beyond the Yates Paradigm,” 29. I tend to agree, though his opponents might ask—in true discursive fashion: who sets these rules (but the *entire* academic community itself)?

¹⁰⁶ Arthur Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007). 5 & 1.

Finally, to mention one more example, Jeffrey Kripal's description of the esoteric discourse at Esalen as a typically American "religion of no religion"—"a kind of mystical secularism"¹⁰⁷—again, has the same religionist ring to it. By his own admission, Kripal gleaned this "enigmatic phrase" from Frederic Spiegelberg (1897-1994), a German professor of comparative religion at Stanford, whose idea(s) had influenced the founders of Esalen.¹⁰⁸ For Spiegelberg, all religions revolve around "realization" or "awakening," as "a direct and potent insight into the Being of Being ... [which] is something that is beyond reason." However, *organized* religion is "a piece of social rather than spiritual machinery," he says.¹⁰⁹ Kripal agrees, claiming that the religion of no religion does not locate itself within any single tradition and even rejects the game of religion as such. This "may look innocent enough, and often, particularly in some of its recent New Age forms, it may often devolve into a kind of anemic anti-intellectualism ... But the potential deconstructive power of such a worldview remains powerfully in place."¹¹⁰

Reminiscent of the Transcendentalist, Traditionalist, Darmstadt and especially Eranos and Esalen scholars, arguably, their religionist approach not merely reiterates, but, in doing so, also intellectually, or even academically, legitimates the "protective strategy" of practitioners,¹¹¹ who shield western esotericism from rational scrutiny, by reducing it to an immediate experience of a higher knowledge beyond reason. As Kripal says, this anti-intellectual strategy was widespread in the cultic milieu of the "New Age."

New Age is often tied to "secularization." Until recently, many scholars believed—"believe" being the key word—that the theory of secularization could account for the changes of religion in modernity, often in terms of decline.¹¹² Some have since revised or retracted their support for it, but one-time advocates include Peter Berger,¹¹³ Bryan Wilson¹¹⁴ and Steve Bruce.¹¹⁵ Despite variations in interpretation, it is safe to say that

¹⁰⁷ Jeffrey John Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). 53.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 8. cf. Frederic Spiegelberg, *The Religion of No Religion* (Stanford: James Ladd Delkin, 1948).

¹⁰⁹ Frederic Spiegelberg, *Living Religions of the World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1957). 10, 17, 36.

¹¹⁰ Kripal, *Esalen*: 9.

¹¹¹ Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). e.g. 233.

¹¹² This refers to a combination of the second and third of Casanova's threefold distinction between the *secular* as a modern category for a (realm of) reality differentiated from "the religious," *secularization* as a socio-historical transformation of "the religious" and "the secular" from early to late modern times and *secularism* as a worldview or an ideology which regards religion either as a superseded historical stage or as an irrational discourse that should be banished from the democratic public domain, Jose Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms," in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Jurgensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55-67.

¹¹³ Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967/1973).

¹¹⁴ Bryan Wilson, "Salvation, Secularization and De-moralization," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Richard K. Fenn (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001).

recurrent aspects of their perceived secularization paradigm are differentiation, rationalization and worldliness,¹¹⁶ which Charles Taylor refers to as a “great disembedding” from an intrinsically religious worldview to one in which religion is merely optional.¹¹⁷

The historical assumptions behind grand narratives of religious decline¹¹⁸ have come into question, for sounding more like an ideology than a theory.¹¹⁹ Some scholars have not just criticized this secularization “theory,” but are even speaking of a religious revival, particularly of the evangelical,¹²⁰ the pentecostal¹²¹ and the New Age variety.¹²²

Combining¹²³ and unpacking¹²⁴ these contradictory observations, Martin Marty concluded scholars have to reckon with an all-pervasive religiousness *and* a persistent secularity. “In adjusting to the complex world around them, people confound the categories of the social scientists, theologians and philosophers: they simply ‘make do’ with a syncretic and characteristically modern blend of attitudes—call it religio-secular.”¹²⁵

¹¹⁵ Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹¹⁶ Olivier Tschannen, "The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, no. 4 (1991): 400-407.

¹¹⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). Chapter 3.

¹¹⁸ After debunking the historical claims behind such narratives—which Stark sums up as “the myth of past piety”—Clark concludes that we cannot argue for a fundamental divide between a “religious” pre-modern and “secular” modern era, Rodney Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P.," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 253 & 255; J. C. D. Clark, "Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a 'Grand Narrative'," *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 01 (2012): 174. Davie even talks about a “resacralization” of contemporary western society—“the alter-ego of secularization”—but she does add that this is as much a shift in perspective as in the reality perceived, Grace Davie, "Resacralization," in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 160. The same observation leads Turner to deny that we are living in a post-secular age. Rather, he reckons that the commodification and globalization of religion have created an environment in which the separation between the “sacred” and “profane” has largely vanished, Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularisation and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). xii.

¹¹⁹ See e.g. William H. Swatos, Kevin J. Christiano, "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999). They explain that reservations had already been voiced in the sixties, but that these were not heard until the eighties, for instance, by Larry Shiner, "The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6 (1967); or Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Toward Desacralizing Secularization Theory," *Social Forces* 65, no. 3 (1987): respectively.

¹²⁰ e.g. John Boardus Watson, Walter H. Scalen, "'Dining with the Devil': The Unique Secularization of American Evangelical Churches," *International Social Science Review* 83, no. 3/4 (2008).

¹²¹ e.g. Joel Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004).

¹²² e.g. Paul Heelas, "Challenging Secularization Theory: The Growth of 'New Age' Spiritualities of Life," *The Hedgehog Review* 8, no. 1-2 (2006).

¹²³ Martin Emil Marty, "Religion in America since Mid-Century," *Daedalus* 111, no. 1 (1982).

¹²⁴ Martin Emil Marty, "Transpositions: American Religion in the 1980s," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 480 (1985); Martin Emil Marty, "Revising the Map of American Religion," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 558 (1998).

¹²⁵ “One of the most striking facts about the religio-secular world we actually inhabit is how consistently most scholars ... have mistaken its mixed composition and underestimated the strength and durability of its religious components, however one characterizes them ... as fundamentalist, mainstream or new-age ‘spiritual,’” Martin Emil Marty, "Our Religio-Secular World," *Daedalus* 132, no. 3 (2003): 42 & 45.

Midway the “invisible religion” of Thomas Luckmann¹²⁶ and the “civil religion” of Robert Bellah,¹²⁷ Marty’s hybrid of “religio-secularity” targets what Paul Tillich has called people’s “ultimate concern.”¹²⁸ In a word, Edward Bailey would add, we are faced with shades of “secular religion,” which he portrays as programs with secular as well as religious “integrating foci,” “intensive concerns” or “commitments” that are “expressed in the whole of life,” but which “no longer [take] the form of a traditional religion.”¹²⁹ He later changed it to “implicit religion,”¹³⁰ because this better allows for the inclusion of phenomena that will likely not be perceived as religious by the people involved.¹³¹

Most relevant for us is that the (sociological) study of religion has moved “from concentrating on institutions such as the church-sect typology to a focus on so-called de-institutionalized or post-institutional forms of popular religion,” variously defined in the past as “invisible,” “implicit” or “New Age” religion and today often referred to as “spirituality,” Bryan Turner says.¹³² Leading scholars in the field of western esotericism have, indeed, also framed such post-institutional spirituality as “secular religion.”

Looking at some of the earlier mentioned specialists, Hanegraaff, for instance, has argued that the contemporary New Age movement is “the clearest manifestation” of “a new phenomenon which may be defined as ‘secular religion’ based on ‘private symbolism.’”¹³³ I will go into this, shortly, but it is important first to spell out the conceptual distinction he makes between New Age religion and the New Age movement.

New Age *religion* consist of currents of romanticism and occultism, as reflected in “the four mirrors of secular thought”—the new natural scientific view of causality,

¹²⁶ “[B]oth the ultimate significance of everyday life and the meaning of extraordinary experiences are located in this ‘different’ and ‘sacred’ domain of reality ... The relations that link the individual to the sacred cosmos are defined by an [visible] institution that claims the exclusive right to interpret matters of ‘ultimate’ significance and pursues, at the same time, various ‘secular’ aims which are determined by the organizational structure of the institution, the relations of conflict or accommodation to other specialized institutions, the vested interests of its body of experts” etc., while “the social basis of the newly emerging [invisible] religion is to be found in the ‘private sphere’ ...” Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967). 58, 73 & 107-114.

¹²⁷ Bellah presented “the American way of life” as a socio-political religion, the ultimate concern of the American people, if you will, Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967).

¹²⁸ “[T]he dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man’s ultimate concern,” which can also be “cognitive, aesthetic, social, political,” Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957). 1-4.

¹²⁹ Edward I. Bailey, “Secular Religion,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* ed. William H. Swatos and Peter Kivisto (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1998), 457.

¹³⁰ Edward I. Bailey, *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society* (Den Haag: Kok Pharos, 1997). Note that he had already decided on the terminological switch during his graduate studies, from Edward I. Bailey, “The Religion of a ‘Secular’ Society” (MA Thesis, Bristol University 1969); to Edward I. Bailey, “Emergent Mandalas: The Implicit Religion of Contemporary Society” (PhD, Bristol University, 1976).

¹³¹ Edward I. Bailey, “Implicit Religion,” *Religion* 40, no. 4 (2010): 272.

¹³² Bryan S. Turner, “Introduction: Mapping the Sociology of Religion,” in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 6.

¹³³ Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, “New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion: A Historian’s Perspective,” *Social Compass* 46, no. 2 (1999): 146.

the new historic-critical comparative study of religions, the new paradigm of evolutionism and the new field of psychology—which emerged at the end of the eighteenth and matured at the start of the twentieth century. Think of Swedenborgianism, Transcendentalism, Mesmerism, Theosophy or New Thought. He finds five “basic tendencies” recurring throughout its source material: first, a (weak) this-worldly attitude; second, a holism, which emphasizes the universal interrelatedness of everything, based on a common source of being; third, an evolutionism, as a creative and teleological process, on an individual, a social as well as a cosmic scale; fourth, a psychologization of religion and a sacralization of psychology, including the notion of a “higher self”; fifth, the expectation of a coming better “new age”—often expressed in terms of the culmination of a mytho-historical “perennial wisdom” tradition that is at the core of all religions.¹³⁴

The New Age *movement* arose more recently, out of the countercultural sixties, in the late seventies. With the “First New Age” of Jenkins and Sutcliffe in mind,¹³⁵ this may be described as the “Second New Age.” It shed its left-wing socio-political rebelliousness, but most of its ultimate concerns stayed the same, during the eighties and nineties. Scholars agree, *the* ultimate concern was a “realization” of “the self.”¹³⁶ Paul Heelas has even called the New Age movement a collection of “self-religions,”¹³⁷ though he nowadays refers to them as “spiritualities of life.”¹³⁸ These self-religions started in North America and Western Europe, but have since spread as a privatized “spirituality” to other industrialized societies across the globe. However, given that its dominant themes had already long been established, Hanegraaff claims, it offered essentially nothing new. The only significant thing that *was* new is that the New Age “cultic milieu,” as Campbell calls it,¹³⁹ became aware of itself as a more or less unified “movement.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Wouter Jacobus Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996/1998). 409-410 & Chapter 15.

¹³⁵ Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs*: Chapter 4; Steven J. Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (London: Routledge, 2003). Part 1.

¹³⁶ Hanegraaff, “New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion,” 153-157; Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*: 144; Peter B. Clarke, *New Religions in Global Perspective: A Study of Religious Change in the Modern World* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006). 7; Partridge, “Truth, Authority and Epistemological Individualism in New Age Thought,” in *Handbook of New Age*, ed. Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 237-243.

¹³⁷ Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996/2003); for a shorter version, Paul Heelas, “Western Europe: Self-Religions,” in *The World's Religions: The Study of Religion, Traditional and New*, ed. Stewart Sutherland and Peter B. Clarke (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹³⁸ Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

¹³⁹ Colin Campbell, “The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization,” in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5, ed. Michael Hill (London: SCM Caterbury Press, 1972).

¹⁴⁰ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*: 10-18 & 521-522. He deliberately applies scare quotes, for to define it as a movement is to obscure the very character of the cultic milieu, he explains,

New Age religion in general and the movement in particular could be seen as a culture criticism on the dualist and materialist reductionism of modern mainstream science and religion. More precisely, New Age ideologies reject the excessive scientific rationalism (reason) and religious—Christian—dogmatism (faith), on the one hand, in favor of an immediate experiential cognition (gnosis), on the other, typically projected onto the Occident and the Orient, respectively¹⁴¹—although, I should add, Hanegraaff denies eastern ideas having had any fundamental influence on western esotericism.¹⁴²

Returning to his statement about New Age as secular religion, he explains that “spiritualities” and “religions” are at the opposite individual and institutional ends in the field of “religion.” Spiritualities may appear in *any*—religious and non-religious—field, actually. Extending his line of reasoning, Hanegraaff submits that a religion or a science cannot do without a spirituality, but a spirituality can do without both—“New Age is the example par excellence of this latter possibility.”¹⁴³ Its rise and perpetuation, even proliferation, prove secularization does not mean religion in general is disappearing, rather, that it is transforming. “The essence of this transformation is that *religions are faced with increasing competition by spiritualities* which are themselves no longer based upon and embedded in an existing religion but become wholly autonomous.”¹⁴⁴

This squares nicely with von Stuckrad’s “twofold pluralism” of modern religion. Much to the surprise of the majority of scholars, he says, religions have indeed far from disappeared. Instead, they have become “strong identity markers both for individuals and for communities,” whose (religious) identities are not just found, but negotiated, through an interaction with alternative religious *and* secular systems of knowledge.¹⁴⁵

In the entanglement of religious and secular systems of contemporary New Age, for instance, scholars and scientists are resorting to metaphysical terminology in their claims about the nature of reality and religious practitioners are marshaling scientific methods and theories to legitimate their metaphysical claims.¹⁴⁶ Through this ongoing

which by definition, is not organized and transcends specific NRMs, *ibid.*, 17. Many scholars of modern religion agree it is more of a “countercultural Zeitgeist” than “(new religious) movement,” but that the term “New Age movement” still retains emic and etic currency, e.g. George D. Chryssides, “Defining the New Age,” in *Handbook of New Age*, ed. Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 19-23.

¹⁴¹ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*: 515-520.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 517, for a detailed denial re Theosophy and American Transcendentalism, 448-455, 455-462.

¹⁴³ For a definition of each, see also Hanegraaff, “New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion,” 147 & 151.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 151, italics mine.

¹⁴⁵ Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge*: 7, 16 & 18-22.

¹⁴⁶ Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion*: Chapter 8. In her study of contemporary metaphysical religious practitioners—“metaphysicals”—Courtney Bender brings up this same “entanglement” between religious and secular as well as academic and non-academic fields and actors underlying “spirituality,”

“religionization of science” or “scientification of religion”¹⁴⁷—defined as “the discursive organization of knowledge about religion in secular environments”—their spiritualities, if you will,¹⁴⁸ are fitting religiosity in a new framework.¹⁴⁹ According to von Stuckrad, this competition between and creation of new ways of acquiring knowledge about the world is crucial for understanding discourses on the esoteric within western culture.¹⁵⁰

It is crucial for understanding the intellectualization of anti-intellectual claims within these discourses as well. Arguably, even more so than during the First New Age, at the time of the Second New Age, increasing interaction between religious and secular fields, at once, encouraged an amalgamation of methods and theories from different traditions and disciplines from different times and places, but also paradoxically challenged every new religious movement to differentiate itself from those same traditions and disciplines as well as from every other new religious movement, past and present, that were doing the same, in order to establish and sustain its own “unique” identity.¹⁵¹

The *way* new religions differentiate themselves affects their position in society. That is, the (lack of) tension with their social surroundings—what David Bromley calls the degree of “congruence” or “alignment”¹⁵²—is important. The degree to which they accept or reject the dominant culture of their host society, in turn, largely determines the degree to which it rejects or accepts them.¹⁵³ This reminds of what Benton Johnson once argued—in the early stages of the “church-sect” debate—that a church is a religious group that accepts the social environment in which it exists and that a sect or cult is a

Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010). 5-7, 12-18, 183.

¹⁴⁷ Stuckrad, “Secular Religion,” 6-7. Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). Chapter 5; James R. Lewis, “Science and the New Age,” in *Handbook of New Age*, ed. Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

¹⁴⁸ The term “spirituality” is often mentioned, in this context, though I agree with von Stuckrad that the distinction between (pre) modern “religion” and (post) modern “spirituality” is problematic, Stuckrad, “Secular Religion,” 6. Like him, I highly recommend Ulrike Popp-Baier, “From Religion to Spirituality: Megatrend in Contemporary Society or Methodological Artefact? A Contribution to the Secularization Debate from Psychology of Religion,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 3, no. 1 (2010). She questions if there is a “spiritual turn,” beyond simply the rise of a more individualist—“self-controlled”—religiosity.

¹⁴⁹ Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion: 179-180*. Elsewhere, he lists four perspectives from which this new framework can be seen: next to the *scientification of religion*, there is a *communitarization* in which group identities are grounded on the idea of “being individual,” an *aestheticization* that reduces religion to a (sensory) experience as well as a process of *public activation* that is creating new societal arenas which challenge the constitutional state-church separation, Stuckrad, “Secular Religion,” 4-10.

¹⁵⁰ Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge: 22-23*.

¹⁵¹ Krech similarly talks about (ex)changes of traditions, but only through *religious* contact, in general terms, Volkhard Krech, “Religious Contacts in Past and Present Times,” *Religion* 42, no. 2 (2012): 199.

¹⁵² David G. Bromley, “Perspective: Whither New Religions Studies?,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 8, no. 2 (2004): 94.

¹⁵³ This ties in well with the distinction Wallis makes between “world-rejecting,” “world-accomodating” and “world-accepting” new religions, Roy Wallis, “Three Types of New Religious Movement,” in *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

religious group that rejects the social environment in which it exists.¹⁵⁴ Gordon Melton later turned this into a distinction between established “churches,” “sects,” established religions from foreign cultures referred to as “ethnic religions” and “new religions.”¹⁵⁵

Building on Johnson, but with revisions based on decades of research into new religions, Bromley and Melton recently suggested a new fourfold typology of religious groups. Briefly, “dominant traditions” are most aligned with other dominant religious and secular institutions; “sectarian traditions” share a claim to a dominant religious tradition, but challenge one or more aspects of its doctrine, ritual or organization and leadership; “alternative traditions” present themselves as legitimate representatives of non-dominant traditions, foreign and domestic; “emergent traditions” are rejected as representatives of a dominant or an alternative tradition or as heralds of a new one.¹⁵⁶ These types of religious traditions are socio-culturally “aligned” in decreasing order.

So, what were once seen as “cults” and later as “new religions” or “new religious movements” are now viewed in even more neutral—sanitized—terms, as weakly aligned “emergent traditions.” What is interesting is that Robert Ellwood, whom I mentioned earlier—one of the first scholars to take new religions seriously—had already replaced “cult” with “emergent religion,” as early as in the late seventies.¹⁵⁷ This is more relevant than it seems, which will become clear, as we return to Merrell-Wolff and his Assembly.

In 1930, Franklin and Sherifa got a special permit from the Californian office of the US Forest Service—for an annual fee of twenty-five dollars—to use a five-acre plot of land, in the hills of Lone Pine, “for the purpose of [constructing and] conducting a summer school.” Its build would begin within three months, finish within six years and then serve for occupation for at least three months a year¹⁵⁸—none of which happened.

In 1963, Franklin and Gertrude had received word from the local forester about a proposed expansion of the High Sierra wilderness.¹⁵⁹ If the Act passed Congress, that would mean their “summer school”—the Ashram—would be destroyed. In the following months, Merrell-Wolff wrote to several government officials, explaining his case.

¹⁵⁴ Benton Johnson, “On Church and Sect,” *American Sociological Review* 28, no. 4 (1963): 542.

¹⁵⁵ John Gordon Melton, “Perspective: Toward a Definition of ‘New Religion,’” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 8, no. 1 (2004): 79-81.

¹⁵⁶ David G. Bromley, John Gordon Melton, “Reconceptualizing Types of Religious Organization: Dominant, Sectarian, Alternative, and Emergent Tradition Groups,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 15, no. 3 (2012): 6-7.

¹⁵⁷ Robert S. Ellwood, *Alternative Alters: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). 20; Robert S. Ellwood, “The Several Meanings of ‘Cult,’” *Thought* 61, no. 241 (1986). Granted, emergent “tradition” is better; it allows for religious *and* secular influences.

¹⁵⁸ US Forest Service, “Special Use Permit,” (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (73), 1930), 1-4.

¹⁵⁹ US Forest Service, “Public Notice: Proposed Establishment of High Sierra Wilderness Area,” (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (73), 1963), 13.

“I am one of the founders of a philosophical group,” he wrote his senator. “In order to have a quiet retreat for our summer discussion, we built a lodge about 3000 yards up the canyon bordering our property ... [It] is the very heart of our group.” They had not kept and occupied it as much as they had intended, but “To destroy it would destroy the purpose of years of effort on the part of many people. We could never do it, Senator.” Similar pleas went out to his local ranger, congressman and secretary of agriculture.¹⁶⁰

In 1980, the building was still standing, but again in danger. This time Doroethy Briggs would take up the pen. “It has come to our attention that the Parks and Services branch in Lone Pine ... has once again a plan to dynamite a religiously oriented building in the mountains near Lone Pine,” she starts her letter to them. Note that, unlike her step-grandfather, she does not talk about the “summer school” of a “philosophical group,” but about a “non-denominational ‘Ashrama’ building [from] the early 1930s.” She requests a delay, as her group prepares a complete history of the building, so that “it might become classified as a historical monument.”¹⁶¹ The first draft soon followed.

In this first draft of the “History of the Ashrama,” Briggs portrays “Dr. Wolff” as a “lecturer” around whom “groups” of people who were interested in his “teaching” had formed, during his tours across the United States. She elaborates how “Franklin and Sarah (Sherifa) Wolff, filled with a mutual dedication toward each other and toward a spiritual ideal felt deep within,” had hiked up to Mount Whitney in 1928, since “They believed ... the most spiritual place is the highest place.” The beauty and serenity of the location inspired them to build a school there—“in the form of a balanced cross, signifying equilibrium!”—where these scattered groups could convene, once or twice a year. Over time, its name changed “from Summer Camp to Rama Sangha School to Ashrama,” but it is also known as “the Monastery” among locals and called “the Stone House” by hikers. What the couple had envisioned was “a place of religious or spiritual education and worship, which would be non-denominational and non-sectarian,” she writes. Today, visitors still “seem to feel the spiritual presence” at this “Great Space.”¹⁶²

In 1983, Ron Leonard took over. While writing his dissertation on Merrell-Wolff, he also tended to the nomination form and separate list of questions from the National Register of Historic Places. Since their criteria for evaluation stress a site or structure’s

¹⁶⁰ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Letters to Government Officials,” (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (73), 1963), 8-12 & 14-17. One of his letters is signed as “(Dr.) Franklin Wolff for the Assembly of Man.”

¹⁶¹ Doroethy Briggs, “Letters to Government Officials,” (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (73), 1980), 22.

¹⁶² Doroethy Briggs, “History of the Ashrama,” (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (73), 1980), 23-24.

significant contribution to “the broad patterns of our history,” relating key people and places,¹⁶³ Leonard would take a different tack—with more socio-historical awareness.

In the second draft of the “History of the Ashrama”—integrated throughout the nomination form—Leonard sees Merrell-Wolff the way he had and would want to be seen himself, as a lecturer of philosophical workshops and discussion groups, “whose contribution to the school of Idealism distinguished him as an important innovator in modern American philosophical thought,” trying to “strike an equilibrium between the conflicting forces of science and religion.”¹⁶⁴ He follows in the footsteps of American Transcendentalists like Emerson, who had taken his cue again from Kant and Hegel.¹⁶⁵ But “Dr. Wolff [also] investigated Theosophy, Śāṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta, Buddhism and Aurobindo,” he adds. As a result of this double exposure to East and West, mixed with his own “penetration into non-dualistic consciousness” or “introception,” Merrell-Wolff came up with his “Noetic Thesis,”¹⁶⁶ as Leonard calls it—which I return to later.

The last section is crucial for us. “In order to view the Ashram and its founder in proper historic perspective, it is also necessary to examine the concept of religious ‘revitalization movements’ ... and ... the theme of emergent/excurses religion,” notably those influenced by eastern traditions, after the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, Leonard writes. He goes on to say that the term “emergent religion,” derived from Ellwood, fits the Transcendental Club of Emerson, Theosophical Society of Blavatsky, Vedānta Society of Vivekananda, western Zen of Suzuki and more recent imports such as the Self-Realization Fellowship of Paramahansa Yogananda, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness of Swami Bhakti Vedanta and the Transcendental Meditation movement of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The crux is that, for Leonard, the Assembly of Man is neither a “religion” nor a “cult,” but “a continuation of the pattern of eastern-influenced emergent/excurses religions in American history.” And its balanced-cross Ashram embodies their view of a harmony of “all thoughts, religions, philosophies.”¹⁶⁷

The building was preserved, but its builder passed away. Around midnight, on 4 October 1985, Merrell-Wolff died quietly in his sleep, at the Southern Inyo Hospital,

¹⁶³ US Forest Service, “Letter to Ron Leonard,” (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (73), 1983), 28-38.

¹⁶⁴ Ron Leonard, “National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Final),” (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (73), 1983), 52-54. He omits the part about him being “an instructor in spiritual philosophy and/or spokesperson and head of the Assembly of Man,” Ron Leonard, “National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Draft),” (Letters: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Archive (73), 1983), 39.

¹⁶⁵ Leonard, “Nomination Form,” 52-53.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 55-58. For his historical overview, he draws heavily from Ellwood, *Alternative Alters*; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

at ninety-eight—exactly forty-nine years after his realization at forty-nine. His corpse was carried home, where family and friends took turns reading out loud passages for him from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, with Brahms playing in the background.¹⁶⁸

His legacy passed on to his family, friends and followers. They have preserved—rather, shaped—it since, as Merrell-Wolff's life and teaching became subjected to a process of “routinization of charismatic authority,” as Max Weber calls it. For Weber, charisma entails a “quality of an individual personality by virtue of which [s/]he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities ... regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a ‘leader.’”¹⁶⁹

Somewhere between a “prophet” and a “philosopher,”¹⁷⁰ the memory of Merrell-Wolff as a charismatic leader of an emergent religion was made into that of a modern “master.”¹⁷¹ He is also described as such, by admirers and academics alike. In a letter, fellow mystic William Lloyd salutes Franklin as “the Sage of San Fernando ... more like my ideal of a master than any other man I ever met ...”¹⁷² Scholars Dennis McCort and Arthur Versluis call him an “unknown American master”¹⁷³ and “Emersonian sage”¹⁷⁴ and student Joseph Rowe thinks back to him as “the Gnostic of Mount Whitney.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ This was done at his request, Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” 27.1.

¹⁶⁹ Karl Emil Maximilian Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff et al., 1921-1922 original German ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). 241. According to a recent study by John Potts, “The contemporary meaning of charisma is broadly understood as a special innate quality that sets certain individuals apart and draws others to them.” Despite a shift from a communal “gift of grace” in Paul to an individual “giftedness” in Weber, there is still a link between then and now, in that its “hazy semantic status” retained something of its original “mystical-religious dimension,” John Potts, *A History of Charisma* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009). 2 & 215-217. I agree, with the Weberian addition that it is an *ascribed* dimension. What is key is how the charismatic leader is seen by his “followers” or “disciples,” Weber, *Economy and Society*: 242.

¹⁷⁰ For Weber, a prophet is “a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment,” Weber, *Economy and Society*: 439. The term has connotations that do not fit Merrell-Wolff, but his followers *do* see him as someone who showed others a way to liberation by example, cf. *Ibid.*, 447-448. A philosopher could be seen as a secular priest, who lays claim to authority by virtue of his service to some non-religious (post-Kantian) tradition, *ibid.*, 440.

¹⁷¹ It seems that religious veneration of individuals addressed as (synonyms of) “master” arose around the turn of the last century, notably through the influence of Theosophy, Almut-Barbara Renger, “The Emergence of the Master around 1900: Religious Borrowings and Social Theory,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 5, no. 1 (2012): 2 & 9. In Wachian terms, prior to 1936, Merrell-Wolff had been respected as a (replaceable) “teacher” who transmitted an ideology to his students, while, after 1936, he was revered as a (irreplaceable) “master” who embodied an ideology for his disciples, Joachim Wach, “Master and Disciple: Two Religio-Sociological Studies,” *The Journal of Religion* 42, no. 1 (1924/1962): mainly 1-2.

¹⁷² John William Lloyd, “Review of the *Pathways*,” (Letters: The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship (19), 1937), 1 & 3.

¹⁷³ Dennis McCort, *Going beyond the Pairs: The Coincidence of Opposites in German Romanticism, Zen and Deconstruction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001). 134.

¹⁷⁴ Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism*: 159.

¹⁷⁵ Joseph Rowe, “The Gnostic of Mount Whitney: A Personal and Philosophical Memoir of Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” (Phoenix: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 2012).

In its pure form, “charismatic” authority resists routinization. This means that a charismatic community exists *in statu nascendi*, which becomes visible at the time of the death or disappearance of the leader(s), when the problem of succession arises. At this point, the community either dissolves or stabilizes by resorting to “traditional” or “rational” authority or a combination of both. This can take several forms. Weber lists six typical solutions. One, there is a *search* for a new charismatic leader, on the basis of clearly established qualities. Two, the successor is selected through a technique of *revelation*. Three, he or she is chosen by *designation of the original leader*. Four, they are chosen by *designation of the “staff.”* Five, charisma is believed to be transmitted by way of *heredity*. Six, it is deemed able to be bestowed upon another through *ritual*.¹⁷⁶

Here, we find a “staff” of guardians more than successors, whose status is partly legitimated by their appointment as descendent by the original leader, who allegedly “passed on the mantle” to them, in a ritual, as far as Briggs goes, but largely on hereditary grounds, as far as her family is concerned, who have “rationally bureaucratized” Merrell-Wolff’s legacy in the form of a Fellowship.¹⁷⁷ Since 1987, first solely by Briggs and Leonard, later assisted by other family members and former students, the Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship has seen it as its task to preserve the life and teaching of the Lone Pine sage for posterity, in the way he would have wanted them to be remembered.

As we will see, in the following sections, an important part of this preservation process has been a further rationalization of Merrell-Wolff’s own intellectualization of the three axioms that followed from his anti-intellectual realization. As such, strange as this might sound, within our Weberian context, his friends and followers and other apologetic interpreters could actually be regarded as his “theologians”—no matter how philosophically or psychologically sophisticated their religious rationalizations may be.

“All theology is the intellectual *rationalization* of sacred religious beliefs,” says Weber, whereby every theology adds certain assumptions to justify its existence. Their sense and scope may vary, but they all share the basic premises that reality must have meaning and that (specific) revelations or realizations grant access to that meaning.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Weber, *Economy and Society*: 241-249, for rational or traditional authority, see 217-226 & 226-231.

¹⁷⁷ Weber assigns these traits to “the spirit” of rational bureaucracy: “(1) Formalism, which is promoted by all the interests which are concerned with the security of their own personal situation, whatever this may consist in ... (2) There is another tendency, which is apparently, and in part genuinely, in contradiction to the above. It is the tendency of officials to treat their official function from what is substantially a utilitarian point of view in the interest of the welfare of those under their authority,” *ibid.*, 226.

¹⁷⁸ Weber says every theology presumes “the world” must have meaning, Karl Emil Maximilian Weber, “Science as Vocation,” in *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 28-29.

The truth or value of these revelations or realizations themselves are not—cannot be—rationally explained. In Weber's own words, they require a "sacrifice of the intellect," in that they "simply must be believed in."¹⁷⁹ They form the extra-logical foundation of systematic theological explanations of reality, as Einstein would say. Though, for him, most theologies would only count as "correct," rather than "true," considering they do coherently follow from their axioms, but do not reflect or predict shared experiences.

Returning to Weber, our modern age is marked by a disenchantment of reality. As he famously argued, particularly in modern western cultures, a growing process of intellectualization or rationalization—fed by the firm conviction that we are not ruled by magical forces, but can, in principle, "*control everything by means of calculation*"—has resulted in the evaporation of ultimate values from public life, which has sparked an "inner need" among intellectuals again, to search for a higher meaning of reality.¹⁸⁰

As Kalberg explains, theologies are undergirded and given their momentum by this "metaphysical need" and "irrepressible quest" of thinkers to transcend the routine and random occurrences of everyday life with a coherent meaning.¹⁸¹ Some measure of rationalization takes place at every levels of society, Ahmad Sadri adds, but members of the lower strata generally search for salvation from their life, whereas those of the higher strata are looking to give meaning to and legitimation for their life.¹⁸² Limiting ourselves to these upper classes, Randall Collins says that Weber takes their religious rationalizations as attempts to reconcile the tensions and conflicts that emerge within and between different worldviews, to attain intellectual and behavioral consistency.¹⁸³

Collins also underscores that, for Weber, "*anything* at all can be rationalized," including claims to mystical experiences that are said to surpass reason or intellect.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Weber, *Economy and Society*: 567; Weber, "Science as Vocation," 29.

¹⁸⁰ Weber, "Science as Vocation," 12-13 & 30. Kalberg sees four types of rationality in Weber's work: practical rationality judges worldly activity in relation to pragmatic and egoistic interests; theoretical rationality concerns the mastery of reality through the construction of concepts; substantive rationality judges actions in relation to a past, present or potential value postulate; and formal rationality refers to the bureaucratic control of reality through laws, rules and regulations, Stephen Kalberg, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History," *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 5 (1980): 1151-1159. Collins only observes three forms of rationality, that is: rationality as causal calculations between means and end; rationality as a force of change in actively mastering the world instead of passively adapting to it; and rationality in the sense of systemization or bureaucratization for the sake of regularity and predictability, Randall Collins, *Max Weber: A Skeleton Key* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1986). 62-63. Note that Collins omits the very type of rationality Kalberg thinks to have been the most long-term effective form of rationality, according to Weber, that is, substantive or value-oriented rationality, Kalberg, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality," 1165 & 1170.

¹⁸¹ Kalberg, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality," 1153.

¹⁸² Ahmad Sadri, *Max Weber's Sociology of Intellectuals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). 58 & 60; Weber, *Economy and Society*: 486, 491, 505.

¹⁸³ Collins, *Max Weber*: 70, 74, 77-78.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 71, italics mine.

In fact, as Weber himself acutely observed, in late modern cultures, even “the realm of the irrational is what is now made conscious and subjected to intellectual scrutiny.”¹⁸⁵

This brings us back to Merrell-Wolff’s legacy. After his “mystic illumination,” as Weber would call it,¹⁸⁶ Merrell-Wolff rationalized his realization about there being only consciousness into three axiomatic claims: that, one, consciousness is original, self-existent and constitutive of all things; two, the subject always transcends the object of consciousness and; three, there is a third faculty or function of cognition that gives immediate access to this higher knowledge. As we shall see, these premises have been developed philosophically and psychologically by posterity into a perennialist theology.

PHILOSOPHY

The spirit of philosophy arises from the depth of our very nature as seekers of knowledge and understanding concerning the totality of our experience. Philosophy is the most comprehensive and fundamental inquiry into human existence, because not only does it attempt to determine whatever is real, but also the grounds for such knowledge. Perhaps the most intriguing domain for investigation is mysticism—not simply as subject matter, but as a mode of apprehending reality—for mystical experience reveals extraordinary human potential. Enlightened mystics often manifest great illumination, wisdom and compassion as well as paranormal powers. More to the point, many claim an immediate grasp of reality—a way of knowing that transcends the senses and the intellect. Mysticism thus challenges the dominant worldview of rational materialism—in all of its various forms—but must not be dismissed merely because of its apparent incompatibility. It also opposes dogmatic religion, so our first step in its authentic understanding is to consider what mystics themselves say about their experiences ... Franklin Merrell-Wolff [is] a twentieth-century mystic and philosopher, who provides a clear and penetrating account of the nature and value of mystical experience—to a degree that I have yet to find elsewhere.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Weber, "Science as Vocation," 16. What seems often forgotten, though, is that whatever is perceived as “irrational” is not intrinsically so, but follows from the incompatibility with the irrational premises upon which one’s own “rational” worldview is built, Kalberg, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality," 1156.

¹⁸⁶ Weber, *Economy and Society*: 544-551.

¹⁸⁷ Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* ix. This is the opening passage of his book. He concludes his book saying that mysticism is “an inexhaustible source of renewal for philosophy,” best symbolized by the serpent that bites its own tail—“Oroboros,” *ibid.*, 290-292.

This is the opening passages of Ron Leonard's *Transcendental Philosophy of Franklin Merrell-Wolff*, which started as a doctoral dissertation in the early-mid-eighties and finally found its way to the press in the late-nineties. Though we will see that scholars and scientists from a range of disciplines have written about our lead figure—or at least mentioned or quoted him in passing—this remains the only thorough academic study that has been conducted on the life and teaching of this charismatic character to date.

The strength of this study is that it cuts through Merrell-Wolff's verbiage, does away with the turgid turn of phrases of his antiquated language and delivers his ideas in a more accessible style. I question Leonard's—credulous use of—sources,¹⁸⁸ but the material covered is impressive. And even if he barely digs into biographical events, let alone their socio-historical background,¹⁸⁹ as a basic introduction to the (analytical) *philosophical* parts of Merrell-Wolff's *published later theory*, I would recommend it.

But there also lies its greatest weakness. Though he acknowledges that Merrell-Wolff blurred the borders between philosophy and religion, with the occasional pinch of mathematics thrown into the mix,¹⁹⁰ Leonard looks at his later philosophical theory—with very little, if any, further socio-historical sensibility—even though Merrell-Wolff deliberately drew on methods and theories from psychology and religion as much as from philosophy, with many significant ideological dis/continuities throughout his life.

¹⁸⁸ For instance, Leonard wants to relate Merrell-Wolff's "central propositions" to "relevant traditions," which, to him, means the analytic, phenomenological and esoteric traditions, in the West, and Vedānta and Buddhist traditions, in the East, *ibid.*, x. Regarding the West, knowing Merrell-Wolff had a "nineteenth-century orientation to the history of philosophy," *continental* philosophy at that, it is strange he looks at mid-late twentieth-century analytic philosophy so much, *ibid.*, x & 8. In his defense, he does briefly touch upon continental currents like phenomenology (Husserl), critical philosophy (Kant) and existentialism (Sartre), *ibid.*, e.g. 161-172, 261-274, 211-217. Regarding the East, there is a distinction between oriental and orientalist thought. Granted, when Leonard was writing his dissertation, in the mid-eighties, Said's paradigm-shifting study had only just been published and other revisionist studies on modern Hinduism and Buddhism were years away from being written or translated, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978/1979); for Hinduism e.g. Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Paul Hacker, *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); for Buddhism e.g. Bernard Fauré, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993); Robert H. Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42, no. 3 (1995); for both e.g. Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (Oxon: Routledge, 1999). Nevertheless, most of it had become available, when Leonard revised it for publication. He also rarely questions the literature Merrell-Wolff used, in light of recent research, swallowing whole the cultural caricature of the "mystic East" versus "rational West" of Northrop as well as the Schopenhauerian and Christian tendency of Deussen's interpretation of Śāṅkara, Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* 37 & 297. What is more, his own rendition of the classic Vedānta of Śāṅkara itself relies on Nikhilananda, whose modernized "Neo-Vedānta" belongs to the nineteenth-century reform movement that significantly transformed its own tradition, *ibid.*, 31-33.

¹⁸⁹ Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* Chapter 1 & 2. Two chapters of biographical facts might seem substantial, but it is fair to say that his short discussions never actually scratch below the surface.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, respectively, 93-94, 102 & 24-26, 151-155.

Actually, the ideological continuities outweigh the discontinuities. Condensed to a single sentence, before and after his “realization,” Merrell-Wolff said that there is a higher faculty or function of cognition, beyond perception and conception, based on (his verification of) the same eastern and western religio-philosophical texts, that its *gnosis* can be accessed under the right condition of a meta-psychological self-enquiry, whereby the subject to and object of knowledge are transcended in a state of non-dual consciousness, and that this shows the self and the divine are essentially one. And yet, like Merrell-Wolff himself, Leonard splits his life and teaching into an “unenlightened” and “enlightened” half—pre and post-1936—scraps the former as irrelevant for a proper grasp of his philosophy and selectively picks parts of the latter, “to show how mystical Realization advances the development of a truly comprehensive worldview.”¹⁹¹

This worldview is based on what he calls “the Noetic Thesis.” The noetic thesis states that “mystical knowledge is a source of knowledge,” not derived from sensation or conception. It has a weak and a strong version. The weak version maintains that, in principle, it is *possible* for people to take away noetic value from mystical experiences. The strong version asserts that it not only *is possible*, but people actually *have taken* away noetic value from mystical experiences, as shown by Merrell-Wolff’s example.¹⁹²

Perennialism versus Constructivism

Leonard says that Merrell-Wolff did not try to prove the possibility of the noetic thesis so much as disprove its impossibility.¹⁹³ How can it be proven, he reckons, if its essence is ineffable? “Mysticism is difficult to comprehend due in part to the pervasive difficulty of trying to say something meaningful about an awareness that mystics universally allege is ineffable,” which has led them “[to] employ paradoxical locutions in their account of the mystical.”¹⁹⁴ Building on Carl Jung,¹⁹⁵ Joseph Campbell,¹⁹⁶ Mircea

¹⁹¹ Ibid., x. “There’s a sharp distinction between Wolff’s writings before and after his Enlightenment ... His early works ... lack the inspiration and sense of authority so obviously manifest subsequent to his breakthrough,” *ibid.*, 295, endnote 23. Leonard listened to Merrell-Wolff’s talks and read his early and unpublished writings, but stresses his later published (philosophical) texts, which bypasses his early published work and early and later unpublished work, which is to leave out two-thirds of his oeuvre. Within this limited selection of source material, he ignores crucial *tacit* methodological and theoretical influences. This permits him, for instance, to gloss over Theosophy as a minor influence. “Theosophy is the most pervasive and extensive personal influence in Wolff’s life, particularly through his long association with Sherifa. This effect notwithstanding, it is the least germane of his philosophical references, meriting only a single specific footnote [to Blavatsky] in his later books,” *ibid.*, 19, cf. 297 endnote 14. But this *only* holds true, if one separates his personal from his philosophical influences, his informal (early and unpublished) from his formal (books and article) texts and talks and his implicit from his explicit references. Otherwise, as I have shown, one finds his oeuvre riddled with Theosophical idea(l)s.

¹⁹² Ibid., Chapter 8, 233-237.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 236-237, 238, 274-279 & 281-282; cf. Merrell-Wolff, “Pathways through to Space,” 107-116.

¹⁹⁴ Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* 107 & 126.

Eliade¹⁹⁷ and more recent scholars like Walter Terence Stace,¹⁹⁸ who builds again on William James,¹⁹⁹ Richard Bucke²⁰⁰ and D.T. Suzuki,²⁰¹ next to Merrell-Wolff, Leonard deems himself “justified, at least, on pragmatic grounds, in accepting the notion of an essential core of mystical experience, which the mystic truly claims is ineffable ...”²⁰²

Despite this same essential core, the published work of Merrell-Wolff qualifies as “a *unique* contribution to modern philosophy and a source of inspiration to many.” The fact that it is “grounded explicitly on his personal realizations” should “justify the inclusion of Introceptualism within the corpus of western *philosophy*,” he thinks, for “Although there is no possibility of providing coercive proof, and the strict authority of Realization extends only to the individual mystics, it is reasonable to accept Introception as a third cognitive function.”²⁰³ This is wishful thinking more than anything.

I would like to agree with Leonard, that Franklin Merrell-Wolff is more than a marginal figure in the history of western thought, who made a real unique contribution, but he is not and did not. That is *not* to say his life and teaching are not fascinating in their own right, that he did not have meaningful experiences that transformed his life, which, in turn, inspired and might continue to inspire the lives of others. The point is that his is a very typical case of a charismatic leader of a small-scale emergent tradition, whose methods and theories resemble the secular-religious ideology of the “average” twentieth-century new (age) religion in the West. Granted, the intellectual breadth and depth of his oeuvre exceeds that of many of his peers. And yet, the methods used for elaborating and legitimating theories based on a supposedly immediate—mystical—experience of a pure non-dual consciousness beyond the senses and the intellect that are said to provide access to a higher (knowledge about) reality stays virtually the same across their—particularly eastern-inspired—modern western esoteric “spiritualities.”

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 134-135; Jung, *Psychological Types*.

¹⁹⁶ Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* 136; Joseph John Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

¹⁹⁷ Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* 136; Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, 1952 original French ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹⁹⁸ Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* 78-83; W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: MacMillan, 1960/1961).

¹⁹⁹ Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* 79-80; William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: New American Library, 1902).

²⁰⁰ Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* 79-80; Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1901/1969).

²⁰¹ Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* 79-80; Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki* (New York: Doubleday, 1956).

²⁰² Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* 156.

²⁰³ Ibid., 283-284 & 282, italics mine. It is only “reasonable,” if one is *already* positively predisposed to accepting (the possibility of) non-ordinary kinds of knowledge, since his arguments are no more than well-documented claims. Having said that, I do agree such claims still deserve scholarly attention.

Against the background of everything we have discussed so far, if we scrutinize his statements above—about modern seekers turning to mystical philosophy based on psychological self-enquiry rather than to the rationalism of materialist science or the dogmatism of institutional religion to realize their hidden human potential, in search of a higher knowledge about reality, through immediate experience—it is safe to conclude that Leonard’s study is not a critical reflection *on*, but an apologetic reflection *of*, the very socio-historical development within late-modern American metaphysical religious discourse of which Franklin Merrell-Wolff is a perfect example. It is part of increasing reasoned flights beyond reason, due to a rise (in awareness) of similar spiritual teachers and movements with similar ideologies, which requires them to intellectualize their anti-intellectual claims, to create and sustain what they see as their own unique identity.

Blurring the lines between emic legitimation and etic investigation, Leonard has shaped the memory of Merrell-Wolff into that of a psychologically prone philosopher, who added an original—mystical but logically sound—touch to a perennial philosophy, which set the tone for every other scholarly take on his life and teaching. Four typical claims of their essential or common core perspective is that, one, the phenomenal world is the manifestation of a noumenal ground; two, human beings are capable of gaining a direct knowledge of that transcendental reality; since, three, they do not only have an ego or a lower self, but also a higher self, which is of the same or similar nature as that transcendental ground; four, realizing this identity is life’s true end or purpose.²⁰⁴ But before we turn to the perennialists, let us go back a few years and start with Steven Katz.

In 1978, Katz had shaken up the religious studies scene with his edited volume *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*. This seminal book spearheaded a constructive and constructivist critique on the common core theory of those very scholars Leonard relies on—say, William James, Rudolph Otto, Aldous Huxley, Joseph Campbell, Alan Watts and Mircea Eliade, but also Walter Stace, Robert Charles Zaehner and Roderick Ninian Smart—who had tried to find a satisfactory solution to the “existential crises of twentieth-century living” by appealing to “an intuitively available transcendental realm which was not susceptible to more pedestrian theological or philosophical criticism.”²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Jonathan Shear, "On Mystical Experiences as Support for the Perennial Philosophy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 2 (1994): 319-320.

²⁰⁵ “The cure for the *anomie* created by our revolutionary contemporary awareness of man’s finitude, mortality and freedom was now sought in a renewed, immediate, non-critical, largely non-cognitive, contact with the mystical depths of Being itself (whatever that is!),” hoping to find some “universal spiritual resource that could restore meaning to contemporary life in the face of the cultural crises of modern society, marked out perhaps most clearly in the decline of the power of organized, positive

In his own contribution entitled “Language, Epistemology and Mysticism,” Katz argues “There is no *philosophia perennis*,” since “*there are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences.*”²⁰⁶ The interpretation of every experience—religious or otherwise—takes place before, during and after the event itself and is mediated by the symbols of the socio-historical setting in which it occurs.²⁰⁷ As such, the social constructivist criticism on perennial philosophy is actually “a plea for a recognition of religious differences.”²⁰⁸

This criticism could be further deconstructed into three related points.²⁰⁹ First, perennialists claim to study religious experiences, but they really only have access to—usually textual—reports that are said to describe them. And “no scholar can get behind the putative autobiographical fragment to the putative ‘pure experience.’”²¹⁰ Second, perennialists claim that such reports from different mystics from different times and places submit the same message, but they can only accommodate them to their biased commitment to a common core by dragging them out of their context. And then, still, “they treat as synonymous mystical statements which at least on the surface are clearly dissimilar.”²¹¹ Third, perennialists claim to see the same—a-cultural and a-historical—religious experience in their reports, but ignore the roots of their “religious experience.” “Both *religious* and *experience* are relatively recent concepts, whose provenance is in the modern West.”²¹² Therefore, they cannot anachronistically and chauvinistically be projected onto “religious experiences” from every other time and place. And to make matters worse, they are also terribly ambiguous concepts. “Experience,” for instance, could indicate how something appears to someone, with no regard for the accuracy of

religion, especially in intellectual and academic circles,” Steven T. Katz, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 1.

²⁰⁶ Steven T. Katz, “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,” in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 24 & 26; Steven T. Katz, “The ‘Conservative’ Character of Mystical Experience,” in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 4. Although he calls this his “epistemological assumption” or his “working hypothesis,” the tone of his essays is more matter-of-fact than merely speculative.

²⁰⁷ Katz, “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,” 46. This is the core of the constructivist stance. cf. “All mystical experiences, like all experiences generally, have specific structures and these are neither fortuitous nor *sui generis* ... they are given to the experiences at their very inceptions, by concepts, beliefs, values and expectations already operative in the mystics’ minds,” R.M. Gimello, “Mysticism in its Contexts,” in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 62. “The mind ... constitutes the reality it perceives,” Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*: 45.

²⁰⁸ Katz, “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,” 25.

²⁰⁹ Robert H. Sharf, “The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7, no. 11-12 (1998/2000): 270-271.

²¹⁰ Katz, “The ‘Conservative’ Character of Mystical Experience,” 5.

²¹¹ Hans H. Penner, “The Mystical Illusion,” in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 90.

²¹² At least, in the Schleiermacher-Jamesian way they are used here, Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*: xii. See also Michel de Certeau, “Mysticism,” *Diacritics* 22, no. 2 (1968/1992); and Leigh Eric Schmidt, “The Making of Modern ‘Mysticism,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 2 (2003).

the appearance, *or* how someone perceives something, whereby the object perceived is presumed to exist. In the wake of Schleiermacher and James, perennialists have exploited this ambiguity, complemented by claims about paradoxality and ineffability, to create a “protective strategy,” which cleverly cloaks religion from rational criticism.²¹³

Returning to Leonard, he replies to Katz that it is not *logically* necessary that *all* experiences are phenomenal—always constructed, as Kant contended. As a matter of fact, he goes on to argue, many “intelligent, articulate mystics” such as Merrell-Wolff, “in diverse cultures and throughout history,” leave little doubt that mystical experiences actually share a “non-phenomenal core,” which lies “beyond form and content.”²¹⁴

Throughout the eighties and nineties, many other scholars of religion argued the same. Traditionalist Huston Smith, for one, was quick to note that perennialists “do not appeal to experience at all,” but to “metaphysical intuitions.” Alluding to the *turiya* or “fourth (state)” of Advaita Vedānta, he claims “mystics, in their introvertive moments, invoke a fourth kind of knowing that rises above sensations, images and concepts.” This fourth kind of knowing is said to reveal the absolute as incorporating the relative, to the point that even the absolute-relative distinction itself becomes annulled. “This separates perennialism from the monism it is sometimes (mis)taken for; it is rather *a-dvaita* or non-dual.” Interesting for us is that he reckons Franklin Merrell-Wolff has worked out “a reasoned argument” for the existence of this fourth kind of knowing.²¹⁵

Indeed, Smith’s “fourth kind of knowing” implies Merrell-Wolff’s “third kind of cognition.” But he must have had only a passing familiarity with Merrell-Wolff, other-

²¹³ Katz, “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,” 54; Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*: 233. In sum, “religious experience” serves as a “placeholder that entails a substantive if indeterminate terminus for the relentless deferral of meaning,” Sharf, “The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion,” 286.

²¹⁴ Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy*, Chapter 4, 5 & 7, e.g. 85-91. To suggest dogmatically that all experiences must be mediated could be considered a kind of “hyper-Kantianism,” J. William Forgie, “Hyper-Kantianism in Recent Discussions of Mystical Experience,” *Religious Studies* 21, no. 2 (1985). Not only that, it is rather presumptuous to claim to know which experiences *other* people can or cannot have, based on an unquestioned philosophical premise, adds Donald Evans, “Can Philosophers Limit What Mystics Can Do? A Critique of Steven Katz,” *Religious Studies* 25, no. 1 (1989). More precisely, it denies other people their non-dualist experiences, based on one’s own dualist expectations, Shigenori Nagatomo, “A Critique of Steven Katz’s ‘Contextualism’: An Asian Perspective,” *Dao* 1, no. 2 (2002).

²¹⁵ Huston Smith, “Is there a Perennial Philosophy?,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (1987): 554-557 & 562, he mentions Merrell-Wolff on 556, footnote 4. “Pure Consciousness is called the ‘Fourth’ aspect in relation to the three other aspects, viz. *Viśva* (waking), *Taijasa* (dreaming) and *Prājñā* (dreamless),” Sadananda, *Vedānta-Sara of Sadananda*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, 15th century original Sanskrit ed. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1927/1990). 35-36. Pace Stace, Shear says “The ‘introvertive’ mystical experience (IME) is characterized as being a pure, contentless awareness ... devoid of all determinate phenomenological contents (sense perceptions, images, thoughts, emotions, sense of individual identity) ... The ... ‘extrovertive’ mystical experience (EME) is characterized as being awareness of this same empirically contentless, abstract, transcendental ‘reality’ as underlying every object in one’s experiences, external (trees, the sky, etc.) as well as internal (thoughts, feelings),” Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*: 62-81 & 85-111; Shear, “On Mystical Experiences as Support for the Perennial Philosophy,” 320; cf. Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy* 80-83. Smith means the first.

wise he would have surely cited the message he wished to get across: “Introceptualism [mysticism] affirms a Truth and a Knowledge that are not derived from experience and that are not dependent on experience for their being ... The [mystical] introceptive Realization is to be conceived as something that can be known by a human being, but cannot be experienced,” since “It is the way to direct metaphysical understanding.”²¹⁶

According to Merrell-Wolff, experience is consciousness seen as a process that takes place in time and space, which is produced through a combination of perception and conception, whereby the object is ascendant to the subject. Introception, though, is consciousness outside time and space, not based on perception nor conception, but on another faculty or function of consciousness, whereby the subject transcends the object. From the point of relative consciousness, introception is an experience. But within the space of pure consciousness, nothing happens. Introception does not change the content of consciousness, but shifts the base of orientation towards consciousness, which does not count as an experience. It is better to call it an “event.” As such, it is a phenomenal event in time and space with a noumenal content that remains timeless and spaceless.²¹⁷ Perhaps a proper name for it would be a “pure consciousness event.”

“A pure consciousness event may defined as follows,” Robert Forman wrote, in 1986, “the subject is awake, conscious, but without an object or content for consciousness—no thoughts, emotions, sensations, or awareness of any external phenomena.” Since Kant, western philosophers have just *assumed* something like this is impossible. Yet, “I myself, the author of this article, have undergone a pure consciousness event.”²¹⁸

Based on an autobiographical anecdote, Forman concludes there is undeniable evidence that at least some human beings have undergone a state of consciousness that is not conscious *of* anything. Impeachment of his testimony on the grounds of vested interest is unfair, he says, because if the first-hand experience of a “reasonably honest, reasonably sane, reasonably intelligent person” does not count as proof, what will?²¹⁹

In subsequent publications, he divides his peers into “heapers” and “splitters,” perennialists who filter out similarities versus constructivists who fixate on disparities.

²¹⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Introceptualism,” in *Transformations in Consciousness: The Metaphysics and Epistemology*, ed. Ron Leonard (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975/1995), 173-177.

²¹⁷ “As an experience, it is an event happening to some subject or self in time ... the event may produce changes in the conduct of the individual involved, which may be noted and ... objectively evaluated. In this sense, mystical consciousness is a somewhat that may fall within the range of pragmatic evaluation. [But] the matter is quite different when we come to consider the inward or immediate content—the psychical as distinguished from the psychological aspect—of the mystical state,” *ibid.*, 50-51, 67, 174, 281.

²¹⁸ Robert K.C. Forman, “Pure Consciousness Events and Mysticism,” *Sophia* 25, no. 1 (1986): 49 & 55.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55-56. Merrell-Wolff used the same anecdotal reasoning in his academic article, Franklin Fowler Wolff, “Concept, Percept and Reality,” *The Philosophical Review* 48, no. 4 (1939): 402-403.

But a third group of “perennial psychologists” like him is emerging, who find humans have an “innate capacity” to enjoy “a psychological shift” in how the mind functions.²²⁰

Based on the distinction between *nirvikalpa samādhi* and *sahaja samādhi* of Neo-Hindu guru Ramana Maharshi, Forman explains that such a shift entails either a Pure Consciousness Events (PCE), as “a wakeful though contentless (non-intentional) consciousness,” in which “the mind or consciousness itself comes ... to persist silently and be simply what it is, with no extra activity,”²²¹ or a Dualistic Mystical State (DMS), whereby “the subject is directly aware of consciousness itself, knows itself reflexively” and “is intentionally aware of its content ...” Merrell-Wolff’s “breakthrough,” in which thought persisted at the periphery of his mind, for instance, would signify the latter state. In fact, Forman actually refers to Merrell-Wolff, when he concludes that the intimate knowledge we (can) have of our consciousness is a “knowledge-by-identity.”²²²

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The turning of the light of consciousness on itself revealed that which is real using a third way of knowing, which Merrell-Wolff named *introception*, whereby knowledge results from identity with that which is known ... As we can see from the effort and philosophy of Merrell-Wolff, meditation is seldom practiced in isolation from other activities, whose combined purpose is to effect a transformation of consciousness. Such activities have been labeled as *spiritual* or *religious* ... A noetic quality was present also in a spontaneous transcendent state of consciousness that occurred for me at one time. Everything that I ordinarily knew, including all the things that I did not like about my life, were all still there. However, I seemed to have some sort of extraordinary insight, into which the things I ordinarily knew fit perfectly in a harmonious whole.²²³

²²⁰ Robert K.C. Forman, "Of Heapers, Splitters and Academic Woodpiles in the Study of Intense Religious Experiences," *Sophia* 35, no. 1 (1996): 73-75, 79-82, 87; Robert K.C. Forman, "Introduction: Mystical Consciousness, the Innate Capacity, and the Perennial Psychology," in *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K.C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 27-28. They differ from perennial philosophers, whom he finds rightly criticized for their claims of a cross-cultural homologous metaphysical ideology, as well as from perennial psychologists like Ken Wilber, whose claims of the same psychological stages across different cultures he finds unconvincing.

²²¹ Robert K.C. Forman, "Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting," in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K.C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8; Robert K.C. Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). Part I about the former PCE and Part III about the latter DMS, respectively.

²²² Robert K. C. Forman, "Mystical Knowledge: Knowledge by Identity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 4 (1993); for the short version, cf. Forman, "Perennial Psychology," 18-24.

²²³ Imants Baruss, *Alterations of Consciousness: An Empirical Analysis for Social Scientists* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2003). 202, 204 & 210.

Given how much scholars of philosophy and religion have emphasized the noetic and cognitive sides of introception, it is no surprise psychologists have also started to take notice of Merrell-Wolff. In his consciousness studies, for instance, professor of psychology Imants Barušs often mentions him in order to defend a non-materialist theory of consciousness and also to reinstate introspection as a credible method for research.²²⁴

According to Barušs, there are three perspectives from which consciousness can be approached. One, from a physiological perspective, which focuses on biological and neuropsychological processes. Two, from a cognitive perspective, which mainly looks at information processes of perception and conception. Three, from an experiential or phenomenological perspective, which is concerned with processes of self-reflection.²²⁵

Barušs emphasizes the third perspective. Taking his cue from Charles Tart (b. 1937), he studies “alterations of consciousness.” As one of the pioneers in transpersonal psychology, Tart preliminarily defined normal consciousness as one’s dominant state and altered states of consciousness as a *qualitative shift* in one’s mental functioning. Our culture has a negative attitude towards ASCs, Tart said, so only a few scholars like Jung and Spiegelberg and non-academic research centers such as Esalen have studied the conventional oriental and unconventional occidental traditions that cultivate these states, answering the surge of interest which western psychology stubbornly ignores.²²⁶

Fast-forward forty plus years and the field of consciousness studies has taken the (t)issue of both normal and altered states head on, trying to tackle the “hard” and “easy” problems of consciousness²²⁷ in order to discover “what it is like”²²⁸ to have the whole range of different human experiences. Nowadays, Barušs remarks, particularly influential are the brain imaging studies of religious states of consciousness by cranial investigators such as Michael Persinger or Eugene d’Aquili and Andrew Newberg.²²⁹

Persinger was among the first researchers to take their neuroscientific expertise to the field of religion. Based on the repeatedly observed “hyper-religiosity” of patients

²²⁴ Imants Baruss, "The Art of Science: Science of the Future in Light of Alterations of Consciousness," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 15, no. 1 (2001): 65; Imants Baruss, "Beyond Scientific Materialism: Toward a Transcendent Theory of Consciousness," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 17, no. 7-8 (2010): 221 & 225.

²²⁵ He covers all three, but admits to downplaying the physiological and stressing the experiential perspective, due to the phenomenological nature of his sources, Baruss, *Alterations of Consciousness*: 5-6.

²²⁶ Charles T. Tart, "Introduction," in *Altered States of Consciousness: A Book of Readings*, ed. Charles T. Tart (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969), 1-5.

²²⁷ Respectively, the problem of *why* and *how* there is consciousness, David Chalmers, *The Character of Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). 3-6.

²²⁸ Thomas Nagel, "What is it like to be a Bat?," in *The Mind's I*, ed. Douglas R. Hofstadter and Daniel C. Dennett (New York: Basic Books, 1974/1981).

²²⁹ Baruss, *Alterations of Consciousness*: 206-208.

with temporal lobe epilepsy, Persinger was curious to find if their spiritual experiences could be artificially induced.²³⁰ He, therefore, devised something that would come to be popularly known as a “God-helmet,” which emits weak complex magnetic fields that mimic the neural activity of an epileptic fit. Pace James and Leuba, Persinger found that activation of the temporal lobe can bring about a “sense of presence” of another consciousness, which the brain interprets as something supernatural outside itself.²³¹

d’Aquili believed an ineffable non-dualist feeling of “absolute unitary being” recurs in the world’s religions, which reduces our dualistic reality to a fleeting reflection. Philosophically, it is generally described in terms of the “transcendent,” “ultimate,” or “absolute.” Religiously, it is described as a union with “God” or “the Void.”²³² Based on his *Pathways* and *Philosophy*, d’Aquili and colleagues considered Merrell-Wolff to be a perfect example of a cross-cultural “mature contemplation,” which they defined as “the systematic exploration of consciousness by means of trained introspection.” More specifically, they felt that “Merrell-Wolff has described very clearly the changes in his consciousness leading to, and subsequent to his attainment of, Void Consciousness.”²³³

When joined by Newberg, d’Aquili went on to speculate that these empty states of absolute unitary being induced through prayer or meditation may be neurologically explained by what could be called functional “deafferentation.” In sum, when the part of the brain that is correlated with the analysis and integration of higher-order visual, auditory and vestibular information—like locating oneself in three-dimensional space and distinguishing oneself from others—is cut off from sensory input, due to a deprivation of stimuli by the frontal “thinking” cortex and subsequent unusual activation of the limbic “emotional” system, the brain is short-circuited into oblivion, as it were.²³⁴

In their affirmation of Otto and their rejection of Katz,²³⁵ d’Aquili and Newberg have provided a neurological twist to perennial philosophy and perennial psychology,

²³⁰ Michael A. Persinger, “Religious and Mystical Experiences as Artifacts of Temporal Lobe Function: A General Hypothesis,” *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 57(1983).

²³¹ They further speculated that this may be explained by the involuntary intrusion of information from the stimulated (right) hemisphere into the other (left) hemisphere, Michael A. Persinger, Faye Healey, “Experimental Facilitation of the Sensed Presence: Possible Intercalation between the Hemispheres induced by Complex Magnetic Fields,” *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 190, no. 8 (2002). One of the first repeat studies did not find any of the same results, though. Instead, it hinted at a significant correlation not with electromagnetic stimulation, but with the suggestibility of the participants, Pehr Granqvist et al., “Sensed Presence and Mystical Experiences are Predicted by Suggestibility, not by the Application of Transcranial Weak Complex Magnetic Fields,” *Neuroscience Letters* 379, no. 1 (2005).

²³² Eugene G. d’Aquili, “Senses of Reality in Science and Religion: A Neuroepistemological Perspective,” *Zygon* 17, no. 4 (1982): 363, 366-367 & 376-378.

²³³ Charles D. Laughlin et al., “Mature Contemplation,” *Zygon* 28, no. 2 (1993): 134 & 170-171.

²³⁴ Eugene G. d’Aquili, Andrew B. Newberg, “Religious and Mystical States: A Neuropsychological Model,” *Zygon* 28, no. 2 (1993): 186-194. They took that part to be the posterior superior parietal lobe.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

arguing, first, that “the deepest origins of religion are based in mystical experience,” as “a genetically inherited talent for entering unitary states [and] many of us interpret these states as the presence of a higher power” and, second, that this concerns a coping mechanism for stress, in the face of uncertainty, which nature conjured to protect our physical and psychological health, to secure human survival.²³⁶ After d’Aquili died, in 1998, Newberg has continued to spread their “perennial neurotheology,” if you will.²³⁷

Like d’Aquili and Newberg, Barušs backs an introspective perennialism. “Introspection had a history in the 20th-century of being discredited, for all kinds of reasons,” but mostly to make way for Behaviorism, due to the “imageless thought” controversy. Nevertheless, “What is becoming clear [in research on alterations of consciousness] is that first-person reports cannot be ignored.”²³⁸ Barušs believes that the abundance of autobiographical accounts of profound non-dual experiences—his own and those from various religious virtuosi—point to a more substantial perennial truth than is revealed by our baseline *material* reality. With references to Maslow, Barušs says that mystical “peak experiences” like those alterations of consciousness that Franklin Merrell-Wolff introspectively accessed and described so well are proof of a *transcendental* reality.²³⁹

Other academic and non-academic writers from a range of disciplines have also mentioned Merrell-Wolff—though, often in passing—to support a similar perennialist mysticism. For instance, in *Beyond the Occult*, Colin Wilson characterizes him as “an American doctor ... [who] had his own experience of Nirvana ... by an extremely difficult method: looking inward [introspection], and then ‘abstracting the subjective element’ from the ‘objective consciousness manifold’ [introception].”²⁴⁰ In *Going beyond the Pairs*, Dennis McCort calls him “another American contemporary whose genius lay in a profound awareness of the *coincidentia oppositorum* as the common core of German and Eastern mysticism.” By combining “Hindu and German religio-philosophical thought with an American pragmatic sense of what worked and what did not work in bringing about realization of the deeper mystical states,” he withstood the West’s anti-

²³⁶ e.g. Andrew B. Newberg et al., *Why God won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001). e.g. 100-107, 128-131 & 140.

²³⁷ Andrew B. Newberg, Mark Robert Waldman, *How God changes your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010). For his (relatively) most critical reflections, see Andrew B. Newberg, *Principles of Neurotheology* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

²³⁸ Barušs, "The Art of Science," 61.

²³⁹ Barušs, *Alterations of Consciousness*: 187, 189, 201-204 & 238-239. He thinks this transcendental reality can be scientifically expressed by mathematics, Imants Barušs, "Franklin Wolff's Mathematical Resolution of Existential Issues," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 21, no. 4 (2007). He encourages to “extend science even further,” and try to incorporate *introception*, Barušs, "The Art of Science," 64-65.

²⁴⁰ Colin Wilson, *Beyond the Occult: Twenty Years' Research into the Paranormal* (London: Watkins, 1988/2008). 18 & 460-464.

intellectual tendency to yield to the East's "age-old insistence that the intellect has no significant role to play in leading us to ultimate Truth or Reality." Thus, McCort thinks, "He is, literally, the thinking man's mystic."²⁴¹ Relating his philosophical approach to quantum physics, in *Nature loves to Hide*, Shimon Malin quotes him on the difficulty or even unfeasibility of bridging the gap between transcendental insight and its rational expression into subject-object terms.²⁴² In *The Taboo of Subjectivity*, Buddhist scholar and teacher B. Allan Wallace mentions him in the context of the Katz-Forman debate, as someone who has reported a conceptually unmediated—"pure"—consciousness.²⁴³ In *Mind in the Balance*, reflecting on "twentieth-century insights into consciousness," Wallace, furthermore, sides him with Hindu and Christian contemplatives of the past millennium, whose combined first-hand introspective accounts of a transcendent consciousness are suggestive of "a convergence on universal truths that transcend any one time, place or ideology."²⁴⁴ In "The Metaphysics of the Feminine and Its Indian Roots," Patrick Laude counts him among three male sages whose mystical realization asserted the feminine dimension.²⁴⁵ In sum, "outsiders" are starting to discover Merrell-Wolff.

Autobiographically "Advaitizing" Immediatism

In the years that I knew Dr. Wolff, up until the very end of his life, every Sunday, he opened his home to students or anyone pursuing the Perennial Wisdom ... I respected him as my predecessor in the lineage of spontaneous realization. [However] He did not believe in founding a school to survive him; he asked no one to carry the mantle of his work. He felt that the full reality of Realization could not be passed from one man to another, that ... Realization had to come spontaneously of itself—as it had for him. And when it came, each person would express it uniquely. For him, this was the tradition of Enlightenment that is ever renewing, that stands outside all dogma, that can never be institutionalized.²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ McCort, *Going beyond the Pairs*: 16-17 & Chapter 6, notably 134-135, 163.

²⁴² Shimon Malin, *Nature loves to Hide: Quantum Physics and the Nature of Reality, a Western Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001/2003). 153.

²⁴³ B. Alan Wallace, *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Toward a New Science of Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). 118 & 194, endnote 52.

²⁴⁴ B. Alan Wallace, *Mind in the Balance: Meditation in Science, Buddhism and Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). 79-80 & 192-193.

²⁴⁵ Patrick Laude, "A Metaphysics of the Feminine and Its Indian Roots: Franklin Merrell-Wolff, Bede Griffiths and Frithjof Schuon," in *Crossing Religious Frontiers: Studies in Comparative Religion*, ed. Harry Oldmeadow (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2010), 105. This claim only applies to his last years.

²⁴⁶ Richard Moss, "Preface to the French Edition of Franklin Merrell-Wolff's "Experience and Philosophy", in *Experience et Philosophie, Tome 1: Chemins Ouvrant sur l'Espace* (Gordes: Editions du Relié, 1998), 5. I am citing the English manuscript of the preface to the French edition of *Pathways*.

After Merrell-Wolff's death, some "insiders"—students turned self-appointed spiritual teachers—paradoxically, have positioned themselves within a lineage which they deny to exist. Among them are Brugh Joy,²⁴⁷ Richard Moss²⁴⁸ and Joel Morwood.²⁴⁹ Each of them partly derives their authority from an informal affiliation with Merrell-Wolff, but none of them claim to be a formal successor. In fact, as witnessed above, they will—erroneously²⁵⁰—refute the existence of *any* remotely “dogmatic” or “institutionalized” tradition. Instead, they claim to be *like* Merrell-Wolff, acquiring charismatic authority based on a similar but nevertheless unique “realization” or “awakening” of their own.

This loosely affiliating with a teacher or lineage, on the one hand, yet still relying one's own religious experience for authority and originality, on the other, with less focus on its philosophical *interpretation* compared to its psychological *introspection*, seems to be a growing trend among the latest generation of spiritual “satsang” teachers, particularly those of a Neo-Hindu (Advaita) but also Neo-Buddhist (Zen or Dzogchen) persuasion, in their “advaitizing” of western esotericism slash metaphysical religion.

In many ways, this even applies to Merrell-Wolff himself. He repeatedly voiced his strong affinity with Śāṅkara, but always referred to the authority and originality of his own realization. And although he stressed its philosophical interpretation over its psychological introspection, he was still remarkably frank and forward about his inner stirrings. Given this transparency, Joseph Rowe distances him from the accumulated “guru-scandals” of the eighties and nineties, in his own memoirs. He claims Merrell-Wolff cannot be included in “the guru-apocalypse that was occurring in the culture at large,” precisely because he had nothing to hide—unlike other spiritual teachers, such as Krishnamurti,²⁵¹ Muktananda,²⁵² Castaneda²⁵³ or Rajneesh, he says.²⁵⁴ In fact, some of his students even took his reflections on the—all-too-human—grief after Gertrude's

²⁴⁷ He does not see Merrell-Wolff as his teacher, but does rank him as one who “enrich[ed] my life and Beinghood through Elderhood inductions,” being initiations into spiritual wisdom, William Brugh Joy, *Avalanche: Heretical Reflections on the Dark and the Light* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990). 310.

²⁴⁸ “... Franklin Merrell-Wolff and Brugh Joy [are] my first consciousness teachers,” Richard Moss, *The Mandala of Being: Discovering the Power of Awareness* (Novato: New World Library, 2007). 330.

²⁴⁹ He talks about “my own teacher, Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” Morwood, *The Way of Selflessness*: x.

²⁵⁰ Merrell-Wolff *did* “pass on the mantle” to his step-grandchildren and *did* foresee “the formation of a philosophical school or a religious movement or even a combination of the two,” see above, 184 & 207.

²⁵¹ Krishnamurti is said to have had a decades long affair with the wife of a close friend, Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti and the Rajagopals* (Ojai: Krishnamurti Foundation of America, 1996). Chapter 22.

²⁵² Muktananda has been charged with sexual abuse of (young) women, Sarah Caldwell, “The Heart of the Secret: A Personal and Scholarly Encounter with Shakta Tantrism in Siddha Yoga,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 5, no. 1 (2001): see section II and III of her article.

²⁵³ Castaneda (probably) lied about his own initiation into shamanism, Yves Marton, “The Experiential Approach to Anthropology & Castaneda's Ambiguous Legacy,” in *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters* (University of Toronto Press, 1994), 17.

death as unbecoming of a sage, even though the introspections of his private experiences in the *Pathways* would have been part of what had first attracted them to him.²⁵⁵

Rowe reckons that Merrell-Wolff not just anticipated the intellectual approach to anti-intellectual non-dualism of today's gurus, but also their autobiographical turn. "[I]t is significant that, previous to approximately the 1980s, it was virtually unthinkable for a spiritual teacher to be so open about such [private] matters. In retrospect, I have come to believe that Dr. Wolff was (despite his old-fashioned, almost nineteenth-century personality) actually ahead of his time in this kind of naked transparency."²⁵⁶

He mentions popular guru Gangaji, whom I will discuss in a moment—"a highly respected contemporary American spiritual teacher," who has also candidly described her path to realization in *Just like You*²⁵⁷—as a recent example. According to teachers like her, he says, "creative thinking and creative imagination cannot be circumscribed by ... 'the mind.' Their resources are invaluable in learning to live in fruitful service to That which is beyond the grasp of this thinking ... or [beyond] the grasp of anything"²⁵⁸

This aligns well with Arthur Versluis's *American Gurus*, which builds again on a modest but growing number of studies on "the contemporary North American guru." According to Versluis, "there is a more or less consistent American literary, philosophical and religious tradition whose characteristics are best described by the term 'immediatism' ... [which] is not the same as perennialism, universalism or traditionalism," whose underlying metaphysics relies on the concept of a primordial consciousness.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ The Osho-Rajneesh movement has been accused of crimes ranging from arson to attempted murder, Hugh B. Urban, *Zorba the Buddha: Sex, Spirituality and Capitalism in the Global Osho Movement* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015). Chapters 4 & 5.

²⁵⁵ Rowe, "The Gnostic of Mount Whitney," 15 & 23-25.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁵⁷ Gangaji, Roslyn Moore, *Just like You: An Autobiography* (Mendocino: DO Publishing, 2003).

²⁵⁸ Rowe, "The Gnostic of Mount Whitney," 29-30.

²⁵⁹ Arthur Versluis, *American Gurus: From Transcendentalism to New Age Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). 1, 2, 4, 284. Versluis finds only a few books have studied the influence of Hindu teachings on American popular religion, such as Thomas A. Forsthoefel, Cynthia Ann Humes, eds., *Gurus in America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality: From Emerson to Oprah* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005); Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*; Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Harmony, 2010); Lola Williamson, *Transcendent in America: Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2010). He finds "Kripal's argument about the American 'religion of no religion' in his book *Esalen* directly confirms the thesis of this book," Versluis, *American Gurus*: 4-5; Kripal, *Esalen*. I would definitely also add Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism* (London: Continuum, 2004/2008); Ann Gleig, Lola Williamson, eds., *Homegrown Gurus: From Hinduism in America to American Hinduism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2013). Two other relevant and well informed works which he surprisingly excludes from his short list but does refer to elsewhere in his book are Andrew Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997); and Dennis Waite, *Enlightenment: The Path Through the Jungle* (Winchester: O Books, 2008).

Though rooted in Platonism, Hermetism, Gnosticism and Christian mysticism, he explains, immediatism found its current form through their interaction with eastern teachers and traditions, budding in Emerson's New England Transcendentalism and blooming in post-countercultural Californian New Age religion. "American Transcendentalism provides at least some historical precedent for the later phenomenon of Neo-Advaitin American gurus and their embrace of what I call 'immediatist' mysticism." So, by his own admission, "immediatism" is a term that Versluis has invented for the phenomenon that is more often referred to as "Neo-Advaita" or "the satsang network."²⁶⁰

Starting with the latter, Liselotte Frisk was one of the first scholars to observe that a new religious phenomenon has arisen in the West, whereby self-acknowledged "enlightened" teachers tour the country or even the world to assist others in making the same shift in consciousness through short talks followed by question-and-answer dialogues with members of their audience. These *satsangs* revolve around intimate introspections on the part of the questioners as well as the speakers,²⁶¹ many of whom will freely write and talk about autobiographical events on their own "spiritual path."

"The satsang network is the result of a process of translating an eastern religion into a contemporary western culture," she says. And this is where Neo-Advaita comes in. "Essential features in the Satsang network have their origins in the Indian *advaita* (non-dual) philosophy," with an emphasis on the divinity of the sacred self—expressed as "consciousness," "nothingness" or "emptiness"—that is always already enlightened, but has not yet realized it, which is seen not as a belief but a matter of experience.²⁶²

According to Phillip Lucas, Neo-Advaita in North America can be largely traced to Ramana Maharshi,²⁶³ but also Hariwash Lal "Papaji" Poonja (1913-1997) and Nisargadatta Maharaj (Maruti Kampli, 1897-1981),²⁶⁴ whose teachings consist primarily of transcriptions of similar responses to different questions from students and visitors.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ He himself claims "immediatism comes out of Advaita Vedanta non-dualism," but is still "a distinct new global religious phenomenon, with many American representatives," Versluis, *American Gurus*: 5, 8, 51, 84, 188 & 227.

²⁶¹ Liselotte Frisk, "The Satsang Network: A Growing Post-Osho Phenomenon," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 6, no. 1 (2002): 64 & 67. Frisk argues that the satsang network emerged in the ninties, following the death of Osho-Rajneesh. Given earlier figures like Jiddu Krishnamurti and Meher Baba, I would nuance her claim a bit, but I do also see a rise around this time.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 74-77 & 79.

²⁶³ Phillip Charles Lucas, "When a Movement is not a Movement: Ramana Maharshi and Neo-Advaita in North America," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 15, no. 2 (2011).

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 94 & 97.

²⁶⁵ Ramana Maharshi, *Talks with Ramana Maharshi: On Realizing Abiding Peace and Happiness* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1955/2006); Hariwansh Lal Poonja, *The Truth Is: Talks with Sri H.W.L. Poonja* (Boston: Weiser Books, 1995/2000); Nisargadatta Maharaj, *I Am That: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* (Durham: The Acorn Press, 1973/2005). Here, "talks" means the satsangs.

Lucas speaks of a “Ramana effect.” Building on Thomas Csordas, he says their Neo-Advaita technique of self-inquiry—“Who am I?”—is a *transportable practice* and a *transposable message*, which easily travels from one time and place to another. Indeed, it has been stripped clean from its typically Hindu features and fitted within the psychologized mind set of contemporary North Americans as a species of self-help, he says, in the tradition of Transcendentalism, Theosophy, New Thought and New Age.²⁶⁶

He presents three typical cases of Neo-Advaita “non-duality” teachers in North America. First and foremost, there is Eckhart Tolle (Ulrich Leonard Tölle, b. 1948), one of the most—maybe *the* most—influential Neo-Advaita teachers in the West today, who professes to have been profoundly influenced by (reading) the Maharshi. Based on autobiographical anecdotes—which Tolle openly shared, in books and interviews—Lucas informs us that “At age 29, he experienced a deep depression that culminated in a radical shift in awareness,” which then took ten years to “ripen,” coming to fruition in the *Power of Now* and *A New Earth*. Due to his appearances on and subsequent support by the popular Oprah Winfrey talk show, Tolle reached a massive audience, which rocketed his books to the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list. “In congruence with the liberal American [metaphysical] religious tradition mentioned earlier, Tolle’s articulation of Advaita avoids traditional religious language, is non-sectarian, practical, and speaks to both the churched and the unchurched. He makes clear that ‘spirituality’ is not the same as ‘religion,’ and that the spiritual experiences to which he points are found within many traditions, including Buddhism and Christianity.”²⁶⁷

Next, he mentions Gangaji (Merle Antoinette Roberson, b. 1942). Again, based on her own autobiographical intimations, Lucas recounts her path from being a school teacher to the founder of a Tibetan dharma center and an alternative health clinic to becoming a spiritual teacher, after following her husband to India, where she says to have reached enlightenment at the feet of Ramana’s self-proclaimed successor Papaji. She says that her guru authorized her to teach, but does not formally present herself as a successor, stressing her own “direct experience of the essential message,” instead. “Gangaji’s teachings, like those of Tolle, synthesize a lifetime of western transpersonal therapies and spiritual practices with the basic insights of Advaitic spirituality.”²⁶⁸

The last case is that of Arunachala Ramana (Dee Wayne Trammell, 1929-2010),

²⁶⁶ Lucas, “When a Movement is not a Movement,” 95-98.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 100-102. Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Sydney: Hodder, 1997/2005); Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose* (New York: Plume, 2005). In May 2008, they were the number one and two best-seller, in the “self-help” category.

²⁶⁸ Lucas, “When a Movement is not a Movement,” 102-105.

whose life course includes an association with the Unity Institute and co-ownership of another self-improvement school with similar ideological ties to New Thought. After his self-professed realization, through an extraordinary encounter with the Maharshi, in a vision, Arunachala Ramana went on to combine Pragmatism, self-empowerment and meditation to teach his own eclectic brand of a New Thought-inspired Advaita.²⁶⁹

I agree with Lucas that there is a modern Advaita movement rising in the West and that these three vignettes are exemplary of hundreds of non-duality teachers who reach millions (also) in America, repeating versions of the same message: there is only consciousness, you are consciousness and there is nothing to do and nowhere to go to realize that. I do think he exaggerates the influence of Ramana, based on verbal rather than “real” historical ties,²⁷⁰ picks questionable cases, as far as his lineage goes,²⁷¹ and ignores gradations, by lumping together what may be called the “perennialized Advaita” of Gangaji with the “advaitized New Age” of Tolle and Arunachala.²⁷² I would be more inclined to speak of a “Nisargadatta effect.”²⁷³ But he is aware of the criticism on (non-traditional) modern western Advaitins, including their debatable historical lineages.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 105-108.

²⁷⁰ Apart from Gangaji, the lineages are verbally stapled on. For instance, to back his claim about a link between Ramana and Tolle, Lucas cites an interview with Tolle, where Tolle states that “there are other teachers [who were just as meaningful, whom I never met in person,] that I feel a strong connection to. One is Krishnamurti and the other is Ramana Maharshi,” *ibid.*, 101. Lucas refers to http://www.inner-growth.info/power_of_now_tolle/eckhart_tolle_interview_parker.htm. But not only does he omit the part in brackets, he also leaves out the entire preceding passage, where Tolle elaborates that he was no less influenced by Jesus, Laozi and Buddha as well as contemporary western teachers—whom he *did* meet in person—in particular, American Buddhist Ajahn Sumhedo (Robert Kan Jackman, b. 1934) and Australian Tantrist Barry Long (1926-2003). And the “vision” of Arunachala shows an even weaker tie.

²⁷¹ Besides Paul Brunton and Arthur Osborne, whom he does mention in passing, Lucas ignores Robert Adams, perhaps *the* most representative example of a western Neo-Advaita teacher in the lineage of Ramana Maharshi. Like Tolle, Adams taught a non-dualism, reminiscent of Ramana, but unlike Tolle, who does not once mention Ramana—or even Advaita Vedānta—in his *Power*, his oeuvre does contain hundreds of references to (his memories of) him. Like Gangaji, Adams had a historical connection with Ramana, but unlike Gangaji, he also sat at his feet. Like Arunachala, Adams had a vision of Ramana, earlier in life, but unlike Arunachala, he was later actually instructed by him, in person, see e.g. Robert Adams, *Satsangs: The Collection August 1990 to June 1993* (E-Book: Ed Muzika, unknown). 2017, 2082, 2207, 2409, 3635. cf. Anonymous, “Obituary Robert Adams,” *The Mountain Path* 1997, 93-94.

²⁷² Indeed, on the one hand, “Like Ramana Maharshi, [Gangaji] asserts that the fundamental question of human existence is ‘Who am I?’ ... [which] is classic Advaita and has its roots in the *Upaniṣads* and the teaching of the great Advaita sage Shankara.” On the other hand, noticeably in *A New Earth*, “Tolle takes a more millennial or New Age tone” and, throughout his work, “A. Ramana’s strategy was to adopt New Thought teachings of self-empowerment and positive thinking as a preliminary step to Ramana Maharshi’s method of self-inquiry,” which, in these cases, is “playing the Advaitic melody in a different key,” Lucas, “When a Movement is not a Movement,” 104-105, 102 & 106. This adds to my (informed) *impression*, that western non-duality teachers with a “historical” link to Indian Vedāntins often reduce all religions to Advaita and those with a “verbal” link often reduce all of Advaita to western esotericism.

²⁷³ As there are more *direct* ties between western teachers and Nisargadatta than with Ramana, Dennis Waite, *Back to the Truth: 5000 years of Advaita* (Winchester: O Books, 2007). Appendix B, 450-451.

²⁷⁴ Phillip Charles Lucas, “Non-Traditional Modern Advaita Gurus in the West and their Traditional Modern Advaita Critics,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 17, no. 3 (2014).

Non-duality teachers within the actual lineage of Ramana include Robert Adams (1928-1997)²⁷⁵ and Papaji with American students like Gangaji²⁷⁶ and Andrew Cohen (b. 1955),²⁷⁷ while that of Nisargadatta includes Ramesh Balsekar (1917-2009)²⁷⁸ with American students such as Wayne “Ram Tzu” Liquorman (b. 1951)²⁷⁹ and David Carse (b. ca. 1950),²⁸⁰ Australian “Sailor Bob” Adamson (b. 1928)²⁸¹ with American students such as James Braha (b. ca. 1950)²⁸² and John Wheeler (b. ca. 1960)²⁸³ with the latter’s own students again, like John Greven (b. 1953)²⁸⁴ and Stephen Wingate (b. ca. 1960).²⁸⁵

²⁷⁵ “Only consciousness exists and you are that ... Realization of consciousness is really no realization because there’s no one to realize,” Adams, *Satsangs*: 2933 & 2037.

²⁷⁶ “All is true self. There is no separation anywhere ... This is the good news of the Buddha, the good news of Christ, the good news of Mohammed—*Consciousness is one, God and I are one, Allah is one*. Whoever awakens declares the possibility of realizing, *You Are That Oneness* ... Science has shown that when physical phenomena are investigated very closely, they are revealed to be not as they are perceived to be. Self-inquiry is spiritual investigation of what is perceived to be real ... Spiritual investigation reveals perception of an entity separate from the totality of consciousness to be false perception,” Gangaji, *You are That! Satsang with Gangaji*, vol. 1 (Ashland: The Gangaji Foundation, 1995). 170. and Gangaji, *You are That! Satsang with Gangaji*, vol. 2 (Ashland: The Gangaji Foundation, 1996). 69.

²⁷⁷ “The liberating experience of self-discovery that you feel when you awaken to the ground of Being is consciousness reawakening to the perennial truth that it is only One, that it is *not two*. The question *Who am I?* dissolves in the recognition that *I AM*. This is the essence of the discovery of enlightenment—when you find what you are seeking for, you discover that it was always already the case ... *I AM THAT*,” Andrew Cohen, *Evolutionary Enlightenment: A New Path to Spiritual Awakening* (New York: Select Books, 2011). 20. Note that Cohen publically distanced himself from Papaji, right after his realization.

²⁷⁸ “... What-I-Am cannot be conscious or aware because it is Consciousness or Awareness ... All there is is [this] eternal Self, and all that is necessary is the unbroken awareness of that Self. And, what is most important, this awareness, which already exists here and now, is most natural and spontaneous. There is no question of any effort, because there is no ‘one’ to make any effort,” Ramesh S. Balsekar, *The Final Truth: A Guide to Ultimate Understanding* (Redondo Beach: Advaita Press, 1989). 58, 172.

²⁷⁹ “You can call it God, or ... Consciousness, or ... Tao, or Source, or Oneness, or Totality, or whatever ... but That is all there is, and all of *this* is simply an aspect of That ... You think that you are the doer, and therefore you respond according to that belief. You cannot do otherwise until such time as that belief is removed. So, it’s all God, it’s all Totality, it’s all Consciousness, it’s all One,” Wayne Liquorman, *Acceptance of What Is: A Book about Nothing* (Redondo Beach: Advaita Press, 2000). 189 & 94. See also Ram Tzu, *No Way: A Guide for the Spiritually ‘Advanced’* (Redondo Beach: Advaita Press, 1990).

²⁸⁰ “All there is, is Consciousness. That is what You truly are ... There is nothing to seek. Separation is the illusion; there is nothing to be separate ... There is only One, not-two, and That Is,” David Carse, *Perfect Brilliant Stillness: Beyond the Individual Self* (Salisbury: Non-Duality Press, 2006). 7 & 88.

²⁸¹ “This pure present awareness ... There is nothing other than that. So, if you are seeking illumination, realization or oneness with God or whatever, then let it be seen directly that what you are seeking, you already are ... There is no becoming [realized]!” Bob Adamson, *What’s Wrong with Right Now unless You Think about It? Talks with ‘Sailor’ Bob Adamson* (Salisbury: Non-Duality Press, 2004). 68 & 62.

²⁸² “Consciousness is not ... something to be found. It is who we are,” James Braha, *Living Reality: My Extraordinary Summer with ‘Sailor’ Bob Adamson* (Longboat Key: Hermetic Press, 2006). 67.

²⁸³ “[T]he presence of awareness ... is your true nature ... Awakening and enlightenment are at best concepts attempting to point to the ever-awake and clear presence that you are ... We search and meditate as long as we are not clear that what we are seeking we already are,” John Wheeler, *Right Here, Right Now: Seeing your True Nature as Present Awareness* (Salisbury: Non-Duality Press, 2006). 154.

²⁸⁴ “The you that is asking the question and hoping to ‘get it’ [about presence/awareness] is within the presence/awareness that you are. The One, that you are, is already whole ... there is nothing to gain,” John Greven, *Oneness: The Destination You never Left* (Salisbury: Non-Duality Press, 2005). 67.

²⁸⁵ “The essential pointer of non-duality is this: ‘Consciousness is, and you are that’ ... Why don’t more people get this? It’s because they’re using their intellect to try to get it,” nevertheless, “your own being, awareness, consciousness is not something you can get. You are it,” Stephen Wingate, *The Outrageous Myths of Enlightenment: Talks with Stephen Wingate* (Kearney: Morris Publishing, 2006). 85.

And then there are countless unaffiliated non-duality teachers, like Americans Stephen “Adyashanti” Gray (b. 1962),²⁸⁶ Byron Kathleen “Katie” Reid (b. 1942)²⁸⁷ as well as Greg Goode (b. ca. 1955),²⁸⁸ Frenchman Jean Klein (1912-1998),²⁸⁹ Dutchman Alexander Smit (1948-1998),²⁹⁰ Englishmen Tony Parsons (b. 1933)²⁹¹ and Jeff Foster (b. 1980),²⁹² but also unfamiliar precursors like our very own Franklin Merrell-Wolff.

Surely, “if not a guru, [he] can be described at the very least as a proto-guru,”²⁹³ Versluis argues. As such, “Merrell-Wolff [is] an exemplary figure of immediatism.” Not only that, “I know of few if any who more clearly exemplify this characteristic western tradition in an American context.” Versluis therefore concludes that “In many respects, he is an archetypal figure whose significance has not [yet] been widely recognized.”²⁹⁴

Following Rowe, Merrell-Wolff is even more of an archetypal figure of modern western gurus in the West than even Versluis has recognized. I am talking about the integration of autobiographical material in his teaching, after his realization, that is, introspections of his private feelings and thoughts throughout his talks and texts. This neo-confessional dimension is typical of especially the non-duality scene in the West.

²⁸⁶ “Silence, stillness and awareness are not states and therefore cannot be produced or created ... The simple yet profound question ‘Who Am I?’ can then reveal one’s self not to be the endless tyranny of the *ego* personality, but ... the Primordial Consciousness in which all states and all objects come and go as manifestations of the eternal unborn Self that YOU ARE,” Adyashanti, *The Impact of Awakening: Excerpts from the Teachings of Adyashanti* (Los Gatos: Open Gate Publishing, 2002). 26. Adyashanti was trained in the Zen tradition, but is viewed as a non-dualist, cf. Versluis, *American Gurus*: 229-230.

²⁸⁷ “[T]o investigate is to put yourself back into a clear position of ‘I Am That,’” Byron Katie, *Losing the Moon: Byron Katie Dialogues on Non-Duality, Truth and Other Illusions* (Manhattan Beach: The Work Foundation, 1998). 21.

²⁸⁸ “But awareness, our true nature, isn’t limited, personal, impermanent or temporary. It is THAT to which objects ... appear ... The person is an object, so [it] comes and goes. Awareness can’t come and go since it is THAT to which coming-and-going appears! ... Your investigation into your direct experience will reveal that all these objects aren’t really objects anyway, but that they have been awareness all along,” Greg Goode, *The Direct Path: A User Guide* (Salisbury: Non-Duality Press, 2012). 16.

²⁸⁹ “When the body wakes up in the morning, awareness is already there ... We may call this awareness without object, consciousness ... Everything is in consciousness, but ... The thing is to be knowingly conscious,” Jean Klein, *Who Am I? The Sacred Quest* (Salisbury: Non-Duality Press, 1988/2006). 44.

²⁹⁰ “No, this is the answer. You are Consciousness. ‘*Aham brahma asmi*,’ [which means] ‘I am absolute Consciousness.’ ‘I Am that I Am.’ Do you want to hear more?” Alexander Smit, *Consciousness: Talks about That which Never Changes*, 1990 original Dutch ed. (Rhinebeck: Epigraph Books, 2008). 246.

²⁹¹ “Presence is a quality of welcoming, open awareness which is dedicated to simply what is ... I cannot ‘do’ presence, because I am presence. So, there is no process to learn ... I cannot learn or achieve something I already am,” Tony Parsons, *The Open Secret* (unknown: Open Secret Publishing, 2008). 23-24.

²⁹² “The mind (that is, ‘you’) is not interested in the Mystery, because the Mystery cannot be an object of knowledge. Indeed, it is That from which objects of knowledge arise, the Void which gives birth to all life ... Call it the Tao ... God ... Spirit ... Consciousness ... Life, call it nothing at all or even deny it; even the denial of it is simply It denying itself. No proof is needed for It. Why? Because this moment is. You are here. It is now. That, and just that, is God. There is no need for belief,” Jeff Foster, *Life without a Center: Awakening from the Dream of Separation* (Salisbury: Non-Duality Press, 2006). 80.

²⁹³ Versluis, *American Gurus*: 84.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 87 & 91, endnote 5. He mentions him together with Krishnamurti. Because of Merrell-Wolff’s hints to an unnamed sage, Versluis suspects “a connection between Krishnamurti and Merrell-Wolff ... for geographic and other reasons.” These hints referred to the allegedly channeled sage from Atlantis.

Beside the psychotherapeutic nature of their satsangs, in the wake of *Be Here Now* by Richard “Ram Dass” Alpert (b. 1931)²⁹⁵ and *The Knee of Listening* by Franklin Albert “Adi Da” Jones (1939-2008) as a close second,²⁹⁶ nearly every western guru has given a detailed autobiographical report of their spiritual quest²⁹⁷—much like Merrell-Wolff had, in his first book and following talks. Spiritual teacher and aspiring scholar Ken Wilber, for one, has published material about his personal life—even edited excerpts from his diaries—as a vehicle for “ideas that orbit the sun of the perennial philosophy (or the common core of the world’s great wisdom traditions).”²⁹⁸ Former perennialist scholar and now aspiring spiritual teacher Robert Forman has written about the path to his own realization to debunk widespread ideas about “spirituality.”²⁹⁹ In the words of Dutch Nisargadatta student Douwe Tiemersma (1945-2013), “Because the passing on of individual experience is an important element of the Advaita teaching, ‘autobiographical’ texts are appropriate for a further orientation,” which “can serve to stimulate recognition of non-duality in the reader.”³⁰⁰ Nevertheless, one hardly ever finds their eastern counterparts doing the same. Modern Indian Advaitins like Ramana, Poonja and Nisargadatta revealed little, if anything, about their personal lives or experiences. None of them disclosed much personal information, let alone wrote an autobiography. That is not to say their lives are entirely shrouded in mystery. There are several works

²⁹⁵ Ram Dass, *Be Here Now* (Cristobal: Lama Foundation, 1971). “Ram Dass set the tone for American Hinduism’s emphasis on personal experience,” Ann Gleig, Lola Williamson, “Introduction: From Wave to Soil,” ed. Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson (New York: State University of New York Press, 2013), 6; cf. Versluis, *American Gurus*: 196; for details, e.g. Francis Xavier Charet, “Ram Dass: The Vicissitudes of Devotion and Ferocity of Grace,” in *Homegrown Gurus: From Hinduism in America to American Hinduism*, ed. Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson (New York: State University of New York Press, 2013).

²⁹⁶ Franklin Albert Jones, *The Knee of Listening: The Early Life and Radical Spiritual Teachings of Franklin Jones* (Los Angeles: The Dawn Horse Press, 1972/1973). Borrowing a term from Rawlinson, Versluis lists his among “the most autobiographical of all western gurus,” Versluis, *American Gurus*: 202. About Jones, see Jeffrey John Kripal, “Riding the Dawn Horse: Adi Da and the Eros of Non-duality,” in *Gurus in America*, ed. Thomas A. Forsthoefel and Cynthia Ann Humes (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), one of few critical introductions to his Advaita-inspired “Adidam” ideology.

²⁹⁷ e.g. Andrew Cohen, *Autobiography of an Awakening* (Larkspur: Moksha Press, 1992); Suzanne Segal, *Collision with the Infinite: A Life Beyond the Personal Self* (San Diego: Blue Dove Press, 1996); Osho, *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), which is actually a collection of autobiographical anecdotes; Leo Hartong, *Awakening to the Dream: The Gift of Lucid Living* (Salisbury: Non-Duality Press, 2001/2007). Chapter 2, 18; Byron Katie, *Loving What Is: Four Questions that can Change Your Life* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002). x-xiv, an anecdote related by her husband; Gangaji, Moore, *Just like You*; Braha, *Living Reality*; Parsons, *The Open Secret*: “The Park,” 19-22; James Swartz, *Mystic by Default* (unknown: Shining World Press, 2012).

²⁹⁸ Ken Wilber, *Grace and Grit: Spirituality and Healing in the Life and Death of Treya Killam Wilber* (Boston: Shambhala, 1991/2001). 1-2; Ken Wilber, *One Taste: Daily Reflections on Integral Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000). 4. By his own admission, the excerpts were heavily rewritten.

²⁹⁹ Robert K.C. Forman, *Enlightenment Ain't What It's Cacked Up to Be: A Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul* (Alresford: O-Books, 2011).

³⁰⁰ Douwe Tiemersma, *Non-Duality: The Groundless Openness*, trans. John Trezevant, 2008 original Dutch ed. (Alresford: Mantra Books, 2012). 25 & 2. Former professor of anthropology Tiemersma is relatively well-known in non-dualist circles, since he penned the foreword to Nisargadatta’s *I Am That*.

about the life and teaching of Ramana, for instance, but these are often more anecdotal memoirs than real biographies, largely relying on B.V. Narasimha's *Self-Realization*,³⁰¹ which itself largely relies again on a disciple's own observations and interpretations.³⁰² Similarly, "Writing a biographical note on Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj is a frustrating and unrewarding task. For not only the exact date of his birth is unknown, but no verified facts concerning the early years of his life are available ... information about his boyhood and early youth is patchy and disconnected," with only second-hand sources.³⁰³

The (growing) emphasis on autobiographically driven discussions is what has been most criticized about western non-duality teachers. Actually, according to Lucas, self-assigned defenders of a more traditional Advaita frown upon their non-traditional peers for a number reasons. He mentions five of them. First, traditionalists scold non-traditionalists for discarding study and practice, because even though enlightenment cannot be attained—as it is always already there—one can get rid of the ignorance that obstruct one's realization of just that. Second, traditionalists reckon non-traditionalists too easily step over the matter of morality, for even if absolute reality stands above all distinctions, including right and wrong, they still insist it is a prerequisite for spiritual development in this relative world. Third, traditionalists condemn non-traditionalists for ignoring this distinction between absolute and relative reality as such, which they believe leads seekers to disengage prematurely from normal life. Fourth, traditionalists rue the lack of study of the Sanskrit language and Hindu texts among non-traditionalists, which they see as a gross neglect of tried-and-tested guides (for helping others) to realization. Fifth, traditionalists find the non-traditionalist satsang method flawed.³⁰⁴

This last point is obviously the most fundamental for a group that is designated as "the satsang network." It is well summarized and associated with some of the other

³⁰¹ B.V. Narasimha, *Self-Realization: Life and Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi: Revised from the Third Edition with an Epilogue by S.S. Cohen* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1931/1943). It is telling that he often interprets rather than cites Ramana about his personal life, since "The Swami as a rule talks quite impersonally. There is seldom any clear or pronounced reference to 'I' or 'you' in what he says," and "one studying his words and ways discovers personal references, mostly veiled," *ibid.*, 20.

³⁰² Among the most authoritative biographies is one written by influential British devotee and founder-editor of the Ashram's *Mountain Path* journal, Arthur Osborne, who, self-admittedly, relies heavily on Narasimha, Arthur Osborne, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge: A Biography*, trans. Ramana Maharshi (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1954/2002). 118. His own autobiography has also been published, posthumously, for its "immense value for spiritual seekers," Arthur Osborne, *My Life and Quest* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2001). publisher's note. Especially in the West, it is not uncommon for seekers to become guru-like examples for other seekers, after publishing about their own "quest," cf. Steven J. Sutcliffe, "'Wandering Stars': Seekers and Gurus in the Modern World," in *Beyond New Age. Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, ed. Steven J. Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), he gives J.G. Bennett as an example, 25-26.

³⁰³ Maharaj, *I Am That*: xi.

³⁰⁴ Lucas, "Non-Traditional Modern Advaita Gurus in the West," 10-14, 15-18, 25-28, 18-23, 23-25.

points of contention by western patron of “traditional” Advaita Dennis Waite.³⁰⁵ “Notwithstanding the ultimate truth of the Direct Path statements,” he pleads, “the practices of the traditional approaches ... should continue as a matter of course, having been established over thousands of years as being the necessary mental and spiritual preparation for realization.”³⁰⁶ Traditionalists such as Waite fear that non-traditionalists like Tony Parsons hold back or possibly even harm spiritual seekers on their path.³⁰⁷

Reminiscent of Richard King and Jeremy Carette, Lucas compares this to a (neo-liberal) economic model of commodification, with different modern Advaitins selling the same spiritual product, while “deligitimat[ing] their rivals, part of an ongoing proprietary battle to maintain market dominance for their own teaching enterprises.”³⁰⁸

The deligitimation occurs through accusations of *mere* intellectualization. Both sides say non-duality is beyond reason, but that the other stays at the level of rational understanding. Concretely, non-traditionalists claim “Inquiry is not in any sense anti-intellectual or anti-rational; it is transrational.”³⁰⁹ As consciousness or awareness, “You are beyond the mind.”³¹⁰ “Awareness is beyond the mind and its categories ... Many seekers lack a deep and penetrating realization of [this] emptiness, because often the looking is done at an intellectual level.”³¹¹ They get it and agree with it, *intellectually*. Though, “Intellectual agreement is just another belief and won’t make much difference to your life. To realize this truth, you need to live it.”³¹² Once *it* is “not merely understood intellectually, but seen as a reality ... life takes on a whole new dimension.”³¹³

³⁰⁵ Waite distinguishes between the traditional Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara, the Neo-Vedānta of Swami Vivekananda, the Direct Path of Ramana and Nisargadatta, and increasingly of their western students, and the Neo-Advaita of Tony Parsons and peers, who do not recognize themselves as or position themselves in part of any tradition, Waite, *Back to the Truth: 5000 years of Advaita: 378-388*. However, Waite deems distinctions between the first two categories—at least, for western audiences—“pedantic” or “academic,” insisting that despite Vivekananda’s intellectual focus, “many of his lectures are clearly Advaita in the traditional sense,” *ibid.*, 380-381. In a strangely circular blindspot, Waite is aware of the western catered Advaita of Neo-Vedānta, but unaware that his own perennialist stance, which assumes Advaita “points to the essential truth in all religions,” is itself a historical product of it, *ibid.*, 379 & xix.

³⁰⁶ Dennis Waite, *The Book of One: The Spiritual Path of Advaita* (Winchester: O Books, 2003). 204.

³⁰⁷ In 2008, a debate played out over the internet between them, see Dennis Waite, “Traditional versus Neo-Advaita,” advaita.org.uk; Tony Parsons, “The Divine Misconception: Traditional Advaita versus Neo-Advaita,” advaita.org.uk; Tony Parsons, “Traditional Not Two-ness is better than Neo Not Two-ness?,” advaita.org.uk; Dennis Waite, “A Response to ‘Not Two-ness’,” advaita.org.uk; Tony Parsons, “A Final Response to ‘Not Two-ness’,” advaita.org.uk. A few other non-dualists contributed to it as well.

³⁰⁸ Lucas, “Non-Traditional Modern Advaita Gurus in the West,” 29; compare this to Richard King, Jeremy Carette, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2005).

³⁰⁹ Adyashanti, *The Way of Liberation: A Practical Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (San Jose: Open Gate Sangha, 2012). 26.

³¹⁰ Bob Adamson, *Presence-Awareness: Just This and Nothing Else: Talks with ‘Sailor’ Bob Adamson* (Salisbury: Non-Duality Press, 2004). 41.

³¹¹ John Wheeler, *Shining in Plain View* (Salisbury: Non-Duality Press, 2005). 84 & 224.

³¹² Tolle, *The Power of Now*: 71.

³¹³ Foster, *Life without a Center*: 143.

Meanwhile, “the best the intellect can do is to recognize its own *modus operandi*. In other words, to get it, we must get why we cannot get it.”³¹⁴ After all, “The aim of Self-enquiry is to discover by direct experience—not merely at the intellectual level—that there is no such thing as a mind ... But the intellectual understanding is a step which may lead to the happening of the true understanding.”³¹⁵ That means “real satsang is non-intellectual,” since “knowing truth intellectually does absolutely nothing for you,” which really means you have to be “*sort of* intellectual ... But [that] if you’re *too* intellectual, you’ll not be able to grasp it, for you will learn theory and dry words.”³¹⁶ The concern non-traditionalists have with traditionalists and their scriptures and practices is that they cannot see “how something called Traditional Advaita could be anything other than a complex collection of ideas,” only intellectual, like all “classic religions.”³¹⁷

The traditionalist response is simple. They concur with the claims, but not with the consequences. “Neo-Advaitin teachers claim that no reading or practising of any kind can be helpful; there is no path and no one to tread it. It will be found, however, that most spent years reading and following gurus before they realized this.”³¹⁸ In their eyes, the “nothing-to-do” strategy of the “plethora of self proclaimed ‘enlightened’ beings who are responsible for the satsang culture that has attracted tens of thousands of seekers, in the last fifteen years,” is “a convenient teaching that plays to the strong anti-intellectual bias of modern seekers.” However, ignorance does not go away simply by ignoring it, “New Age theories to the contrary notwithstanding.”³¹⁹ Granted, New Age non-dualists may very well “[undermine] ‘the phantom ego,’ intellectually at least, after several ‘satsangs,’” but this is “still talking from the mind in reflected Consciousness, not from the ‘no mind,’” catering to the “lazy way in our micro wave culture of wanting instant gratification now instead of having to work at studying the Teaching of the great Sources of the contemporary Advaita Renaissance ...”³²⁰ This “Neo-Zen or New Age non-duality ... boils down to reading whatever the books of whomever is the top selling non-dual teacher *du jour* and perhaps attending a gathering (satsang or retreat) or two of theirs,” which just supports and entertains the ego with “a new way of

³¹⁴ Hartong, *Awakening to the Dream*: 46.

³¹⁵ Balsekar, *The Final Truth*: 172; Ramesh S. Balsekar, *Consciousness Speaks: Conversations with Ramesh Balsekar* (Redondo Beach: Advaita Press, 1992). 205.

³¹⁶ Adams, *Satsangs*: 2186, 3217 & 3234, italics mine.

³¹⁷ Parsons, Traditional Not-Twone is better?

³¹⁸ Waite, *Back to the Truth: 5000 years of Advaita*: 270.

³¹⁹ James Swartz, "The Horse's Mouth: An Essay on the 'Lineage' Game," advaita.org.uk; James Swartz, "Neo-Advaita," advaita.org.uk. This last essay is also found in his book, James Swartz, *How to Attain Enlightenment: The Vision of Non-Duality* (Boulder: Sentient Publications, 2009). Chapter 16.

³²⁰ Alan Jacobs, "Advaita and Western Neo-Advaita," advaita.org.uk.

thinking.”³²¹ The concern traditionalists have with non-traditionalists and their “New Age” satsangs, then, is that they are seen as “*only* communicating intellectual insights that do nothing to burn out the ego’s identification with the body and its desires ...”³²²

In sum, a rise (in awareness) of similar eastern-inspired teachers and movements with similar immediatist spiritualities has sparked a debate in which each side accuses their rivals of intellectualizing the same anti-intellectual *religious* claims. One charges the other with *philosophical* intellectualization, which supposedly relies too much on “traditional” doctrines and practices from sacred texts. The other charges the first with *psychological* intellectualization, in turn, which supposedly relies too much on public displays of private “New Age” idea(l)s and experiences. Here, I will focus on the latter.

Looking at “New Age non-duality,” it is fascinating to find that its satsangs have developed such a dominant autobiographical component in the West. Briefly glossing through history, biography has always been a part of occidental culture, going back to, for instance, the four gospels of the Bible evangelists, the lives of Plutarch (46-120)³²³ or Diogenes Laertius (3rd century),³²⁴ the meditations of Marcus Aurelius (121-180),³²⁵ the confessions of Augustine (354-430)³²⁶ or Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)³²⁷ as well as the real-life based fictions of William Shakespeare (d. 1616),³²⁸ even though it would not acquire its more critical form, until the eighteenth century, in the modern life-writings of Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)³²⁹ and of James Boswell (1740-1795).³³⁰

After a brief return to hollow decorum, during the Victorian era, reminiscent of the commemoration of ancient Greek and Roman biographies and of Christian hagiographies, *Eminent Victorians*³³¹ by Giles Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) and *Orlando*³³² by Adeline Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) spelled the rise of the so-called “new biography,”

³²¹ Aja Thomas, "Three Faces of Advaita," advaita.org.uk.

³²² Lucas, "Non-Traditional Modern Advaita Gurus in the West," 23, italics mine.

³²³ Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. John Dryden, 1st century original Greek ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 1864/1960).

³²⁴ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. Robert Drew Hicks, 3rd century original Greek ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959).

³²⁵ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations, Books 1-6*, trans. Christopher Gill, 170-180 original Greek ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³²⁶ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. E.B. Pusey, 397-400 original Latin ed. (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1853).

³²⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. John Grant, 1782 original French ed. (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1904/1931).

³²⁸ William Shakespeare, *Richard III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, ca. 1592/2008).

³²⁹ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1779-1781/2009).

³³⁰ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (New York: George Dearborn, 1791/1833).

³³¹ Giles Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (Garden City: Garden City Publishing, 1918).

³³² Adeline Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (New York: Rosetta Books, 1928/2002).

early in the twentieth century, following Freud's psychological *Leonardo Da Vinci*.³³³

As Nigel Hamilton argues, the First and especially the Second World War, (re) ignited an interest away from collective crises and ideologies and towards the vices and virtues and trials and tribulations of individuals—but now less directed at the lives of “great men” and more at those of “normal” men and women—after which biography spread, across different genres,³³⁴ “mushroom[ing] into a plethora of forms.”³³⁵ Next to an ever-present popular curiosity for life stories, in modern western culture, there has been “a veritable surge of critical interest in biography, since the 1980s,”³³⁶ to the point that we today live in “a time of hitherto unknown interest in biography.”³³⁷ This “biographical turn” is commonly said to have occurred, during the mid-late seventies.

In 1976, it arguably began with Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms*,³³⁸ which reduces the events around the Inquisition to the scale of an unknown sixteenth-century miller, Domenico “Menocchio” Scandella, who was burned at the stakes for his heretic beliefs. The Counter-Reformation had set the stage for him to speak his mind about the church and its clergy, while the growing availability of books, because of the mechanization of printing, had provided him with the words to do so. Based on ideosyncratic readings of a small amount of literature, Menocchio had come to reject much of Christianity as creations of the clerical elite intended to control the common people.

³³³ Sigmund Schlomo Freud, *Leonardo Da Vinci: A Psychosexual Study of an Infantile Reminiscence*, trans. Abraham Arden Brill, 1910 original German ed. (New York: Moffat, Yard & Co., 1916). “Psychobiographies” are often accused of reductionism and speculation, for building far-reaching conclusions on the scarce evidence of childhood experiences and filling in the gaps with technical sophistry, Donna Arz, “Psychohistory and Its Discontents,” *Biography* 1, no. 3 (1978): 1, 6 & 7; and Louise E. Hoffman, “Early Psychobiography, 1900-1930: Some Reconsiderations,” *Biography* 7, no. 4 (1984): 341 & 347.

³³⁴ “*Individuality* had won out in World War II: it was now rampant, celebrated and ... it became clear from the outpourings of women, blacks, homosexuals, post-colonials, and other hitherto marginalized minorities that biographical depiction and self-depiction would never again be permitted ... to kowtow to respectability,” Nigel Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Chapter 7, 191. Here, I rely heavily on Hamilton, though, like Renders, I am hesitant about some of the liberties he takes in his historical claims, Hans Renders, “Did Pearl Harbor Change Everything?: The Deadly Sins of Biographers,” *Journal of Historical Biography* 3, no. Spring (2008): 89-90, 94, 95.

³³⁵ Ruth Hoberman, “Biography: General Survey,” in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, ed. Margareta Jolly (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 111.

³³⁶ Max Saunders, *Self-Impressions: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction & the Forms of Modern Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). 3.

³³⁷ Binne De Haan, Hans Renders, *Introduction: The Challenge of Biography Studies* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013). 1. Renders makes a controversial distinction between research driven “biography” and more ideologically driven “life writing,” Hans Renders, *The Limits of Representativeness: Biography, Life Writing and Microhistory* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013). The shift from one to the other occurs, he reckons, when the desire to reflect history is replaced by the desire to correct it, Hans Renders, “Biography in Academia and the Critical Frontier in Life Writing: Where Biography Shifts into Life Writing,” ed. Binne De Haan and Hans Renders (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013).

³³⁸ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John Tedeschi and Ann Tedeschi, 1976 original Italian ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

By comparing his books with his interpretations, Ginzburg managed to filter out an older substratum of popular ideas from Menocchio's controversial worldview, which would come to be known as a "micro-history," based on a method of "clues." This term is derived from the *temporal* distinction between short-term (micro) and long-term (macro) studies in economics, but was adopted as a *spatial* distinction between the individual or community and society at large by the social sciences, during the late 1940s and early 1950s, and gained momentum as a historical method, in the 1970s,³³⁹ with Ginzburg—though, he himself has credited others for the actual creation of it.³⁴⁰

In 1979, Ginzburg published his "Clues" article, which has since been translated and republished numerous times. Taking his cue from the detail oriented method of art historian Giovanni Morelli, Ginzburg turned the "Morelli-method" on Morelli himself, to propose links with fictional character Sherlock Holmes and with father of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud.³⁴¹ As Matti Peltonen says, Ginzburg's method of clues reads "seemingly insignificant and marginal, unconsciously or routinely made actions as clues."³⁴² This "evidentiary paradigm" starts from the individual qualitative exception rather than the general quantitative or quantifiable rule of the "scientific paradigm."³⁴³

In 1978, this focus on the (unknown) individual would gain further momentum with the publication of the "Biography Manifesto" by Leon Edel, in the first issue of the new *Biography* journal. His rule for biographers and autobiographers alike still holds, namely that they are permitted to be as imaginative as they please, so long as they do not imagine their facts. "Saturated with fact, he may allow himself all the adventures of literary artifice, all the gratifications of story-telling—save those of make believe."³⁴⁴

As Ruth Hoberman and Hans Renders more recently repeated, there is a "moral contract" with the writer of an auto/biography, if you will, which assures the reader of the reliability and transparency of their text, simply put, that it is "true."³⁴⁵ It is what makes autobiographical texts such as Merrell-Wolff's *Pathways* so fascinating, but

³³⁹ Matti Peltonen, *What is Micro in Microhistory?* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013). 159 & 161.

³⁴⁰ He tell us he first heard of the term from his colleague Giovanni Levi, in 1977 or 1978, but adds that it had already been introduced, in its current form, by American scholar George Stewart, in 1959, Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It," *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993).

³⁴¹ Giovanni Morelli (1816-1891) had proposed a method for discerning genuine from fake paintings by looking at trivial but telling details. Ginzburg similarly suggested to focus on seemingly insignificant individual cases to detect or even correct larger historical patterns that might have otherwise remained unnoticed or unnuanced, Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, ed. Carlo Ginzburg (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 2013).

³⁴² Peltonen, *What is Micro in Microhistory?*: 158.

³⁴³ Ginzburg, "Clues," 96.

³⁴⁴ Leon Edel, "Biography: A Manifesto," *Biography* 1, no. 1 (1978).

³⁴⁵ Hoberman, "Biography: General Survey," 109; Renders, "Biography in Academia," 264.

also what makes autobiografictional³⁴⁶ ones like his “Creative Phantasy” all the more frustrating, because it remains ambiguous whether the author employs or exploits the reader’s trust, in blurring facts and fictions. “Facts are to biography what character is to the novel,” Bruce Nadel affirms. But facts are not conclusions. They are selected or neglected and even manipulated to fit a specific interpretation or characterization.³⁴⁷ Then again, as Max Saunders reminds us, some scholars have argued that *all* forms of auto/biography fictionalize the self, in a way, in the sense that they create a coherently structured narrative around it, which merely provides “self-impressions,” if you will.³⁴⁸

Especially the rise of psychology, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, fueled this fascination with the impressions of our selves. “In the process, [it] may well have fostered a culture of *autobiography*,” speculates Scott Casper, “one in which telling one’s own story becomes a form of therapy and in hearing the self-told stories of others (not just hearing the stories of self-made others) offers examples in how to tell one’s own story (not just how to make one’s own self).”³⁴⁹ This aligns well with what Leigh Gilmore refers to as “American neo-confessional” culture.

According to Gilmore, in the contemporary “memoir boom,” many people have gained—sometimes gained, lost, then regained—popular fame by publically confessing the tribulations in what would previously have been considered their private lives, in books and on talk shows.³⁵⁰ But that did not apply to Merrell-Wolff, who even lost some of his popularity and credibility, for some of his students, due to his public openness about his personal struggles. Quite the contrary, his reflections on feelings of loss and loneliness, following the deaths of his first and, even more so, of his second wife, were regarded by them as being all-too-human, unbecoming of a detached, enlightened sage.

³⁴⁶ This term designates the intersection of fact and fiction in biography and was already introduced at the start of the twentieth century in Stephen Reynolds, “Autobiografiction,” *Speaker* 15, no. 366 (1906).

³⁴⁷ Ira Bruce Nadel, *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* (London: The MacMillan press, 1984). 4. And he elaborates that “The importance of fact in biography corresponds with the seventeenth-century rise of science, the eighteenth-century emergence of empiricism, the nineteenth-century dominance by history and the modern emphasis on individual experience rather than a collective tradition,” *ibid.*, 5-6.

³⁴⁸ He does skeptically add, “To say an autobiographical text is a fictional construct is one thing. To say an autobiographical self is a fictional construct is almost something else,” Saunders, *Self-Impressions*: 507-510. Either way, autobiographical life stories could be considered to tap into the modern western celebration of individuality and autonomy and its faith in “self-creation,” cf. John D. Barbour, “Forum: Religion and American Autobiographical Writing,” *Religion and American Culture* 9, no. 1 (1999): 8.

³⁴⁹ “If we have a ‘culture of biography’ today, it is a culture that autobiography has reshaped. The ‘biographical’ information that millions of readers want is the stuff of first-person interview and the psychologist’s couch,” Scott E. Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography & Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999). 326. A combination of both are found in talk shows like the Oprah Winfrey show, Leigh Gilmore, “American Neoconfessional: Memoir, Self-Help, and Redemption on Oprah’s Couch,” *Biography* 33, no. 4 (2010): notably 662-670.

³⁵⁰ Gilmore, “American Neoconfessional,” 658 & 659-660.

It appears, then, western seekers want their gurus to share their inner stirrings with them, to show they are just as human as they are, so that they can relate to them, on the one hand. But they do not want them to be too human, just as self-consciously insecure and as emotionally unstable like they are, on the other, because they still look to them for certain guidance. Does this actually contradict each other? Not necessarily.

It does suggest *effective* autobiographical transparency concerns the past. The guru's public reflections about the strife in their private life may be drawn from distant or recent memory—going back years, months, even weeks or days—as long as it is not happening now. The struggle must be finished, if possible, resolved, for it to be a source of inspiration instead of apostation. Much like literary auto/biographies, they need to present a completed story, with a beginning, middle and—preferably satisfactory—end.

Compare this to Gilmore. She ties the biographical turn back to the satsang network. Modern western “self-help gurus” like Eckhart Tolle are tapping into the growing popularity of the medium of autobiography, she explains, by building their identity around a “mini-memoir.” These mini-memoirs always entail “a retrospective account of a conventional life filled with inexplicable unhappiness,” in which a “wounded self” has been transcended by a “self-reflexive I” that stands aloof from its (past) suffering. This autobiography is then used again as both an introduction to and a legitimization of the self-help program and ideology which typically follow, in their texts and talks.³⁵¹

Finally, Gilmore suggests that these mini-memoirs are phrased generically, in such a way “that his or her autobiography comes to sound a lot like everyone else’s,” which permits the reader or listener to tell their own self-story according to the guru’s inspiring example, in other words, as a suffering lower self which is seeking to realize a blissful higher self.³⁵² Let me conclude, however, by suggesting the complete opposite.

I suggest that modern western gurus since Merrell-Wolff have been increasingly resorting to a psychological more than a philosophical intellectualization of their generically phrased anti-intellectual claims. In doing so, they have increasingly included autobiographical reflections on and impressions of what would previously have been considered their private life, not only to introduce and to legitimate, but also to differentiate their teaching. It is a strategy for making their ideology genuinely unique, by personalizing it, in the face of a rise (in awareness) of similar modern western esoteric gurus and groups with similar eastern-inspired “advaitized” immediatist spiritualities.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 670, 671 & 673.

³⁵² Ibid., 672-673.

CONCLUSION

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“All theology is the intellectual *rationalization* of sacred religious beliefs”

Max Weber

In 1987, two years after their beloved teacher had died, a group of family and friends established what would come to be known as the Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, which has gone on to organize annual gatherings and issue quarterly newsletters, in commemoration of his life and continuation of his teaching. Anticipating potential legal and fiscal problems in the future, particularly with regards to material and financial donations, the Fellowship registered itself as a non-profit organization in 2003.

Around this time, differences in opinion began to surface among members of the board about the direction of their Fellowship. Things heated up, until, in 2010, years of growing tension came to a head in a breach between family and friends of Doroethy Briggs and Ron Leonard, on one end, and unrelated friends and followers, like Robert Holland, Charles Post and Dorene White, at the other. The former went on to form the Great Space Center, while the latter took charge of the Fellowship. Soon after, in 2012, they started a lawsuit over the rights to Merrell-Wolff’s property, personal possessions and complete archive. The case was settled in court, in 2015, with both sides agreeing to keep his Lone Pine residence intact, share the copyrights to all his published work, have his unpublished texts and talks digitized and made available through the new Fellowship’s website and secure the physical archive in the Stanford University library.

The current Fellowship has formulated its mission as follows, on their website:

the Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship seeks to preserve and support the legacy of Franklin Fowler Wolff. In more detail, we are a publicly-supported, nonprofit corporation whose mission is to educate the public about the twentieth-century American philosopher, mathematician and sage whose penname was Franklin Merrell-Wolff. Our activities include publishing and distributing his archive, and the sponsorship of forums and events to study and discuss Wolff’s lifework as well as to explore the connection between Wolff’s teachings and those of other traditions. Membership in the Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship is free to all.¹

¹ “About Us” at The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship Website, <http://www.merrell-wolff.org>. On the home page of their website, this same statement is posted, in a shortened and slightly altered phrasing.

The Great Space Center, in turn, on their website, states its mission as follows:

Our mission is to advance the Work of Franklin Merrell-Wolff. As he says of his own work, “The ultimate objective is to facilitate, as far as possible, that event which, when achieved, is called Fundamental Realization or Enlightenment.” The goal involves a transformation of consciousness. Our task is not merely to present his philosophy, but to illuminate it with insight and empathy, using our critical and inquiring intelligence. We serve as the focal point for spiritual seekers interested in Franklin Merrell-Wolff to connect with us and with each other online, through the Sangha Newsletter, and at Franklin’s Lone Pine home—now The Great Space Center—a short distance from the Ashrama.²

Their *perceived* difference in responsibility towards Merrell-Wolff’s legacy is perhaps best phrased by one of the principle actors himself, Ron Leonard, who maintains that “Doroethy [Briggs] and I continue to DO Franklin’s Work, whereas the FMWF mission statement makes clear that their concern is to educate the public ABOUT Franklin’s life and work.”³ I concur with this distinction, without the tacit normative condemnation.

However, for us, their differences are not what is most interesting. Much more relevant for this study is that insiders and outsiders on both sides continue to produce intellectual rationalizations of Merrell-Wolff’s legacy, through books⁴ and articles,⁵ in memoirs⁶ and biographies⁷ and on internet websites and other online fora.⁸ But before I go on to clarify the relevance of this, let us refresh our memory, by looking at the life and teaching of Merrell-Wolff, against their socio-historical background, one last time, to work towards my answer to the Kripalian question that initially started this whole Ginzburgian investigation into Hofstadterian “anti-intellectualism” in America, about why popular anti-intellectual idea(l)s have often been spread through—increasingly—intellectual texts and talks, by and for the intellectual elite and educated middle-class.

² This is on the home page of The Great Space Center Website, <http://www.franklinmerrell-wolff.com>. The page head reads: “Franklin Merrell-Wolff. Philosopher. Mathematician. Mystic. Spiritual Teacher.”

³ Ron Leonard, Correspondence with the Author, 2016. original capitals

⁴ Ron Leonard, *The Transcendental Philosophy of Franklin Merrell-Wolff* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

⁵ Thomas J. McFarlane, “The Heart of Franklin Merrell-Wolff’s Philosophy,” McFarlane, Thomas J., integralscience.org/tom.

⁶ Joseph Rowe, “The Gnostic of Mount Whitney: A Personal and Philosophical Memoir of Franklin Merrell-Wolff,” (Phoenix: Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship, 2012).

⁷ Doroethy Briggs, “Franklin Merrell-Wolff: An American Philosopher and Mystic,” (Phoenix: unpublished, 2012).

⁸ Both the Fellowship and the GSC have a discussion forum. The former also posts essays by members.

Starting with the **origination** of his life and teaching, it is significant Franklin Fowler Wolff was raised in a Methodist home in small-town America, at the national and cultural frontier of California, at a time of rapid social and technological change, with the Gilded Age turning into the Progressive Era. As the telegraph and telephone together with the rise in railroad mileage were tying the nation together, the American people had started to adjust their sense of distance, increasingly shifting their cultural identity from regional to national. This national culture consisted of a “can-do” spirit, created by hard-working “self-made” men and women, who needed practical “character” more than abstract “intellect,” to cope with the harsh reality of the Wild West. For even though their country has been founded by intellectuals, Americans have frowned upon intellectualism as a tacit badge of distinction and assault on egalitarianism since.

Already during his early teens did young Franklin start to think critically about the world, as it had been presented to him, including the evangelical dogmas he had been spoon fed, as the son of a Methodist. Due to his personal proclivity for rational reflection, he would become increasingly disenchanted with the enthusiasm and anti-intellectualism of evangelicalism and drawn to the post-Kantian idealism of American Transcendentalism. It pushed him away from the church and pulled him towards the university, exchanging religion for science. Taking advantage of the academic boom around the turn of the twentieth-century, he entered the ranks of the intellectual elite.

At Stanford and Harvard, he excelled on a course of education which combined the abstractions of pure mathematics with the reflections of pragmatist philosophy and introspections of experimental psychology, later complemented with eastern and esoteric intuitions, after his encounters with Vedānta and Theosophy. He completed his studies, accepted a teaching job and briefly contemplated an academic career, before leaving it all behind to seek a “third form of cognition,” which he was certain to exist.

At the start of this **investigation**, Merrell-Wolff had discarded the dogmatism of mainstream religion as well as the materialist rationalism of mainstream science. It drove him into the wild, literally, into the Esselen country south of Carmel, close to the Big Sur coast. There began his quest for meaning outside the confines of conventional society. With a few like-minded friends, he set out to set up a utopian colony, but soon abandoned his plan, to join a post-Theosophical commune in Halcyon. After his return from the First World War, he married fellow member Sarah “Sherifa” Merrell-Briggs. The marriage was likely never consummated, though, for he did not indulge in physical urges. While Sherifa was prepared as a “medium,” Franklin was appointed as a “priest.”

As such, they started to give lectures and workshops. As they became more and more invested in the group and its ideology, however, power struggles between them and the commune's second-in-command, following the death of its leader, resulted in their departure. They went on to join a number of other eastern-inspired esoteric groups—which were growing ever more popular—often in charge of their own branch. Sherifa would typically take care of the practical and ritual organization. Franklin would teach, assuming the style of an Indian guru. Ideological differences usually forced them to leave again, within months, sometimes years, until they established their own school, with their own rituals, their own idea(l)s and their own followers—the Assembly of Man.

Seen in a larger context, the Merrell-Wolffs were typical products of their time. Especially after WWI, during the First New Age, the perceived bankruptcy of modern western culture prompted many in the West to become spiritual “seekers.” Now that God was dead and buried, a general loss of meaning led them to search for new exciting answers to old existential questions in western esoteric and eastern-inspired new religious movements such as Theosophy or Neo-Hindu and Neo-Buddhist societies, which had been attracting interest, ever since the World Parliament of Religions, but whose growth was stunted by increasingly strict immigration rules. Detached from or even defiant towards institutional religions—part of the process of secularization—many of these movements would resort to methods and theories from “the rational sciences of the secular West” to legitimate “the irrational religions of the mystic East,” contributing to a growing scientification of religion. These groups would typically converge around a charismatic leader, who claimed to have had one or more mystical experiences themselves, which had given them an immediate knowledge of the divine nature of reality—rendered in terms of a non-dual spirit or consciousness. Although they would insist that these events transcended the intellect, the rise (in awareness) of similar teachers with similar movements based on similar claims forced them to rationalize their experiences into an intellectually sophisticated ideology, to create and sustain an identity deemed sufficiently unique to warrant its own school. Such a “reasoned flight beyond reason” also recurs in Merrell-Wolff's early but mostly later work, after 7 August 1936.

Merrell-Wolff saw his **realization** of 1936 as the culmination of a series of five correlated events that covered fourteen years and peaked after a period of isolation in the gold mines at Michigan Bluff. It showed him that realization is not the perception of some sensational object or the introspection of some conceptual object of consciousness, but the “introception” of the non-dual consciousness that is always already there,

which he would later come to define as “consciousness turning upon itself towards its source.” As such, it goes beyond reason, he said. And yet, he would spend the rest of his life constructing an intellectual frame around this anti-intellectual claim, through highly intellectual texts and talks, whose content he summarized as “Introceptualism.”

He claimed Introceptualism was a unique manifestation of the wisdom religion or perennial philosophy that is the common core of all enduring traditions, but that its novel mix of eastern and western metaphysics was original enough to set it apart from other historical schools. This shows the same elite perennialism of the eastern-inspired western esoteric discourse of scholars within the Darmstadt School or the Eranos circle.

In the thirties and forties, particularly after Merrell-Wolff published *Pathways through to Space*—his first book, which offers detailed psychological introspections of and philosophical reflections on the events surrounding his mystical realization—the Assembly of Man started to grow. But it would not be until the seventies, after he had published *Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object*—his second book, which attempts, but only partly succeeds, to construe a rational teaching out of the irrational events in his life from his first book—that his popularity took off. The Assembly never surpassed a hundred members, though, which is normal for such emergent traditions.

In the fifties, the Assembly activity came to a halt, when Sherifa fell seriously ill. During this time, their attention shifted to its identity. The group was renamed as “the Holistic Assembly,” with its own reformulated mission statement as well as reorganized leadership structure—reminiscent of the very organized religions they had walked away from, complete with ordained ministers and licensed healers and teachers—in order to distinguish it from other seemingly similar “pseudo-occult” groups. But before they could implement these changes, Sherifa suffered a series of strokes and finally passed away. It left Merrell-Wolff lonely and depressed, in need of another female companion.

Enter Gertrude “Lakshmi Devi” Adams, a disciple who agreed to replace Sherifa at his side. Though Merrell-Wolff never credited her for it, she, too, significantly contributed to the activity and identity of the Assembly of Man, as it was again called, in the sixties and seventies. Mainly through her efforts, many of the group’s initial plans were (re)established or expanded. The Assembly “Ranch” commune in Lone Pine was permanently inhabited and reopened for weekly meetings with students and visitors, a monthly newsletter was introduced and the yearly summer school or convention was reinaugurated, which all added to the group’s shared—post-Theosophical—self-image. And at her encouragement, Merrell-Wolff began to record talks and write texts again,

which kept rationally refining his idea(l)s, at an unprecedented rate. For they both felt they could not “afford to become stale,” given the rising competition of similar groups.

After WWII, once Cold War concerns about domestic communism had lost their sharp McCarthyite edge, there was more leeway for criticism on traditional American culture and for indulgence in alternative ideologies and lifestyles. The socio-economic changes that left people with more time and money on their hands further facilitated this development. As a result, another rise (in awareness) of religious movements took place—especially after the immigration limits were lifted, in 1965—during the counter-cultural Second New Age. Yet, this time, the “spiritual privilege” of “seekers” was no longer restricted to the socio-intellectual elite, but democratized across, mostly upper, middle-class circles, for instance, at “growth centers” like Esalen. The accumulating competition—more visible than ever, given the growing globalized communication and mobility—again, forced founders and followers of emergent traditions to differentiate rationally their ideologies from established as well as emerging religious and secular traditions, by invoking scientific and religious methods and theories, to elaborate and legitimate their secular-religious “spirituality,” intellectualizing their anti-intellectual claims, in order to create and sustain what they considered their own unique identity.

In the final stages of his life, Merrell-Wolff seems to have wanted to set the tone for his posthumous memory, through autobiographical talks and capstone statements, plotting the general course for the **routinization** of his legacy by posterity. Indeed, after his death, in 1985, insiders and outsiders have presented and interpreted his life and teaching as an enlightened psychologically prone philosopher, who added his own original—mystical, but logically sound—touch to a perennial wisdom religion that they believe is behind every lasting world tradition. Even if this claim has been increasingly challenged by social constructivists. So far, then, studies and statements about his life and teaching have been much less a reflection *on* than a reflection *of* the late modern American intellectual anti-intellectualism of which Merrell-Wolff is a perfect example.

Reasoned flights beyond reason like his Introceptualism have often led to a new (age) religion. In fact, Merrell-Wolff himself pointed out that “the material I have put down in written form or oral form that has been recorded may lead, after I depart from this plane, to the formation of a philosophical school or a religious movement or even ... a combination of the two.” However, his followers curiously identify their Assembly as an “emergent religion,” but, to this day, reject its description as a “cult,” despite the historical and semantic overlap. This is almost certainly an outcome of the “cult wars”

from the eighties, after which every religious fringe group was generally regarded as a “dangerous cult” of brainwashed pawns under the spell of a deranged, selfish charlatan.

Similarly, advocates of the Assembly will often distance Merrell-Wolff from the “guru-apocalypse” of the eighties and nineties, insisting he was nothing like a Krishna-murti, Muktananda or Osho-Rajneesh. In many ways, he was, though. Like them, he professed an eastern-inspired western esoteric ideology, which relied on a claim to an immediate experiential knowledge of a non-dual reality. His message, too, was spread through highly intellectual texts and talks with students with an increasingly privatized character, which, these days, would be designated as “satsangs.” In fact, Merrell-Wolff could be said to have anticipated the autobiographically “advaitized” immediatism of modern satsang teachers like Toni Roberson and Andrew Cohen, in the wake of Neo-Advaitin sages such as Ramana Maharshi, H.W.L. Poonja and Nisargadatta Maharaj.

To answer the question about why popular anti-intellectual idea(l)s have often been spread through—increasingly—intellectual texts and talks, by and for the intellectual elite and educated middle-class, then, in a single sentence, is because the rising education of the general population, after an academic boom, a general secularization, accompanied by an increasing scientification of religion, in the wake of a widespread disenchantment with conventional science and religion, and the subsequent globalized search for eastern and western alternatives, including the democratization of this once elitist privilege, which went along with it, together, have repeatedly facilitated a rise (in awareness) of similar charismatic leaders of similar groups with similar ideologies, as a search for meaning, after a far-reaching social crisis like a war, which has constantly forced the founders and followers of these emergent traditions to refine intellectually their anti-intellectual idea(l)s, to differentiate themselves from “dangerous cults” and other “pseudo-occult” groups and create and sustain their ostensibly unique identity.

So, what does all this tell us about modern anti-intellectualism in America? It is safe to conclude that there is no anti-intellectualism, no flight from reason, in modern American culture, like Hofstadter and Webb once said. But as Kripal rightly observed, contemporary—metaphysical—religious discourse in America does abound with intellectuals urging others to transcend the intellect. As I have shown throughout this study, seekers are, indeed, explicitly encouraged to “go out of your mind.” But the implicit message is often to use the mind in doing so, to treat the intellect as a jumping board for transcending the intellect, in other words, to take a *reasoned flight beyond* reason.

FRANKLIN MERRELL-WOLFF: CONCLUSION

Following Weber, if theology entails the intellectual rationalization of religious beliefs—which can themselves be traced to a revelation or realization of a charismatic “prophet”—then reasoned flights beyond reason could be taken as a form of theology, which try to work out tensions within and between different ideologies. And if we take reasoned flights beyond reason as a form of theological reflection, then the legacy of modern western gurus such as Franklin Merrell-Wolff and emergent traditions like his Assembly of Man are really not (only) about anti-intellectualism, but (also) about the changing-yet-continuing presence and relevance of religion and theology in America.

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NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

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FRANKLIN MERRELL-WOLFF

Een Intellectuele Geschiedenis van Hedendaags Anti-Intellectualisme in Amerika

Dave Vliegenthart

“De rede stierf ergens voor 1865”

James Webb

Deze dissertatie beantwoordt de vraag waarom de anti-intellectuele claims van moderne Westerse guru's van hedendaagse nieuwe religieuze bewegingen in Noord Amerika—met name tijdens de eerste (ca. 1920-1940) en de tweede (ca. 1960-1980) “New Age”—in toenemende mate zijn geïntellectualiseerd. Hierbij gebruikt het microhistorische fragmenten uit het leven en de leer van moderne Amerikaanse guru Franklin Merrell-Wolff (1887-1985) en zijn nieuwe religieuze beweging The Assembly of Man of “De Vereniging van de Mens” als uitgangspunt om macrohistorische ontwikkelingen beter te kunnen begrijpen.

Het antwoord op bovenstaande vraag zou men kunnen lezen als een biografie. Het schurkt echter dichter aan tegen een microhistorie. Maar zelfs dat dekt nog onvoldoende de lading van dit werk. Het betreft namelijk niet *alleen* de geschiedenis van een moderne Westerse guru in zijn directe omgeving, maar *ook* het begrijpen, nuanceren en corrigeren van de bredere context van het zogenaamd wijdverspreid “anti-intellectualisme” binnen de Amerikaanse samenleving. Het is dus niet zozeer een microhistorie van een onbekende Amerikaanse intellectueel aan de rand van de maatschappij, maar veeleer een herziene intellectuele macrohistorie van een bekend Amerikaans fenomeen in het culturele centrum.

Intellectualisme is een nagenoeg religieuze toewijding tot een reflectief leven waarin het denken centraal staat. Anti-intellectualisme verwijst naar een argwaan of zelfs een afkeer voor een dergelijk reflectief leven en alles en iedereen dat het vertegenwoordigd.

Een groot aantal academische en publieke intellectuelen heeft gesproken en spreekt nog steeds van een algehele anti-intellectuele “vlucht van de rede” in de Amerikaanse maatschappij op zich en binnen haar religieuze discours in het bijzonder. En dan met name in het zogenaamde metafysisch religieuze discours, waarbinnen methoden en theorieën uit diverse Oosterse en Westerse religieuze en seculiere tradities op eclectische wijze samen worden gebracht. Echter, als we kijken naar dergelijke “seculier-religieuze” spiritualiteit, dan zien we dat het gedachtegoed van de grondleggers van moderne nieuwe religieuze bewegingen weliswaar gestoeld zijn op vermeende anti-intellectuele ervaringen, maar dat deze ervaringen verder zijn uitgewerkt tot en omkleed zijn met intellectuele ideologieën.

De vraag is *waarom* hun anti-intellectuele boodschap over onmiddellijke ervaringen van de werkelijkheid die het denken zouden ontstijgen—in toenemende mate—is verspreid via uiterst intellectuele teksten en toespraken door en voor de intellectuele elite en hoger opgeleide middenklasse? Deze dissertatie toont hoe een samenspel van wederzijds beïnvloedende sociaal-historische ontwikkelingen rondom met name religie, filosofie en psychologie heeft bijgedragen aan de intellectualisering van anti-intellectuele waarheidsclaims van moderne Westerse guru’s in het Amerikaanse metafysisch religieuze discours.

Daarbij zien we dit patroon: een sociale crisis, zoals een revolutie of oorlog, heeft vaak geleid tot een beleving van algehele zinloosheid onder het Amerikaanse volk, waarbij bestaande bronnen van betekenis als betekenisloos werden ervaren. Daardoor ontstond er een vraag naar alternatieve bronnen van betekenis, waarbij antwoorden werden gezocht buiten de kaders van de conventionele Westerse cultuur, in Oosterse en Occulte tradities. Mede onder invloed van de globalisering en democratisering van het “spiritueel privilege” van dergelijke zoektochten naar zingeving, groeide (het besef van) het aanbod aan soortgelijke guru’s met soortgelijke religieuze bewegingen gebaseerd op soortgelijke leringen die terugvoeren op soortgelijke religieuze ervaringen. Dit heeft leiders en volgelingen van nieuwe religieuze bewegingen steeds weer aangezet om hun anti-intellectuele ervaringen steeds meer intellectueel door te denken, om zodoende een “unieke” identiteit samen te stellen en in stand te houden. Daarmee hebben zij het intellect als instrument gebruikt om te wijzen op een onmiddellijke kennis die het intellect juist zou overstijgen.

Hieruit kunnen we concluderen dat er geen sprake is van een anti-intellectualisme, maar—hoe paradoxaal het ook klinkt—van een geïntellectualiseerd anti-intellectualisme. Kortom, het metafysisch religieuze discours van moderne Westerse guru’s en hun nieuwe religieuze bewegingen in de hedendaagse Amerikaanse cultuur wordt niet zozeer gekenmerkt door een vlucht *van* de rede, maar meer door een *redelijke* vlucht *voorbij* de rede.

Curriculum Vitae Author

Dave Vliegenthart was born in Dordrecht, the Netherlands, on 28 December 1980. From 1999 to 2005, he studied Business Communication as well as Philosophy at the Radboud University Nijmegen. After a brief administrative position at ABN AMRO bank, he was selected for a traineeship and subsequent management position at Rabobank Nederland, where he worked from 2007 to 2010. In 2010, he decided to pursue a career switch to academia and signed up for a research master in Religious Studies at the University of Amsterdam, which he completed with honor (*cum laude*), in 2012. From 2012 to 2016, he conducted his doctoral research in Religious Studies at the University of Groningen. He is currently working as an adjunct teacher in the Liberal Arts & Sciences department and as a communication trainer at the Language Center, both, at the University of Tilburg. He aspires to an academic career in teaching and research.

