2019

Whither Rose?: Philosophy, Theology, and the West

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Philosophy Honors Thesis

May 1, 2019

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Acknowledgments:

This thesis is the culmination of many long months of reading, writing, and revision, guided and inestimably benefited from the philosophical talents and editorial finesse of my advisor, Prof. Andrew Pessin. The intelligence and wisdom he evinced throughout this project amazes me, and I am profoundly grateful to have worked with someone so perceptive and uniquely curious.

Even though I declared my Philosophy major late in the autumn of my senior year, I am lucky to have had many engaging conversations with Profs. Lindsay Crawford, Simon Feldman, Derek Turner, and Larry Vogel of the Philosophy Department. The classes I was able to take with them have been genuinely interesting, and altogether they are a wonderful group of teachers.

Profs. John Coats and Sharon Portnoff of the Government and Religious Studies departments, respectively, were the second and third readers of this paper. I am fortunate to have taken many classes with them over the years. In different ways, I have found both refreshingly old-fashioned in their approach to teaching, interested as they are in ideas rather than ideologies.

For nearly all of this school year, I have taken copious notes on Prof. Brad Gregory's magisterial work *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*. For his profound critique of contemporary answers to the 'Life Questions,' his analysis of the distinction between the embodied soul and the constructed self, his multilayered description of the historical trajectory of Christianity, and his delineation of Western hyperpluralism, I am deeply indebted.

To Christian Parker and Aleksandra Plucinski, students of the class of 2020, this thesis is respectfully inscribed. They have been profoundly helpful in clarifying my ideas, and it has been an honor to have enjoyed the friendship of such kindred spirits.

During my sophomore and junior years, I worked for Diane Monte, the recently retired secretary of the Philosophy Department. A lovely woman who, in addition to her other tasks, regularly organized meetings of the Philosophy Club on her own initiative and cared for the student lounges on the third floor of Blaustein, is someone sorely missed by those of us who used to frequent her office for conversation and a pastry. Our many discussions about politics (amidst photocopying) helped guide the earliest intimations of this paper, and I am thankful to have known someone so special.

Erin Walker, formerly of the Lyman Allyn Art Museum of New London, Connecticut, was a conversationalist of mine for many years. Always willing to engage with my ideas (and those of the authors I was reading), I thank her for the many friendly discussions we shared.

I am grateful to Andrew Lopez, research librarian at Shain Library, for his help in addressing my bibliographical questions and formatting concerns.

Die Rose, die Lilie, die Taube, die Sonne,
  Die liebt' ich einst alle in Liebeswonne,
Ich lieb' sie nicht mehr, ich liebe alleine
  Die Kleine, die Feine, die Reine, die Eine;
Sie selber, aller Liebe Bronne,
  Ist Rose und Lilie und Taube und Sonne.
                    —Heinrich Heine

Quam parva sapientia regitur mundus!
                    —Latin maxim

O könnt' ich fliegen wie Tauben dahin,
  weit hinweg vor dem Feinde zu flieh'n!
in die Wüste eilt' ich dann fort,
  fände Ruhe am schattigen Ort.
                    —William Bartholomew

Introduction:

Leaf by leaf the roses fall, but the will of their gardener ensures perennial growth. The hue of the pedals, the strength of the stems, the size of the buds: a testament to man and nature, the care of the former exemplifying the glory of the latter. Constant care throughout the seasons, from spring awakening to autumnal repose, tempers linear illusions of progress with the cyclical harmonies of creation. The labors of the loving cultivator strengthen his flowers against agitations ephemeral and perpetual. From his choice of soil, to the location of his plot, his efforts intertwine the necessities of reason and faith.

Intuiting the ideal conditions for their flourishing, the gardener wisely supplements the material necessities of his crop with the spiritual intimations of their growth. Faith in the seed of the first cause and its attendant succession of changes, hope for the cooperation of the weather, wonder at the fragility of life and the essence of existence: all inform his agricultural endeavors. In choosing to carefully attend his flowers, the revelation of life is reasoned; he believes and knows.

The vitality of the rose, though, is never guaranteed. If the gardener puts all of his faith in nature, blindly assuming that the physical world will naturally yield what he desires, his flowers' stunted growth and wilted pedals will evince his folly. If he puts all of his faith in himself, the artificially engineered roses he produces will betray, in their botanic verisimilitude, the substitution for truth with lies, imperfect life with perfect death.

We of the Western world, that geographically diffuse and creatively kaleidoscopic civilization, are the inheritors of a garden that, by the will of its cultivators, shall flourish or perish to the extent that we grasp the indivisible imperative of the transcendently objective and immanently apparent. The rose of our intellectual, ethical, artistic, and political patrimony shall wither or blossom on the metaphysical soils we choose to lovingly cultivate, and from our philosophies and theologies shall the choice of barbarity or sublimity, desecration or conservation, and disillusionment or enchantment be effected for the judgment of posterity.

To think that a life lived philosophically is predicated solely on reason, while a life lived religiously is predicated solely on faith, is to emasculate God and eroticize tyranny. To perceive a vast chasm between thinking philosophically and thinking theologically strains the explanatory powers of both, and strengthens neither. In essence, to philosophize meaningfully is to contemplate the deepest recesses of reality and the highest domains of the intelligible, to examine the interiority of subjective being and the exteriority of the objective cosmos; to theologize meaningfully is to desire the same end by different means.

The following paper is an extended defense of this idea, explained through a detailed analysis of the epistemic structures of Western philosophy and theology. After elaborating upon their differences, I delineate their fundamental congruence: proceeding from epistemically similar acts of faith, the noblest forms of philosophizing and theologizing conduce in a unitary apprehension of *Truth*. The *enchanted intellect*, that which substantiates the veracity of theological truth claims while metaphysically orienting the trajectory of philosophical truth claims, is, in the pursuit of wisdom and the negation of ignorance, one that rejects both the constraints of ideology and the limitations of rationality. After examining the epistemic challenge of religious pluralism, I conclude with an analysis of Western culture, detailing the intellectual, societal, and psychic chaos of our times.

Philosophical Approaches to Obtaining Knowledge:

To distinguish philosophical intellection from other forms of thought, this section will address two interrelated questions: "What is philosophy, and to what end is philosophical thinking employed?," and "What are the characteristics and assumptions of Western philosophizing?"

Elucidating a comprehensive definition of philosophy is far beyond the scope of this paper; even if I could provide a systematic and (accurate) interpretation of each of the rough demarcations of philosophical history, to account for the plethora of forms that Western philosophizing has taken (treatises, dialogues, confessions, essays, books, etc.) *and* the particular socio-cultural differences separating specific thinkers and their ideas is well above my intellectual grasp. However, I think it is appropriate to outline briefly my understanding of Western philosophizing, to distinguish it from other forms of thought.

I posit that Western philosophizing is, in its essence, *the pursuit of wisdom and the negation of ignorance*. To think philosophically is not to belong to a particular school of thought, or to adopt a particular methodology. The highest aspiration of philosophical thought is to ascertain what is *True* and reject what is *False*. The capitalization of these words does not entail blind casuistry, with the mechanical discernment of what is correct and blind rejection of what is not. Rather, the philosopher is deeply concerned, if but implicitly, with addressing meaningfully the 'Life Questions': "Why I am here?," "What is love?," "For what purpose do the cosmos exist?," etc. If these questions were unanswerably evinced, philosophy would become an exercise in intellectual futility. The fatal error of postmodernist philosophy, however, is that it falsely 'answers' the questions (while really begging them entirely) in assuming *Truth* to be *truths*, and what is *False* to be *valid differences of opinion.*

With respect to what the characteristics and assumptions of Western philosophizing are, they include: (1) The use of reason, (2) the presupposition of a particular anthropology of man, (3) a tendency to reject blind authority and dogmatism, and (4) the use of both dialectic argumentation and historical perspective. While this is certainly not an exhaustive account of what constitutes philosophical ways of thinking, it details a wide swath of such thought as it has occurred throughout Western history.

'Reason' is an amorphous term with connotations ranging from "consciousness of mind" to "pure intellect," but reasoning is the way, through careful consideration of what is known and what is believed, what is observable and what is thought, and what is objectively true and subjectively determined, by which ignorance and a lack of knowledge is ameliorated, inversely proportional to the wisdom ideally acquired through such thought. In a line of philosophical inquiry, an inordinate number of potential ideas or postulates may be considered. There are no required methodologies or frameworks; a question (i.e. 'What is beauty?') or proposition (i.e. 'All men are created equal.') is posited, and an argument is substantiated in the pursuit of understanding and addressing meaningfully the notion or ideas at hand. Beyond a smattering of logical prescriptions (i.e. the law of non-contradiction) and the understood objectivity of mathematical theorems and equations, there are no *required* objects of the intellect, boundaries of inquiry, or foundational premises that *necessarily* ground philosophical ways of thinking.

The philosophical use of the intellect proceeds from a particular anthropology of man, from a presupposed understanding of what constitutes the human person. For the ancients, the cosmos was suffused with transcendence as its inhabitants constituted a purposive part of creation. Socrates speaks of being possessed by a "daemon" that guided his intellection, Aristotle

writes obliquely of the 'unmoved mover,' and man inhabits an enchanted world metaphysically intelligible and teleologically oriented. St. Augustine and his medieval successors presupposed man to be an embodied soul within an explicitly Christian anthropology, stressing the free will of His creation in the providentially ordained cosmos of His design. Falling away from this, Descartes and his early modern successors assumed a mind-body dualism, one which over the coming centuries leads directly into our modern preoccupation with the constructed self, apparently possessed of a *tabula rasa* intellect and an infinitely immutable identity.

To philosophize as an *embodied soul*, endowed with intellect and teleologically, providentially oriented in the purposive cosmos of His design, is diametrically opposed to philosophizing as a *constructed self*, evolutionarily adapted to contingent circumstances of power, sex, race, and class in an intrinsically meaningless universe. To be able to distinguish what is *True* as opposed to what is *False* requires the former; the latter effectively entails philosophical decrepitude.

There is also a tendency to reject authority and dogmatism in Western philosophizing, but this is admittedly a checkered characterization. Lest we think of the philosopher as a freethinking individualist, smashing every idol and preconceived notion along the path to *Truth*, there is a certain conformity of thought in the philosophical tradition. We blithely take Descartes as the exemplar of philosophical thought: the intrepid rationalist who was able to stand athwart of religious superstition and declare resolutely *cogito, ergo sum*. Every philosopher who has followed Descartes is 'forced' into mirroring Descartes: what unique or new or interesting or novel ideas can *I, the individual, sola ratio* argue philosophically? The priesthood of crypto-Cartesians predominates the philosophical clergy, but their centuries-old clericalism regrettably discredits and blurs what could be a more comprehensive and richer understanding of philosophy. There is nothing inherently wrong with a philosophically freethinking individualism, but it is wrong to think that the philosopher *necessarily* breaks down every myth and refutes every empirically unverifiable notion, in the quasi-Protagorean pursuit of a metaphysically-decoupled humanism.

So, while it is true that there is a tendency to reject authority and dogmatic thinking in philosophical thinking (as exemplified by both the early modern philosopher *qua* Cartesian idol-smasher, and the modern philosopher *qua* Nietzschean god-smasher), there is also a strong (and indeed, ironical) tendency for the philosopher to express allegiance to, or align himself with, particular schools or methodologies of thought. Whether in the murky divisions between analytic and continental thought, in the profusion of 'neo-'philosophies, or the ideological commitments that stem from endorsing philosophical systems (i.e. liberalism), a given philosopher is more likely than not to find himself beholden to any number of idols, his implicit commitments to idol-desecration notwithstanding. The ideal philosopher is capable of rejecting authority or dogmatism; the actual philosopher is as wedded to ideas as irrationally or on the basis of blind faith as any other individual.

Yet, the philosopher is more likely than such an individual to *recognize* when they are believing an idea on the basis of authority or dogmatically, which brings me to the final characteristic of Western philosophizing enumerated above: the use of both dialectic argumentation and historical perspective. The philosopher *par excellence* of the entire Western philosophical tradition is surely Socrates, immortalized and glorified as he is in the dialogues written by his devoted student Plato. In a very general sense, *all* Western philosophizing is grounded in the heuristic of careful dialectic that Socrates perfected, exemplified by the Socratic admission of ignorance and his eponymous method of rigorous dialogue and careful questioning.

The good philosopher today must act as both an historian and a dialectician, carrying out solid lines of argumentation while concurrently examining what is old so as to make anew what is perennially *True*. To resolutely dismiss the truth claims of the ancient or medieval period is to arrogantly presuppose an inherent virtue within modern thought, one that the unmitigated intellectual and physical chaos of the last five centuries should surely cause us to question.

Theological Approaches to Obtaining Knowledge:

To distinguish theological intellection from other forms of thought, this section will address two interrelated questions: "What is theology, and to what end is theological thinking employed?," and "What are the characteristics and assumptions of Western theologizing?"

The historical and cognitive outlines of Western philosophy are discernible and fairly constant, even when accounting for disparate forms and contexts. Western theology, in sharp contrast, has no such continuity. The oral traditions of Judaism are rejected by the Church Fathers as Jesus's ministry is codified into the imperatives of the Roman Catholic Church; medieval disputations and dense scholasticism intellectualize the notion of God to heights of incredible abstraction; the epistemological quandary of Protestant theology (i.e. *sola scriptura*) overthrows the unified experiential knowledge of Latin Christendom; Deist interpretations of a rationalist God coincide with the increasingly strict separation of church and state; Moral Therapeutic Deism (Smith) renders God a benevolent friend of subjective understanding and personal belief. In short, Western theologizing has no historically consistent form.

However, even though the semblance of historical uniformity that characterizes Western philosophizing is absent in Western theologizing, this does not mean that a general definition of theology is impossible to posit, at least according to my own experience of it to date. Essentially, Western theologizing is *the understanding of God through the intellect, anchored and bounded by religious truth claims.* The Western monotheisms ascribe to God similar attributes and venerate Him as the transcendent Being that created the cosmos, continually creating and providentially ordaining everything within it (without otherwise doing the logically impossible). God, apprehended in very different ways by the Christian and the Jew, and differently still within each of the innumerable sects and divisions of each faith, is understood through the *intellect*, via theological writings. Every theological writing is both *anchored and bounded* by specific truth claims that orient the person theologizing within a specific faith; to think unmoored from or beyond these truth claims is to think outside of Western theology, per se.

Given this understanding, the end to which Western theologizing is employed is a greater comprehension of God analogous to the philosophical *pursuit of wisdom and the negation of ignorance.* To theologize is to clarify intellectually and affirm religiously what the truth claims of the theologian's faith are, for the betterment of the faithful.

With respect to what the characteristics and assumptions of Western theologizing are, they include: (1) The use of truth claims that are taken to be indisputable, irrefutable, and irrevocable, and that function as epistemically unassailable anchors from whence the essence of the religion is derived (and beyond which the religion cannot go), and (2) a grasp of the transcendent expressed through historical, scriptural, institutional, and personal means. It is surely impossible to give an exhaustive account of what constitutes *religious* ways of thinking, but with respect to an explicitly *theological* way of thinking, these two multifaceted details are vital.

A religious truth claim (i.e. "Christ is the Son of God," or "The Trinitarian God is comprised of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost") expresses, as a formulated statement, that which is indisputable, irrefutable, and irrevocable: in the simplest terms, it cannot be disputed, refuted, or revoked. Such claims simply *are*, and it is far from a grammatical quirk or a trick of semantics to identify a statement of religious fact as that which, by definition, *is*. Now, such claims are not self-evident or naturally intuitive; a vaguely 'spiritual' combination of words is not epistemically strong enough to be a religious truth claim. A given religious truth claim acts as both an epistemic *anchor* and a *boundary* for the particular faith, and it is in this respect that such formulations serve mutually compatible and crucial roles. To take as an example the above formulation "Christ is the Son of God," this statement *anchors* all Christian belief by identifying resolutely that *x is y without exception, at all times*. The incontestability of this statement withstands the changing tides of Christian belief in the West, for as an *anchor* it moors and strengthens Christian belief as a bulwark against the vicissitudes of life. For the Jewish believer, the truth claim that "God revealed His commandments to the Israelites through Moses at Mount Sinai" *grounds* a religion otherwise diffuse and atomized throughout history, especially in consideration of the post-exilic diaspora. A religious truth claim also *bounds* a particular faith by serving as a form of epistemic security, guarding against that which fundamentally disputes or negates the essence of the religion. One cannot, as a Christian, say something *beyond* the idea that "The Trinitarian God is comprised of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." If the Christian were to speculate that He was an *octotarian* God or an entirely human creation, this would constitute a *transgression* of a formulation that *cannot by definition* admit of transgression.

Stemming from this epistemic certitude is the *essence* of the religion, and from the acceptance and belief of religious truth claims are religions said to be *different,* with the specificity of these claims constituting the shared belief system of a religion and from whence the virility (or impotence) of its explanatory power is derived. One cannot accept a Trinitarian God and be Jewish; one cannot be Catholic and deny the divinity of Christ; one cannot accept papal infallibility and be a Protestant. In the lived experience of every religion, of course, there are countless differences and divergences of belief between sects and amongst individuals, but this multiplicity of perspectives does not undermine the *essential* dimensions of Christianity *as fundamentally distinguished from* Judaism, and vice versa. On the Ship of Theseus that is a religious worldview, removing a fundamental truth claim is akin to removing a large section of the flooring; even if it is replaced with something else, the boat will not be a seaworthy vessel.

A kind of contact with the divine, or a transcendent experience, also frequently informs theological reasoning, one that is usually expressed in the paradoxical act of writing or expressing in words that which is ostensibly ineffable. Such an experience is usually described in terms of spiritual ascension or a point of heightened consciousness, where the body and soul of the individual are united in an apprehension of what *Is.* Understandably, the language that is often used to explain this type of divine contact is connotatively vague or supernatural; there is a mystical quality to this felt presence, and it strains the boundaries of human rationality and conventions of language.

While it is not necessary for one to have a mystical experience, a recognition of that which is transcendent and otherwise beyond the bounds of ordinary intellection informs the historical, scriptural, institutional, and personal means of theological expression. Historically, events occur in the life of a faith (the Israelites wander in the desert during the Exodus; Saul is converted to Paul on the road to Damascus) that become part of its historical heritage. The

memory of these events is preserved and brought forth into the present through written Scripture. When Biblical injunctions or prophetic stories are recalled through sermons, tracts, lessons, and processes of religious instruction, the historical distance of the events and persons is diminished through the 'presence' of textual immediacy. As the scriptures are codified, the biblical texts become the basis for institutions; a hierarchy of authority is established and a codification of rules and doctrines occurs whereby orthodoxy and heterodoxy become visible. The faith organizes, and through its structural apparatus across time (via physical churches and synagogues, seminaries, publishing houses, the Vatican, Calvin's Geneva, etc.) there becomes an institutional understanding of how historical knowledge and scriptural interpretation are to be understood. Finally, there are individuals who, being either born into the faith or who convert into it, take their personal experiences and think theologically in dialogue with the historical, scriptural, and institutional elements that they come to understand, insofar as they are committed religious believers.

There is a messiness to the convergence of history, scripture, institutions, and individual religious belief that inform theological thinking, but *all* of the above elements inform theologizing at every level of comprehension. It is impossible to disentangle the historical development of a religion from its scriptural interpretations, its institutional formations, and its personal manifestations. Each of these (and the epistemically unassailable truth claims that anchor and bound the faithful) are part and parcel of the theological epistemology. In thinking so, the end of theological *Truth* is ideally attained.

Tensions: Philosophical and Theological Ways of Thinking

At this juncture, it is worth reviewing the descriptions of philosophical and theological thought I have posited: Western philosophizing involves the use of reason, the presupposition of a particular anthropology of man, a tendency to reject blind authority and dogmatism, and the use of both dialectic argumentation and historical perspective. Western theologizing involves the use of indisputable, irrefutable, and irrevocable truth claims that function as epistemically unassailable anchors from whence the essence of the religion is derived (and beyond which the religion cannot go), and a grasp of the transcendent expressed through historical, scriptural, institutional, and personal means.

I have framed both types of thought as different means by which the *pursuit of wisdom and the negation of ignorance* may be effected; in light of this, the conventional dichotomy between the two is misleading. However, I consider there to be important tensions between the two, including the need for epistemic anchors and boundaries in theologizing that are in no way *required* for philosophizing, and the theologian's need, *not* required of the philosopher, to conceptualize the transcendent.

These *required* anchors and boundaries would be considered inflexible in a line of philosophical argumentation. There is a contingency to philosophizing that allows it to proceed cautiously or skeptically, ideally defusing absolutist understandings of philosophical *Truth*. Contrarily, there is a certitude to theologizing that allows it to proceed reverently with an epistemic enforcement of *belief*, ideally tempering both relativist and absolutist understandings of theological *Truth.* The reason that the philosopher is popularly stereotyped as a radical freethinker, and the theologian lambasted as a straitlaced dogmatist, is because the ideals of their pursuits of *Truth* are grounded in conceptually divergent, metaphysical imperatives. The former

need not *endorse* any particular idea or statement; the latter must not *reject or subvert* any idea or truth claim pertinent to his religion.

The theologian *needs* to conceptualize the transcendent because of the specific revelation that constitutes his faith: what is *revealed* theologically is understood in terms of both temporal existence (i.e. immanence) *and* atemporal profundity (i.e. transcendence). By this, I mean that the adoration and worship of religious figures or ideas is conducted either in a cyclical (i.e. the liturgical calendar of Catholicism) or linear fashion (i.e. the lived progression of one's life from infancy to senescence, from baptism to entombment) *in time*, but the understanding of those same ideas and figures *transcends* the finite demarcations of humanly conceptualized time. That which is *revealed* in the religion is understood, even if but implicitly or unclearly, to be beyond time or even to be beyond lived existence, the timeless gift of God for His time-bound creation. The revelation of the Hebrew prophets, each hearing the voice of God and speaking in a human tongue, personifies this mystery. Contrarily, philosophical reasoning proceeds freely without the *need* for divine understanding. The transcendence of theological thought may or may not be given philosophical credence.

Theology requires a frame of mind intelligent enough to take seriously the validity and legitimate presence of a transcendent dimension to existence. Now, it is not required of the Christian theologian to affirm the existence of Krishna any more than it is required of the Jewish theologian to affirm the redemptive power of Christ. But, to be a theologian in either faith is to take seriously and accept as real that which is otherwise invisible, does not admit of empirical verification, and is accepted epistemically on faith or intuition, as opposed to being proven through rigorous argumentation. The existence of angels and of souls is perfectly within the bounds of reason, insofar as these things are not logically impossible. The existence of unicorns is also perfectly within those same bounds, but to believe in the existence of angels and of souls is to affirm epistemically unassailable, religious truth claims; religious transcendence requires a *faith* epistemically unnecessary for philosophical reasoning.

The kind of empirically unassailable *faith* present in theological thought is imaginatively evinced in a passage from Henry Adams's travelogue of medieval cathedrals, *Mont. St. Michel and Chartres*. Speaking to the likely effect that the cathedrals' architectural designs would have had on the medieval Christians who observed firsthand the glass windows and stylized woodwork in such places, Adams writes, imagining a typical Mass of the period:

> How many women are there, in this mass of thirteenth century suppliants, who have lost children? Probably nearly all, for the death rate is very high in the conditions of mediaeval life. There are thousands of such women here, for it is precisely this class who come most; and probably every one of them has looked up to Mary in her great window, and has felt actual certainty, as though she saw with her own eyes—there, in heaven, while she looked—her own lost baby playing with the Christ-Child at the Virgin's knee…the earth, she says, is a sorry place, and the best of it is bad enough, no doubt…but there above is Mary in heaven who sees and hears me as I see her, and who keeps my little boy till I come; so I can wait with patience, more or less! (Adams 196)

While Adams's depiction of the bereaved mothers at Chartres is fictionalized, the sense of living, breathing *faith* evident in the religious believers attending Mass is profoundly real. Given the reduction of Judaism and Christianity to social phenomena in the contemporary West, it can be difficult to *imaginatively sympathize* with the understanding that the woman that Adam describes *knows* both that her lost child is *really* 'playing with the Christ-Child,' and that Mary *really* 'sees and hears' her. The metaphysically transcendent unity of mother and child speaks to a *faith* that need not inform any philosophical reasoning.

Necessary Synthesis: Philosophical and Theological Ways of Thinking

If the philosophical way of thinking is broadly constitutive of 'reason,' and the theological way of thinking that of 'revelation,' there does not seem to be any reason why the two should be epistemically synthesized. To many contemporary Westerners, looking back over centuries of bitter religious warfare and the hard-won struggles for the separation of church and state, the suggestion of unifying sacred, theological discourse with secular, philosophical considerations is repugnant. Philosophical inquiry must appear to be proceeding adequately without any consideration of theology; theological inquiry, likewise, appears to be doing the same without any consideration of philosophy. If the philosophers have their 'God' and the theologians have theirs, so much the better for both.

This distinction is deeply mistaken. Its validity requires a superficial construction of theology and philosophy as bracketed areas of disparate consideration, irreconcilably divided. Contrary to common misperceptions, philosophical and theological ways of thinking *conduce to a full apprehension of Truth, their necessary synthesis substantiating the veracity of theological truth claims, and metaphysically orienting the trajectory of philosophical truth claims.* To explicate this claim, I will first elaborate upon the specific dimensions of this *necessary synthesis,* conceptualizing theological and philosophical ways of thinking (in their noblest forms) as employing different means to achieve the same virtuous end. This will involve an analysis of their synthesis in a Cartesian 'moment of intuition' and a mystical, 'Beatific' experience of transcendence; effectively, 'reason' and 'revelation' possess deeply similar epistemic structures, and together, as a unified way of life, require faith *and* intellect in the pursuit of *Truth*. Then, I will elaborate upon the *enchanted intellect* that I posit is capable of synthesizing the epistemic structures of philosophy and theology without rejecting both. Responding to Leo Strauss's explicit rejection of the synthesis that I advocate, I will finally argue that Strauss's perspective implicitly complements my analysis.

Necessary Synthesis: Cartesian Intuition and the Beatific Vision

The enchanted intellect is such that every act of philosophical reasoning is informed by the religious knowledge of its thinker, as every act of theological reasoning is informed by the philosophical knowledge of its believer. The thinker and the believer are the same person, of the same intellect, of the same soul; there is no epistemic dualism involved in thinking theologically, as opposed to thinking philosophically.

Of course, the seeming impossibility of this is compounded by the frequent invocation of an admittedly powerful 'either-or' dichotomy between philosophy and theology. A plethora of divergent, mutually incompatible truth claims, opinions, conjectures, reasoned inquiries, diatribes, remarks, etc. on religious thought and philosophical thought render the two ways of thinking either intractably solid or amorphously liquid, ambiguously sketched or objectively drawn. It is quite easy to be jerked violently back-and-forth between the two epistemic structures, and an entire worldview, a complete way of thinking, seems so easily condensed and neatly conceptualized into one or the other. But this is ultimately to indulge an intellectual schizophrenia, and the explanatory power of *both* theological and philosophical thought is consequently diminished. Profound thought about God and philosophy involves, for each, an act of cognition that becomes, for the individual thinker, objectively and self-evidently true. Regarding the epistemic structures of philosophy and theology, and how they proceed from these

respective acts of cognition, I posit that, in their *noblest* forms, both ways of thinking proceed from an epistemically identical point of faith, and then employ different intellectual means to achieve a *virtuous* end.

And those are the justifiably elitist terms: *noble* forms of epistemic structure, employed in their respective ways towards a *virtuous* end. In the American milieu (and indeed, most of the contemporary West), talk of 'virtue' and 'nobility' are the epitome of aristocratic snobbery, deeply unpalatable to our dual ethos of democratic equality and capitalist fervor ('Every man a king…who hath a credit card'). Yet, there are alternatives to our self-induced malaise of equalitarian consumerism, and I think that it is *a propos* of this that intelligent people, when grappling with the 'Life Questions' (which are the ultimate origins of all inquiry, religious, philosophical, or otherwise), must attempt to resurrect those buried ideals and their high-minded connotations, thinking in such a way that they are able to transcend, philosophically and theologically, the purely rationalist or reductionist explanation that puts a *cordon sanitaire* around the profound to preserve the mediocre. To *define* 'noble' thought and 'virtuous' ends is to put an unwarranted period on a sentence that is necessarily incomplete, but I know that a flourishing of both arises when individuals recognize their ignorance, refuse to peddle absolutes, and take the complete person as being of heart *and* mind, love *and* intelligence, soul *and* intellect.

The point of faith from which the epistemic structure of philosophy proceeds takes the form of a Cartesian 'moment of intuition,' an understanding of inference as the basis for clear and distinct ideas. Descartes conceives of inference as "an internal process which operates with a criterion of truth and falsity that is beyond question" (Gaukroger 117). The act of intuition is "instantaneous…and it consists in a clear and distinct grasp of an idea" (118), recognized as immediately true to the thinking person. "Exhibited paradigmatically in the case of mathematics" (123), "Descartes makes the image-forming power of the imagination the basis for the operations of reason" (124), taking mathematical equations or theorems (and indeed, "geometrical constructions…the end of apparently infinite processes of division," etc. (Ibid.)) as being profoundly necessary, intuited self-evidently. In the Cartesian 'moment of intuition,' that which is understood (e.g., '2+2=4') is understood to be both necessary and profoundly transcendent. A recognition of the inescapable veracity of the equation, recognizing that 'geometrical constructions' (and indeed, all of mathematics) can take on infinite forms, is that which epistemically grounds philosophy on an apprehension of the necessary and the infinite, mathematical truth imposing itself upon the apprehender.

Similarly, the point of faith from which the epistemic structure of theology proceeds takes the form of a 'Beatific' moment of transcendental experience; an experiential contact with the divine (i.e. God), transcending ordinary sense experience, sparks the flames of religious belief. As a generalized phenomenon, it manifests in specific ways for the individual believer; a mystical vision of Christ, or a profound realization of the immortality of a loved one's soul, are all essentially 'Beatific.' Conceptualized by Eliezer Berkovits as the felt presence of that which simultaneously threatens to destroy you as it sustains you with its love, this moment of contact is such a profound personalization of the transcendent that its validity *cannot* be denied by the individual believer. Even if they are not particularly dramatic or publicly evidenced (as would be the convulsions of a mesmerized Pentecostal in a fit of religious fervor), these experiences epistemically initiate and affirm theological cogitation.

At the moment of this spiritual illumination, there is an epistemic comparison to be drawn between it and the moment of Cartesian intuition. In the 'Beatific' moment, that which is

understood (i.e. a mystical vision of Christ) is understood to be both necessary and ultimately infinite; a recognition of the inescapability of the vision, or grasping the infinitude of the temporal moment, founds theology on an apprehension of the necessary and the infinite, grasped as an external reality imposed inexorably upon the apprehender. For this person, such a moment can neither be empirically rationalized nor explained away as a fanciful delusion. The man enraptured can no more deny the imposition of this force upon his soul than he can rent asunder the fetters of gravity. Now, when one reasons mathematically, one usually does not feel borne aloft on the wings of religious fervor; and similarly, in the moment of religious transcendence, one usually is not thinking of that which is mathematically intuitive. However, what both cognitive realities, the intuition of clear and distinct ideas and divine contact, possess fundamentally is a unified use of *reason and faith* in apprehending what is incontestably *True*.

The intellect does not disappear during a 'Beatific' moment of transcendence. To dismiss such a recognition as the manifestation of a mental disorder is to callously invalidate the veracity (and presuppose the falsity) of a type of human experience basically universal in its efficacy (i.e. the peoples of native cultures and Western organized religions *alike* attest to such experiences, however vastly different the spiritual contexts), in the ideological service of an ironclad methodological naturalism. Similarly, during the intuition of a 'clear and distinct idea' a comparably profound (albeit emotionally attenuated) act of faith occurs; there is a *knowing* to the truth of such an idea that is analogous to the *knowing* of a contact with the divine. The truth of a mathematical equation (e.g., '2+2=4') and the truth of a 'Beatific' experience (i.e. a mystical vision of Christ) are a unitary apprehension of *Truth*. There is faith in the intellect that a 'clear and distinct' idea (the implicit or explicit foundation for many a line of philosophical argumentation) is true, and there is faith in the intellect that an experience with the 'divine' (the implicit or explicit foundation for many a line of theological argumentation) is true. Both are but necessarily synthesized forms of the *same* cognition, present in a unified, enchanted intellect.

And it is indeed, the *enchanted* intellect that understands the epistemic structures of theology and philosophy as, in their noblest manifestations, conducive to a virtuous end. To blithely assume a bifurcated intellect, where loving wisdom and thinking about God are disparate cognitions, is to indulge a childish Manichaeism. Naturally there are important differences in a given binary, but the epistemic borders between theology and philosophy are far more porous than is generally assumed, and especially so when it comes to the vaunted distinction between 'reason' and 'revelation.' Extremisms of rationality and religiosity wrack spiritual and physical devastation in equal measure, and it is dangerously naïve to divide what is necessarily complementary. We are endowed with the capacity for reason *and* the capacity for faith, and to deny the potential of one is to *invariably* cripple the potency of the other. Where Theo plants, Sophia must grow; what Philo sows, Deus will reap. Only together shall the infinite capacity for creation and destruction latent in the human heart be tempered, in the arduous yet humble apprehension of *Truth*.

Delineating *Truth* and the 'Enchanted Intellect':

Of course, the very idea of a 'capital-T' *Truth* strikes many Westerners as an odious concomitant of political or religious extremism, a singular and all-encompassing understanding of reality believed by fanatics and lunatics. If a man were to declare to all those around him that every precept, every idea, and every notion that he believed or thought to be true was *absolutely* correct, he would be immediately derided as unworthy of serious consideration.

The tragic irony of this description is that many of us seriously believe that we possess the *Truth* that is our beliefs, precepts, notions and thoughts. Challenges or rebuttals to our most dearly (and even not-so-dearly) held ideas are reflexively, if not *a priori*, dismissed; so many of us are implicitly so desperate to know what is *ultimately* true in the 'liquid-modern' world we inhabit, where all of the old certainties, societal norms, and fundamentals of life admit of questioning, invite dramatic re-interpretation, or can casually be negated or dismissed (Bauman), that we cling to whatever we think is true ever more tightly. The typical Westerner possesses a contradictory admixture of nonjudgmentalism and ironclad ideological commitments: "what I hold to be true is *Truth for me*, and what *you* hold to be true is *Truth for you,* until I can convince or force you to think like I do."

A residue of social decorum still inhibits some of us from *publicly* pronouncing our judgments and ideas on matters political, ethical, religious, and societal as infallibly veridical, but in the privatized-digitized world of the twenty-first century, we frequently scream the *anonymously* triumphant, inchoate cry of absolutism. Many of our most cherished beliefs (the absolute equality of the sexes, the unquestioned virtue of liberal-democracy, the good of creating individual identity uninhibited by tradition or birth, the positives of technological change accompanied by unrelenting economic progress) are held with a dogmatism that would have put the scholastics to shame, and without the metaphysical stability that was provided by the cloistered environs within which those medieval thinkers lived. In effect, many of us who openly proclaim the virtue of nonjudgmentalism hypocritically practice the ostensible vice of deep prejudice to all that opposes our worldview.

When I speak of philosophical and theological epistemic structures ideally *conducing to a full apprehension of Truth*, that apprehension entails rejecting the false truths of ideologies (across the entirety of the political spectrum), '-isms,' (Liberalism, Marxism, Libertarianism, Feminism, *ad nauseam*) understood as codified (read 'ossified') formulations of social orthodoxy (i.e. control), as well as rejecting the absolute virtue of uninhibited identity formation. In line with my understanding of philosophy and theology as *seeking the pursuit of wisdom and the negation of ignorance* in differing ways, we must begin by seeking that which is intellectually *and* spiritually virtuous, and rejecting that which is intellectually *and* spiritually vicious. In negating ignorance, we must begin by rejecting our ideological commitments (as being intellectually vacuous) and the self-evident virtue of our personhood (as being spiritually vacuous). In pursuing *Truth,* we must begin by striving for and aspiring to attain, however fleetingly and imperfectly, the *love of what is Good, True, Beautiful, Perfect, Just, etc*.

I cannot define precisely what is *Good* or *True*, but the humble (and continual) desire for its attainment by those whom E.M. Forster referred to as the "aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky" (Forster 73) attests to its validity, exemplified by the epistemic potency of the Cartesian 'moment of intuition' and 'Beatific' experience. These 'capital-letter' notions become absolutist when either philosophy or theology self-aggrandize, and the *pursuer* becomes the *pursued*, committed utterly to the unambiguous glorification of God *or* Mind,

religion *or* rationality. Knowledge of what is *True* is, ultimately, in possession of those who wisely make receptive the *unified* intellect to what is *both* impressed upon the knower and what the knower knows independently of what is impressed. Far from endorsing a paltry relativism or attitude of skeptical disinterestedness, what we must do is begin to strive for the *love* of these ultimate essences of 'knowing,' and seriously emulate, philosophically *and* theologically, those men and women throughout history who have been *wise* (rather than merely intelligent or perspicuous), who have been able to grasp beyond the limiting exigencies of their fleeting existences, and who have possessed enchanted intellects, theological *and* philosophical.

Yet, what I have presented here may, ironically, be but another ideology, another '-ism,' another assertion of subjective belief masquerading as objective *Truth*. All this talk of the *Good* and the *True*, of the 'negation of ignorance,' of intellects enchanted, may be nothing more than vague pabulum. It smacks of a traditionalist conservatism rooted in Platonic idealism, with intimations of orthodox Christianity. How is the religio-philosophical notion I have described *any better* than the ideologies I just castigated for being ossified formulations of social control? Christianity and Platonism may act as authoritarian mechanisms of social control, as have all organized religions and philosophical schools when employing intellectual and/or physical coercion to enforce conformity of thought and action.

Such criticisms are well-warranted, but I would wager that I have posited a terrible ideology, failing to possess the hallmarks of any good '-ism.' Most importantly, the comprehension of *Truth*, the *virtuous* end to which I take the *noblest* epistemic structures of philosophy and theology conduce, entails an enlightened capacity for *doubt and uncertainty*. We must distinguish between the postmodernist obsession with ambiguity and the obviation of *Truth*, and the capacity for *reasonable doubt* about what one believes or thinks; the former is a full-throttled denial of philosophy, theology, the human condition, and the empirically verifiable.

Strewn as we are amidst the spiritual, psychic, intellectual, and often physical wreckage of modernity, there is something deceptively comforting about being able to construct an identity and sew a framework of ideas out of whole cloth, impervious to criticism. The perverse creativity of identity madness and the paradoxical inflexibility of the constructed, postmodernist self, are reinforced through belonging to any rigidly defined school of thought, any '-ism' worth its ideological 'salt,' any coterie of like-minded, 'right-thinking' individuals who dictate the perfect 'us' against the evil 'them.'

The ideologies and '-isms' that substitute curiosity with obedience derive their strength from a lack of curiosity about the cosmos and an absolutist conception of false 'truth.' Contrarily, he that is committed to pursuing *Truth* daily walks the epistemic tightrope between the dark chasm of self-abnegation and the vaunted heights of virulent conviction. The epistemic obligations that the enchanted intellect entails are greater than a theologically or philosophically absolutist intellect; the convergence of *Truth* from both epistemic structures tempers the extremisms of both without rejecting one or the other.

Belief in religious truth claims, epistemically anchored and bounded, metaphysically orients philosophical lines of inquiry, undergirding the enchanted intellect. This orientation 'locks' the thinker within certain boundaries and upon certain foundations that, rather than constrict free thought to the point of suffocation, give him the capacity for greater virtue and less evil than the purely rational individual. As all moral codes are believed and followed from metaphysical imperatives, however tenaciously believed (and unlike the rationally legalistic system of Western liberalism, coated with but a residuum of metaphysical dust, quickly blowing

away), the person striving for *Truth* is guided and indeed *impelled* by the theological thought of his philosophy (and, obviously, vice versa).

A genuine aspiration for what is *Good* or *Beautiful*, imperfectly pursued, necessarily entails an appreciation for the manifold complexities of human nature while tolerating, perhaps to a fault, the striking dissimilarities and divergences between individual understandings of what is *Good* or *Beautiful.* Yet, there is simultaneously an understanding in *Truth* and the essences of 'knowing' that recognizes that, ultimately, what is capital-T *True* is *really true*, as distinguished from what is capital-F *False*, which is *really false*. In a repudiation of the hedonism, egoism, materialism, relativism, etc. that a purely 'reasoned' (i.e. 'philosophized') approach to existence entails, and an equal repudiation of the religious fundamentalism and extremism that a purely 'revealed' (i.e. 'theologized') approach to existence entails, I posit that the individual, within the epistemic framework I advocate, *seeking the pursuit of wisdom and the negation of ignorance* will ultimately be striving for the use of an enchanted intellect, where contact with the theologically divine and philosophically substantive will unify the intellect and body, the mind and the soul in *substantiating the veracity of theological truth claims, and metaphysically orienting the trajectory of philosophical truth claims*.

And I cannot stress enough how vital it is for the theologically substantive and the metaphysically philosophical to intertwine. When mankind favors the purity of the 'reasonable' mind, the savors of freedom from ghostly abstractions and spooky superstitions are perceived as a delight to the intellect. The triumphalism of the *philosophes* and the brightest minds of the Enlightenment are a lasting testament to the intoxicating effects of an unbridled humanism; our very notions of 'progress' and 'improvement,' at a material, societal, and psychological level are beholden to the dawning of a bright future that so many minds of the 16th through 20th centuries imagined. And indeed, technologically and economically, the world has advanced upon the lines that these thinkers delineated, leaving us in but a short half-millennium with unparalleled technological and economic growth and achievement. If ever was there a time to praise the mechanical ingenuity and physical creativity of *homo sapiens*, this would be that epoch.

But something was steadily degraded in this concatenation of mechanical growth and progressive change, and it was the soul of the West. As Western man steadily improved himself physically, his spirit sank further and further below him, until the shadows of his divinity were utterly obscured by the lights of his rationality. Out of the blinding rays of philosophy sans theology came barbarity; out of the fractured splinters of theology sans philosophy came stupidity. These sad, unintentional outcomes would have been significantly attenuated if more had chosen the life of the humble, enchanted intellect, rather than the fantasies of the theologically deluded or the catastrophes of the philosophically blinded.

Intellectual curiosity and epistemic humility are not Enlightenment-era inventions. Because there is an enmeshing of the immanent and transcendent in the *enchanted* intellect, there is a deeply compatible comprehension of *Truth* understood philosophically and theologically. Surveying modernity, I find it impossible to feel hope in the efforts of man unaided by faith, of intellectual efforts unmoored from metaphysically transcendent imperatives. The tremendous creation of 'Enlightened' man is very difficult to reconcile with the incalculable destruction of property, geography, culture, and human life that it ultimately entailed. We have perilously forgotten what was once inexpressibly intuited about *Truth*: the ineffable essence of the transcendent and the physical nature of the immanent are perceived and felt by a singular consciousness, a unified mind, an embodied soul.

Objection: Strauss and Potential Incompatibilities

I contend that the enchanted intellect is both possible and desirable for its apprehension of philosophical and theological *Truth*. However, this is a conception deeply antithetical to the understanding of the philosopher Leo Strauss, in his masterful examination of 'reason' and 'revelation.' Given that Strauss was an influential expositor of the idea that the two are basically irreconcilable, it is worth giving some attention to his understanding of philosophy and theology, laid out clearly in the essay "Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization." Strauss explicitly *denies* the possibility of synthesizing, necessarily or otherwise, the epistemic structures of the theologian and philosopher:

> …it seems to me that the core, the nerve, of Western intellectual history, Western spiritual history, one could almost say, is the conflict between the biblical and the philosophic notions of the good life…it seems to me that this unresolved conflict is the secret of the vitality of Western civilization…the very life of Western civilization is the life between two codes, a fundamental tension. There is, therefore, no reason inherent in the Western civilization itself, in its fundamental constitution, why it should give up life. But this comforting thought is justified only if we live that life, if we live that conflict. *No one can be both a philosopher and a theologian, or, for that matter, some possibility which transcends the conflict between philosophy and theology, or pretends to be a synthesis of both.* But every one of us can be and ought to be either one or the other, the philosopher open to the challenge of theology, or the theologian open to the challenge of philosophy. (Strauss 116; emphasis added)

Strauss delineates how a fundamental tension exists throughout all of Western intellectual history between 'Athens' and 'Jerusalem,' exemplified by "the life of autonomous understanding" needed by Greek philosophy for the former, and "the life of obedient love" needed by the Bible for the latter (Strauss 104). Given the divergent orientation of each ethos, Strauss argues that they are in permanent tension with each other, never admitting of genuine synthesis; however, the tension possesses such an intrinsic vibrancy that, as long as each of us chooses either to be "the philosopher open to the challenge of theology, or the theologian open to the challenge of philosophy" (Strauss 116), that vital tension need not perish. I think that Strauss recognizes an important tension; as I noted earlier, the need in theologizing for epistemic anchors and boundaries, as well as a conceptualization of the transcendent, speak to an 'obedience' that the supposed autonomy of philosophizing does not require.

Consequently, for Strauss the choice of intellectual autonomy *or* loving obedience is a choice between opposed worldviews, not diametrically so but rather presuppositionally. To begin thinking from an initial point of divine love is radically different from thinking initially from a point of unrestricted intellect, but they are not hermetically sealed off from each other. Strauss stresses the need for both, but we must individually choose the way of life that we see fit; we are either spiritually motivated or enchanted in our theological considerations, or we are intellectually motivated and reasoned in our philosophical considerations. The 'philosopher-theologian' corrupts the first part of his title and vulgarizes the second. Because they are worldviews (and as such are all-encompassing ways of comprehending reality), it is impossible to achieve a synthesis of these two perspectives beyond the superficial. The philosopher can no more honestly *submit* himself to an 'obedient love' in his inquiries, than can the believer honestly inquire *autonomously*, independent of God. Because both Greek philosophy and the

Hebrew Bible presuppose different existences for their adherents, the idea of synthesizing, let alone *necessarily* synthesizing these ways of life is implausible for Strauss.

To elaborate on Strauss's idea here, the presupposition of *either* autonomous reason *or* Scripture ends up creating two distinct ways of life, one proceeding in a broadly philosophical (i.e. 'reasoned') way, and another proceeding in a broadly theological (i.e. 'revealed') way. The practical implications of the former manifest in a devotion to secular life; even though they are usually inadequately philosophical, those living lives of autonomous reason represent those who overwhelmingly occupy positions in business, government, academia, and the media, working for and leading organizations of which they are the managerial, corporatist, bureaucratic elites. The practical implications of the latter manifest in a devotion to spiritual life; owing to this preference over worldly concerns, those living lives of obedient, Scriptural love overwhelmingly *do not* occupy the same positions of power and privilege as do their secular counterparts. Perhaps framed as the split between 'head and heart,' the 'reasoned' individual is first and foremost a thinker, rationally adjudicating the concerns of his worldly existence. The 'revealed' individual is, contrarily, a lover, attending spiritually to the concerns of his present and future existence, corporeal and immaterial.

As the ways of life that philosophy and theology entail are presuppositionally contradistinguished, the ethos of each requires a specific orientation towards God or intellect, 'reason' or 'revelation' in Strauss's terminology. However, Strauss intimates the following towards the end of his essay, interestingly complementing the epistemic synthesis I advocate:

> If one can say colloquially, the philosophers have never refuted revelation and the theologians have never refuted philosophy, that would sound plausible…And to that extent we may be said to have said something very trivial; but to show that it is not quite trivial, I submit to you this consideration…*philosophy must admit the possibility of revelation.* Now that means that philosophy itself is possibly not the right way of life. It is not necessarily the right way of life, not evidently the right way of life, because this possibility of revelation exists. But when then does the choice of philosophy mean under these conditions? In this case, *the choice of philosophy is based on faith.* In other words, the quest for evident knowledge rests itself on an unevident premise. And it seems to me that this difficulty underlies all present-day philosophizing…that philosophy or science, however you might call it, is incapable of giving an evident account of its own necessity. (Strauss 131; emphasis added)

Because either the philosophical or theological worldview and way of life is unable to refute the veracity of the other, both stand as separate but legitimate possibilities, with each of us still capable of choosing the philosophical or the theological life. However, there is tremendous importance in Strauss's admission that, because of this inability, *revelation* may rightfully be admitted into philosophical considerations, and *faith* ultimately impels the choice of philosophy. In the case of the former, a rejection of methodological naturalism on the part of the philosopher opens his ostensibly autonomous intellect to the viability of religious truth claims. In the case of the latter, it is the recognition that the choice to philosophize is not self-evidently true, but rather proceeds from an act of faith that is congruent with the choice to theologize.

Strauss fails to recognize what I consider to be an inability for us to cognitively divide theological and philosophical epistemic structures. By this, I mean to say that we can reasonably *theorize* philosophy and theology as disparate areas of inquiry, respectively rooted in autonomous reason and Scripture, but in the *lived experience* of thinkers and believers, the two cannot be dissociated. Strauss's stress on the *autonomy* of reason is epistemically questionable

because there is no way to mentally divide the free exercise of reason *from* the capacity for obedient love. There is a *unity* to the intellect that has been increasingly obscured by centuries of careless dichotomization. The theological thinker does not cavalierly abandon his capacity for philosophizing the moment he begins to think about God, and neither does the philosophical thinker his capacity for theologizing. There is no definitionally prescribed way to *be* a philosopher *as opposed to* a theologian.

Superficially, there is a marked difference between the professional theologian and philosopher, but this is a matter of historical contingency, not an indisputable bifurcation. The perniciousness of this divide, of course, is evidenced in how we stereotype both the intellectual and the religious believer. The former is an erudite scholar, contemplating profound ideas using exquisite jargon and impressive argumentation. The latter is an incoherent idiot, believing superstitious nonsense peddled to the gullible and uneducated. This characterization of the religious simpleton against the intellectual sophisticate is nothing more than a timeworn, Enlightenment-era canard. Given that sophisticated, intellectual types spurred on the untold miseries of the twentieth century, the deaths of tens of millions resulting from the implementation of their secular fantasies, we would do well to temper our disdain for the religious believer. I think that Strauss's characterization is false because the epistemic gap between 'reason' and 'revelation' that he proposes is only superficially divisive. Intellectual elites and the devoutly religious have proven themselves quite capable of blind, superstitious prejudice, whether it be masked in political platitudes or devotional exercises. Moving away from this false characterization, if the religious person should be 'open to the challenge of philosophy' or vice versa, we have all the more reason to *coalesce* philosophy and theology.

The *individual* will to believe *x* is bolstered and strengthened by the *shared* convictions of the theological or philosophical communities that one inhabits. The secular ideologies of Western liberal-democracies are a corrupted example of this logic. A worldview and way of life oriented around a secular devotion (i.e. Liberalism, Capitalism, etc.) is possible because the individual is consistently reinforced in their beliefs by the parameters of groupthink. The assumption, both explicitly and implicitly articulated, is that the actions and beliefs of secular elites are self-evidently true; the truth claims they advocate and which countless millions internalize and propagate are vainly cultivated on the barren metaphysical soils of Western hyperpluralism.

The choice Strauss posits between intellectual autonomy and divine obedience is clearly rooted in his profound understanding of Western faith and intellection, and its strength rests on the reality that there are indeed subtle and important distinctions between a predominantly theologized worldview and way of life, as distinguished from one that is predominantly philosophized. Strauss would likely deny the possibility of an enchanted intellect because 'enchantment' inextricably entails theology, and 'intellect' philosophy. However, he rightly notes the distinction is far more opaque once it is recognized that, because "the philosophers have never refuted revelation and the theologians have never refuted philosophy" (Strauss 131), the certainty of either way of thinking is not apparently discernible *but* for the act of faith in autonomous reason *or* divine revelation, in his conception.

Contrary to this understanding, I posit that the Cartesian 'moment of intuition' and 'Beatific' moment of transcendence typify the unification of philosophy and theology in a singular apprehension of *Truth*, and it is because of the act of *faith* that fundamentally predicates both ways of thinking that our intellect is either enchanted or disenchanted, open to the possibility of humbly aspiring to the knowledge of what is *Good* and *Beautiful*, or blindly

craving (and asserting) the knowledge of 'either-or' absolutism. When 'either-or' becomes 'and-and' in a unified apprehension of *Truth*, the inability of philosophy to give "an evident account of its own necessity" allows for the enchanted intellect to cohere 'reason' and 'revelation,' underpinned on epistemically similar acts of faith. *Truth* is apprehensible with a unified intellect that strives for the *Good,* the *Beautiful*, etc., while recognizing that our *one* life ought to be lived on an act of faith that courts both theological and philosophical understanding.

It is a *choice* to epistemically synthesize philosophical and theological ways of thinking, the sparks of their intellection ideally setting alight the flame of *Truth*. And that is, for the contemporary Westerner at least, the operative word: *choice.* A stunning plethora of possible answers, possible solutions, and possible ways of thinking about the world and one's place within it abound and confound. And it is undeniable that he who is not sensitive to the impressions of philosophical or theological *Truth* will not be able to comprehend it in its totality, regardless of how frequently one engages with religious apologetics or self-intuitive mathematics. The present bifurcation of 'superstitious' religion and 'enlightened' reason is epistemically tyrannical, if only because the choice of 'enlightened' reason seems, both at a cursory and (frequently) deep examination to be, *the* choice of intelligent, educated people. Western governmental, journalistic, intellectual, and creative endeavors all epistemically champion 'reason' to such an extent that those pursing 'revelation' are segregated and, if not yet physically subjugated, intellectually relegated to a position of inferiority, wrongly castigated as backwards and deluded.

I know that there is more honest, common-sense virtue in the thinning pews of the local Protestant church than in the bustling corridors of the United Nations. Regrettably, the credentialed elitism of the meritocracy persuasively divides the stupid from the reasonable, and the rational from the religious. The believer and the thinker *alike* tragically accept this division, and thus religious alienation corresponds to rational triumphalism. An epistemic division is cemented sociologically. However, because we stubbornly continue to believe in something higher than ourselves, many modern Westerners, having rejected institutional religious belief as irrelevant and obsolete, gleefully throw themselves at the clay feet of their favorite secular ideologies, providing all of the fun of religious extremism without any of the messy transcendence. It becomes seemingly obvious: man is the measure of all things, and we can dismiss or affirm whatever philosophical or theological arguments or ideas that are necessary for the fulfillment of that ideal. Intellect need not be enchanted, for we are the self-evident enchanters of our own lives.

However, this (deeply flawed) assumption of ours is one that Strauss speaks to in his essay, and his analysis provides further credence for the enchanted intellect. He writes:

> The first characteristic feature of modern thought as modern thought, one can say, is its anthropocentric character…I contrast it with the theocentric character of biblical and medieval thought, and with the cosmocentric character of classical thought. You see this most clearly if you look at modern philosophy which, while it does not have the general authority which modern science has, is nevertheless a kind of conscience or consciousness of modern science. One has only to look at the titles of the most famous books of modern philosophy to see that philosophy is, or tends to become, analysis of the human mind. You could also see this same trait easily…by looking at what philosophic disciplines emerged in modern times that were unknown to earlier philosophy: all are parts of the philosophy of man or of the human mind. The underlying idea, which shows itself not in all places clearly but in some places very clearly, is that all truths or all meaning, all order, all beauty, originate in the thinking subject, in human thought, in man…certain human pursuits which were formerly called imitative arts are now called creative arts. *One must*

> *not forget that even the atheistic, materialistic thinkers of classical antiquity took it for granted that man is subject to something higher than himself, e.g., the whole cosmic order, and that man is not the origin of all meaning.* (Strauss 102; emphasis added)

When we solipsistically place ourselves at the center of our individual universes, and declare arbitrarily that the question of our origins is either unanswerable or evolutionarily derivative, we stunt something essentially human, something that the ancients and the medievals recognized in a way that so few of us understand. There are many 'truths' and 'facts' that derive their validity from our subjective experiences and beliefs, but *Truth* cannot be understood as simply *created*, like a painting or a sheet of cookies. The desacralized intellect that rejects transcendence cannot perceive *Truth* because it is permanently imprisoned within the cave of the mind, comprehended in purely material and physical terms. Once transcendence is seriously considered, an epistemic orientation towards attaining *Truth* can be effected, obviating the suicidal stupidity of self-referential metaphysics. It requires a unity, a cohesion, a bondedness that understands the mind to be but a constituent (and absolutely crucial) part of what is a *soul*. The *choice* for our objective and subjective understandings of reality to be metaphysically ordered, where the enchanted intellect unites immanent and transcendent through a rejection of what is *False* and a yearning for what is *True*, is one that we must make if we are to salvage our minds *and* hearts.

The Epistemic Challenge of Religious Diversity:

I have posited that the enchanted intellect apprehends *Truth* by synthesizing, on an epistemically identical act of faith, philosophical and theological ways of thinking in *substantiating the veracity of theological truth claims, and metaphysically orienting the trajectory of philosophical truth claims*. Having delineated the dimensions of philosophical thought, I have decidedly begged the questions of *which* theology and *what* God I am referring to theologically. Such considerations must be addressed.

If I proceed to substantiate a specifically Catholic, or Protestant, or Jewish notion of the Western monotheistic God, and affirm the worship rituals, traditions, creeds, and texts attendant to that faith (or sect thereof), *Truth* seems to immediately fracture into a subjective chaos of interpretative confusion. The tendentiousness of declaring *x* Western religion and its belief system correct does not escape me, as it seems to entail an exclusion of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians, atheists, agnostics, and all other believers and non-believers throughout the West from possessing the enchanted intellect I have described. Religious pluralism is, in short, an epistemic nightmare: how can anyone convincingly articulate *the* correct theology, when the absence of one or a different choice seems plausible?

My 'solution' to the problem of religious pluralism, albeit imperfectly substantiated, is articulated below, but I should explain a couple of things from the onset. I strongly reject the notion that all religions are equally valid, as well as the prevalent imperative for ecumenical coexistence. The law of non-contradiction seems to require a choice between either one or another religious tradition. Christianity is fundamentally different from Islam, for example, and those two religions will coexist only once they have both been properly denuded of their transcendence, and beaten into submissive domestication. Christianity is tamed throughout the West and consequently of little import for many tens of millions; it is to the immense credit of orthodox Christians, of all persuasions, that they continue to *profoundly believe* the Gospel of

Jesus Christ. It is not fearmongering to note the simple truth that once a proselytizing religion loses its ability to convincingly do so, and fails to believe in its own explanatory narrative (i.e. much of Western Christianity), another, more confident and virulent faith (secular or otherwise) will surpass it (i.e. Islam, as is happening in Western Europe) (Murray). Huge swaths of Arabia and Asia embrace the theological transcendence of Mohammedan devotion; far from faulting them for this, the West should *learn* from their profound devotion, epistemically informed and tempered by philosophical intellection.

In proceeding along the following line of argumentation, I shall have to speculate within reason, but I trust that my conjectures are sound, although obviously open to dispute. Against the backdrop of secularized, 21st century hyperpluralism, I will argue that, for the typical Westerner seeking the enchanted intellect:

1. Not all religious beliefs are viable.
2. The religions that *are* viable for the typical Westerner are the textually grounded religions of Judaism and Christianity.
3. Each of these religions are similar manifestations of the *Real* (à la John Hick's 'spheres of salvation,') and the believer bridges the Kantian gap between the phenomenal and the noumenal, thereby affirming the *Truth* of his religion.
4. The epistemic challenge of intra- and extra- religious incompatibilities requires a practical humility in adjudicating religious *Truth*. The believer maintains that the *Truth* of his religion is indisputable, but by virtue of a Hegelian 'negation of the negation,' it becomes possible to philosophically interrogate one's religion, enhancing both epistemic structures of the enchanted intellect.

Point 1: For the typical Westerner, not all religious beliefs are viable.

In an age given to priding itself on its ideological commitments to globalization, transnationalism, and the international exchange of commerce and people, to speak of certain religious beliefs as being *invalid* for the contemporary Westerner, situated as he is at the geographical crux of neoliberal economics, seems ridiculous. Theoretically, at the very least, the sheer profusion and intermixture of cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, and ways of life throughout much of the cosmopolitan West should indicate a booming plurality of possible religious beliefs. The problem with this assumption is that it wrongly universalizes *all* forms of religious belief as being equally valid or open to acceptance. Chanting the blasé tones of a monochromatic ecumenism, we forget the arresting contrapuntalism to be heard in the polyphony of William James's "Will to Believe":

> Let us give the name of hypothesis to anything that may be proposed to our belief; and just as the electricians speak of live and dead wires, let us speak of any hypothesis as either live or dead. *A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed.* If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion makes no electric connection with your nature,--it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis it is completely dead. To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Madhi's followers), the hypothesis is among the mind's possibilities: it is alive. This shows *that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker. They are measured by his willingness to act.* The maximum of liveness in hypothesis means willingness to act irrevocably. Practically, that means belief; but there is some believing tendency wherever there is willingness to act at all. (James 2-3; emphasis added)

There are obviously Westerners who practice quite happily the traditions of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and a plethora of other comparatively minor, non-Western faiths; these individuals obviously merit the same protection of religious freedom accorded Christians, Jews, and non-believers. For the majority of people in the West, however, these religions are effectively James's 'dead wires,' and because of this are ones that the average Westerner will not likely be able to seriously believe.

Point 2: The religions that are viable for the typical Westerner are the textually grounded religions of Judaism and Christianity.

A monolithic brush cannot be painted over all non-Western forms of religious belief; there are thriving elements of all of these religions and practices throughout the West, and they help add to a sense of cultural 'diversity' that, outside of the ideological prescriptions that that term unfortunately carries, should be admired as indicative of the toleration for religious freedom that our civilization has painstakingly cultivated. However, I still maintain that the 'dead wires' of religious belief are very much 'dead' to the average individual; thus, the religions that for Westerners *are* in fact viable are those that historically have shaped so much of what we are and continue to be, namely the textually grounded religions of Judaism and Christianity.

Christianity pervades the historical, artistic, linguistic, ethical, intellectual, and governmental milieu of Western civilization, and as it is still demographically prevalent, capable of proselytization, and admits converts, it constitutes in its Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant variants *the* theological tradition and religion in which *most* individuals seeking an enchanted intellect will be able to believe. Jews are obviously capable of having an enchanted intellect as well, but because Judaism does not proselytize and is a covenently bounded, ethnically tight-knit faith, for *most* Westerners it is not *the* viable means to an enchanted intellect.

Of course, *why* these two faiths specifically are of such critical importance to the West is both quite obvious and extremely difficult to understand; for the purposes of my argument, I should like to limit our focus to what metaphysically both faiths share, and whence their vitality arises. As they came about when, in the West, we "had sufficiently assimilated and internalized both the skills and the structures of thought afforded by systematic writing" (Fallon 120), both Judaism and Christianity:

> …represent a radical paradigm shift away from magical, naturalistic, or animistic forms, interested in control of the environment and personal and group survival by the placation of some erratic, unpredictable deity, to a more rational, more humanistic form interested in moral values, in virtues, in questions of right and wrong, good and evil, reward and punishment…They represent a shift from exterior concerns of the body to interior concerns of the soul…They represent a shift from action to contemplation, from verbalization to (abstract) nominalization, from "man as doer" to "man as thinker," from the external life of the internal, from materialism to etherealism, from monistic pantheism to dualism, from immanent transcendence to immanence *and* transcendence. (Fallon 121)

As Christianity and Judaism are textually-based religions, the imaginative and creative effulgence of this transition, detailed in the above citation as the remarkable way by which we transitioned from a purely oral culture to a culture of written words and alphabetic languages, has oriented the West morally and philosophically for over two millennia. It is perhaps the most

generalized explanation for why both faiths have maintained the potency and spiritual legitimacy they have, for as long as they have. In effect, because the sparks of Western civilization were ignited during the Axial Age, the time "of Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah in Palestine; of "Homer," Plato, and Aristotle in Greece; of Jesus Christ and the New Testament evangelists in Palestine and Greece" (Fallon 120), is one in which the foundational metaphysics of our civilization were planted. The Western psyche is indelibly imprinted with the cultural, societal, linguistic, and ethical mark of God the Father and Christ Jesus, and thus the respective traditions of Judaism and Christianity constitute *the* 'live-wire' religions for the typical Westerner.

Point Three: Each of these religions are similar manifestations of the Real (à la John Hick's 'spheres of salvation,') and the believer bridges the Kantian gap between the phenomenal and the noumenal, thereby making his religion *True*.

Taking the two prevalent monotheisms as the likeliest forms of religious belief for the contemporary Westerner, it is worth noting that the above explanation of their origins, as a consequence of the paradigm shift from orality to literacy, should not be understood in purely rationalistic, social-scientific terms. The objective quality of the transcendence felt and known to be real by millions of religious believers, experienced in the 'Beatific' moment of intuition, is incontestably *True*, independent of strictly rational analysis. I posit that the typical Western believer's variant of Christianity or Judaism, the epistemic structure of theological *Truth*, should be understood as a manifestation of the 'Real,' conceptualized as one of John Hicks's 'spheres of salvation.' Taking each tradition to "offer salvation…[through] the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness" (Hick 54), Hick takes each major religious tradition to be "a cognitive response to the universal presence of the ultimate divine Reality that, in itself, exceeds human conceptuality" (63). With respect to the *Truth* of the viable Western religions, both Judaism and Christianity, across their sectarian differences, divergences, and divisions, are ways by which the Westerner takes his naturally selfish *individuality* and reforms it as an inward *spirituality*, 'saving' himself in *response* to the *externally objective, True* presence of the 'Real' beyond all 'human conceptuality.'

Of course, the 'Real' can all-too-easily be understood in purely psychological, materialistic, or imaginative terms, as an intensely creative human response to external stimuli and internal consciousness, forcibly removed from considerations of transcendence and *Truth*. Drawing on the Kantian correspondence between the phenomenal and the noumenal, Hick articulates the following in response to objections about the extent to which the *Real* is beyond human rationality:

> …we might well ask, why postulate an ineffable and unobservable divine reality-in-itself? If we can say virtually nothing about it, why affirm its existence? The answer is that the reality or non-reality of the postulated noumenal ground of the experienced religious phenomena constitutes the difference between a religious and a naturalistic interpretation of religion. If there is no such transcendent ground, the various forms of religious experience have to be categorized as purely human projections. If on the other hand there is such a transcendent ground, then these phenomena may be joint products of the universal presence of the Real and of the varying sets of concepts and images that have crystallized within the religious traditions of the earth. To affirm the transcendent is thus to affirm that religious experience is not solely a construction of the human imagination but is a response-though always culturally conditioned-to the Real. (Hick 61)

For Kant, the phenomena of the world (things as they appear to us) is distinguished from the noumena (things as they are in themselves); about the latter we can know nothing, for knowledge is possible only of phenomena. However, because phenomena are noumena conceived (and thus connected to, and pointing towards) an external world, the different religious traditions (of which Judaism and Christianity are the operative ones for Western civilization) are different conceptualizations of the 'Real,' theologically *True* for the individual believer.

Point Four: The internal and extrinsic contradictions of religious pluralism merit humility in adjudicating religious *Truth*. By virtue of a Hegelian 'negation of the negation,' a philosophical interrogation of faith conduces to the enchanted intellect.

However, the epistemic challenge of intra- (i.e. the differences between Reformed Protestantism, Lutheranism, Catholicism, Pentecostalism, etc.), and extra- (i.e. the profound differences between Judaism and Christianity) religious incompatibilities poses something of a problem for the believer, even once secure in his faith. Hick intimates that, with respect to different religious traditions

> …they cannot all be wholly true; quite possibly none is wholly true; perhaps all are partly true. But since the salvific process has been going on through the centuries despite this unknown distribution of truth and falsity in our cosmologies and eschatologies, it follows that it is not necessary for salvation to adopt any one of them. We would therefore do well to learn to tolerate unresolved, and at present unresolvable, differences concerning these ultimate mysteries. (Hick 61)

I disagree with Hick's negative conclusion about salvation; I think that it is necessary to reject a studied relativism with respect to religious truth claims. Religious belief is *True* for the enchanted intellect, not 'possibly true.' Yet, I do think that there is something valuable about a sort of toleration for unresolvable theological differences. *Yet again*, I think that attitudes of toleration frequently degenerate into attitudes of milquetoast relativism, wrongly blurring or altogether removing the important distinctions and differences between religions. To universalize religious belief is to trivialize it out of existence; the idea that Islam *is* Hinduism *is* Christianity is both stupid and dangerous. This is the attitude of secular elitism, first and foremost, and as such it should be repudiated as a rejection of tradition and the *uniqueness* of *each* faith.

As a 'solution' to the epistemic problem of religious pluralism, I think that the enchanted intellect should maintain a 'gentle absolutism': my religion is incontestably *True* as opposed to yours, but because I am a thinking, philosophic person, I must exercise a practical humility in my religious convictions and in adjudicating differing religious truth claims. A balance should be struck between a tepid nonjudgmentalism and a violent fundamentalism; the humility that arises from our imperfect quest for *Truth* necessitates a fundamental respect for others *while* maintaining the righteousness of our faith. For example, the utilitarian calculus of Rav Shagar's belonging to a religion or believing in its *Truth* simply because it is an attractive social construction, "no less valid an option than others" (Pessin 207), is too paltry a religious understanding for the *Truth* that the enchanted intellect seeks. He who desires to possess an enchanted intellect *must* belong to the form of Christianity or Judaism that he believes, because it resonates so profoundly in his soul that it is *True*, even as he humbly interrogates it philosophically. This process of interrogation and affirming belief, conducive to a deep

understanding of theological *Truth*, is articulated well in Hegel's 'negation of the negation,' as follows:

> (a) A simple (and oversimplified) historical analogue of the dialectic of something and other is this: Before the emergence of Protestantism, Catholicism is just (Western) Christianity as such. It then generates Protestantism, which negates it. Protestantism is not just non-Catholicism, but actively differentiates itself from it and bears the marks of the Catholicism that it negates. Catholicism in turn negates Protestantism, thereby ceasing to be simply Christianity as such and bearing the marks of its active self-differentiation from Protestantism.
>
> (b) An unreflective Catholic and an unreflective Protestant come to reflect on their respective faiths (perhaps owing to their awareness of the difficulty of substantiating either faith in opposition to the other). They then lapse from, or negate, their faiths. But each still bears the marks of the faith he negates or sublates: a lapsed Catholic is different from a lapsed Protestant, since such negation is determinate. Subsequently, by further reflection each reacquires the faith he lost: he negates the negation. But neither returns to the unreflective faith he lost: it is now a reflective faith, enriched by the return journey by which it was reached. (Inwood 201)

Even without stepping into the metaphysical abstractions of Hegelian terminology, it seems apparent to me that the individual who can respond to religious difference, challenge his *Truth,* and recognize the enrichment of the intellection is one who is trying to utilize his heart *and* his mind, his intellect *and* his soul.

St. Augustine's Doctrine of Divine Illumination:

Each of these formulations and theorizations of theological *Truth*, variously understood as the Kantian bifurcation of phenomena and noumena, the Hegelian 'negation of the negation,' or Hick's 'spheres of salvation,' lack an important element: direct, concrete application. How can the 'flesh-and-blood' Westerner, towards the humble apprehension of philosophical and theological *Truth*, emulate *practically* the enchanted intellect?

Theoria is made *praxis* in St. Augustine's doctrine of divine illumination, in practical terms correlating strongly to the idea of an enchanted intellect I have articulated. The specifics of Augustine's late-antiquity Catholicism are unimportant, for what matters is how Augustine bonds the epistemic structures of philosophy and theology. As a neo-Platonist, for him the grasping of higher, perfect Forms requires a virtuous ascension of the intellect towards the *Good* in the pursuit of truth. However, this *Good* is not that which we can obtain freely, absent the ineffable truth of God and his incarnate Son (Christ); we must assent to Christian belief as we require His grace to both receive and understand it, on faith. There are two broadly different modes of inquiry in function: the Platonic cognition of Forms requires one to ascend to a higher apprehension, while the indwelling logos of Christ descends to his creation. The Augustinian synthesis of the two is the creation of a wholly divine and human point of contact between the two, an ineffable 'meeting-place' between mortal ascension and divine condescension. Augustine's neo-Platonism and his Christianity coalesce at this contact where human reason, aided by divine faith, achieves a cognitive cohesion with divine truth.

Yet, while the indwelling logos of Christ is fundamentally from God, there are *other* eternal and unchanging truths of the universe that are *not* necessarily all holy; i.e. the necessity and infinity of mathematical forms. Augustine emphasizes in *On the Free Choice of the Will* that

just as the rules of God's wisdom are true and unchanging, discerned in Scripture and felt in the 'Beatific' moment of transcendence, so too are the rules of numbers, possessing an intelligible structure that is also true and unchanging (54). The individual striving for the enchanted intellect recognizes the apparent disjunction between the 'philosophized' operations of numbers and unchanging mathematical forms, and the 'theologized' understanding of the Mediator (i.e. Christ) and His wisdom, imparted to the faithful. It is possible, obviously, to cognitively reason through mathematical problems without ever once considering a single religious idea; conversely, a religious person can profoundly believe in God while never once proving a mathematical theorem. However, even though many people can perceive mathematical truths while only fleetingly (or never) receiving divine illumination, this does not mean that the two are disparate considerations. The fundamental moment of 'reason' is epistemically similar to the fundamental moment of 'revelation' in this often overlooked respect: the Cartesian moment of intuition (i.e. the philosophized, pure use of the rational intellect) *necessarily* requires God's direct assistance to perceive that which is objectively (and indeed, transcendently) *True*.

Augustine metaphorically frames the doctrine of divine illumination like this: mathematical truths (i.e. that which is purely philosophized) and religious truths (i.e. that which is purely theologized) are, respectively, like the *brightness* and the *heat* of a fire. The fire is God, yet the heat affects only what is moved close to it, whereas the brightness is diffused far and wide. Wisdom is the grasping of *Truth* philosophical and theological; those that are closest to this are like those individuals closest to the fire, almost mystically immolated with a love for *Truth* that sets their hearts and minds ablaze. Contrarily, those that are farthest away from the fire are not absent God's consideration, for all, as God's creation, is suffused with the 'light' of numbers and mathematical intelligibility (56). Rather, these people (the vast majority, alas) see the brightness of *Truth*, however dimly, but are unable to begin feeling the heat of *Truth*, unable to recognize that what is 'reasoned' and what is 'revealed' are from the same source of illumination.

Augustine argues that *both* mathematical intelligibility and theological wisdom are dependent on God, and because of this the doctrine of divine illumination possesses a universality that encompasses all human intellection. That we all access one and the very same truths indicates that these truths exist outside our individual minds; that these truths reflect or manifest necessity and infinity indicates that they must ultimately reside in the necessary and infinite being; for we finite intellects to glimpse them means that this being must permit us to "glimpse" into His own being, and thus illuminate our intellects. For Augustine, every act of either philosophical or theological reasoning requires divine illumination, regardless of how well or poorly the person philosophizing or theologizing understands this. All intellectual cognition is enchanted and ultimately *True*, but because of both our imperfect intellects and confusion about the epistemically similar act of faith from which all philosophy and theology proceeds, we think that we have arrived at an understanding of *Truth* independent of any transcendence, when actually we have arrived at subjective, self-referential 'truths.' The enchanted intellect is *aware* of the role of divine transcendence in all cognition, rather than its enchantment being self-evidently intuited.

The doctrine of divine illumination collapses the divide between the immanent and the transcendent, attempting to cohere the neo-Platonic intellect striving for comprehension of the Forms and the objective reality of Catholic theology ordained by Christ. Abstracted from the cultural milieu of late-antiquity, it is the preeminent example of the enchanted intellect for many reasons. Because of our imperfect intellects and our utter dependence on faith as a means of

grasping intellectually and 'Beatifically' the thrust of *Truth*, the inklings of an epistemic humility here are congruent with our contemporary need for tempering both absolutism and relativism in our theological and philosophical cognitions. By aspiring to a point of mortal ascension ('reason') and divine condescension ('revelation,') the seemingly ironclad bifurcation of 'obedient love' and 'autonomous reason' collapses; the epistemically similar act of faith from which philosophizing and theologizing proceed becomes overwhelmingly apparent when there is no theorized divide between the head and the heart. If the *pursuit of wisdom and the negation of ignorance* constitute the singular essence of Western 'reason' and 'revelation,' the search for *Truth* informing the late-antiquity doctrine of divine illumination applies to all contemporary Westerners pursuing the enchanted intellect. We are all trying to find our way home, and home is where the transcendent and the immanent, the reasoned and the revealed, the philosophized and the theologized, and the body and the soul are *one*.

Conclusion:

The Western rose is bathed in twilight, and the sleepiness of her evening visage masks the fractured chaos of her soul. The soils of the garden whence she struggles to survive are corrupted and increasingly barren, littered as they are with the metaphysical pollution of every failed ideology, scheme of social engineering, and rational methodology that has deformed the hearts and minds of Western man. From the corporate machinations of transnational capitalists, to the perverse designs of social reformers, the Western garden and her patrimony is increasingly a heritage of dying flowers.

Some of the cultivators continue to carefully attend to the roses, tenaciously trying to keep alive a fragile idea, but perhaps they find their efforts increasingly maligned. Most of their fellow cultivators reject, both implicitly and explicitly, the humble pursuit of wisdom and the negation of ignorance. They have substituted the faith and reason that that existence would entail for something infinitely more intoxicating, albeit infinitely less meaningful: the absolutism of identity and the spiritual emptiness of modernity. Of course, most of them would never think of their lives in those terms. But in observing these individuals and detailing their actions, a few cultivators, stopping a moment from their noble efforts of preservation, continuity, and transcendence in matters *Good, True,* and *Beautiful*, can recognize them for what they are.

Many gardeners are pulling up rows of flowers; some of them do this with profound apathy, others with self-righteous determination. Thinking only in the inanities of contemporary discourse and the platitudes accepted by their friends and coworkers, many of these philistines fail to plant but one seed or care for a single rose. From indifference or ideological passion, the rose is torn from root and the fragile bonds of historical continuity frayed.

A great many cultivators cherish the unbounded potential of the garden for narcissistic gratification, settling into lifetimes of security and safety, utterly unbothered by the tremendous problems both intellectual and physical that bedevil their endangered civilization. Anesthetized by the creature comforts of avarice, busily working to the end of their subjective satisfaction, such individuals commodify the rose and prostitute her along the global thoroughfares of commerce.

Some gardeners gather the heritage strewn about the garden and attempt to rebuild a simulacra of cultivation with like-minded individuals. As all manner of political and social division occurs, each faction, party, and organization devoting itself to its respective members or adherents, a fantastic proliferation of identities and perspectives, amplified by the incoherence of

the digital information environment, destroys the ability for consensus and the points of unification for an already diffuse culture. Clinging to any number of signifiers and '-isms,' the left and right alike grind the rose pedals into intrinsically meaningless dust.

There are also those gardeners who deny the existence of the garden altogether, claiming that while they live in one civilization, it is not a civilization necessarily worthy of admiration or preservation and is, in fact, no better or worse than any other. Existentially burdened by the weight of history, evincing a self-hatred and maudlin penchant for guilt curiously absent the inhabitants of other gardens, they take all gardens to be alike, all peoples fundamentally similar, and the time when we took pride in our garden, its faults and all, one best forgotten and dismissed, lest too many of the cultivators be stirred to an act of rebellious remembrance.

Of course, there are also those individuals who would have made wonderful gardeners if not for being systemically denied the beauties of cultivation. The poor and impoverished, the culturally isolated and ideologically alienated: all tragically excluded, whether deliberately or unintentionally, from enjoying fully the fruits of Western patrimony. The rose cries out to the drug-addicted, the homeless, the lost and dispossessed, and in the intellectual chaos of the Western world these cultivators-in-spirit fall further away from her love and the sustenance she, in a less insane time, might have been able to provide.

And this insanity is perhaps best encapsulated by the great bonfire slowly spreading to engulf the entire garden, ignited from the cultural detritus and lost knowledge that the gardeners, collectively and individually, failed to preserve and protect for posterity. Drunk with the laughter of progress, they condemn to fiery obsolescence a discarded hymnal here, a few notions of romantic courtship there, and a bevy of other ideas noble and worthy, quickly forgotten for the seductive satisfaction of rights without obligations, and equality without fraternity.

And yet, perhaps the saddest thing the cultivators see, in surveying this tragedy of metaphysics, is a pile of dead gardeners occupying an increasingly prominent part of the garden. They are all suicides, their deaths brought about from a profound lack of meaning and the utter negation of transcendence. Finding the answers to the questions "why existence? why cosmos?" resoundingly answered with "make up your own reason!" or "who cares?," it is unsurprising that the explanatory narratives of purpose that these gardeners came up with were fatally limited. The atomized self, like the rose, left alone in the garden withers into dust.

So, whither rose? For all of what I believe to be my justified pessimism, the rose of the West is not dead. She is, however, severely damaged, and the metaphysical soils upon which she once flourished are fast losing their capability for perennial growth. I have written this thesis in the hopes of justifying intellectually that philosophy and theology are not incompatible, pointing to a way by which we may begin to unify the immanent and the transcendent. The most viable way that we Westerners can substantiate the veracity of theological truth claims *while* metaphysically orienting the trajectory of philosophical truth claims is through the *enchanted intellect*, pursuing wisdom and negating ignorance. Informed by a varied range of works, from the social criticism of Neil Postman to the cultural critiques of Morris Berman, from the intellectual histories of John Ralston Saul and Ryszard Legutko to the analyses of Douglas Murray and Patrick Deneen, I have tried to argue persuasively a viewpoint antithetical to contemporary mores, but absolutely vital to the creation of a more meaningful civilization.

Intertwining the necessities of reason and faith, the rose of the West shall flourish in the alpha and omega of *Truth*.

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