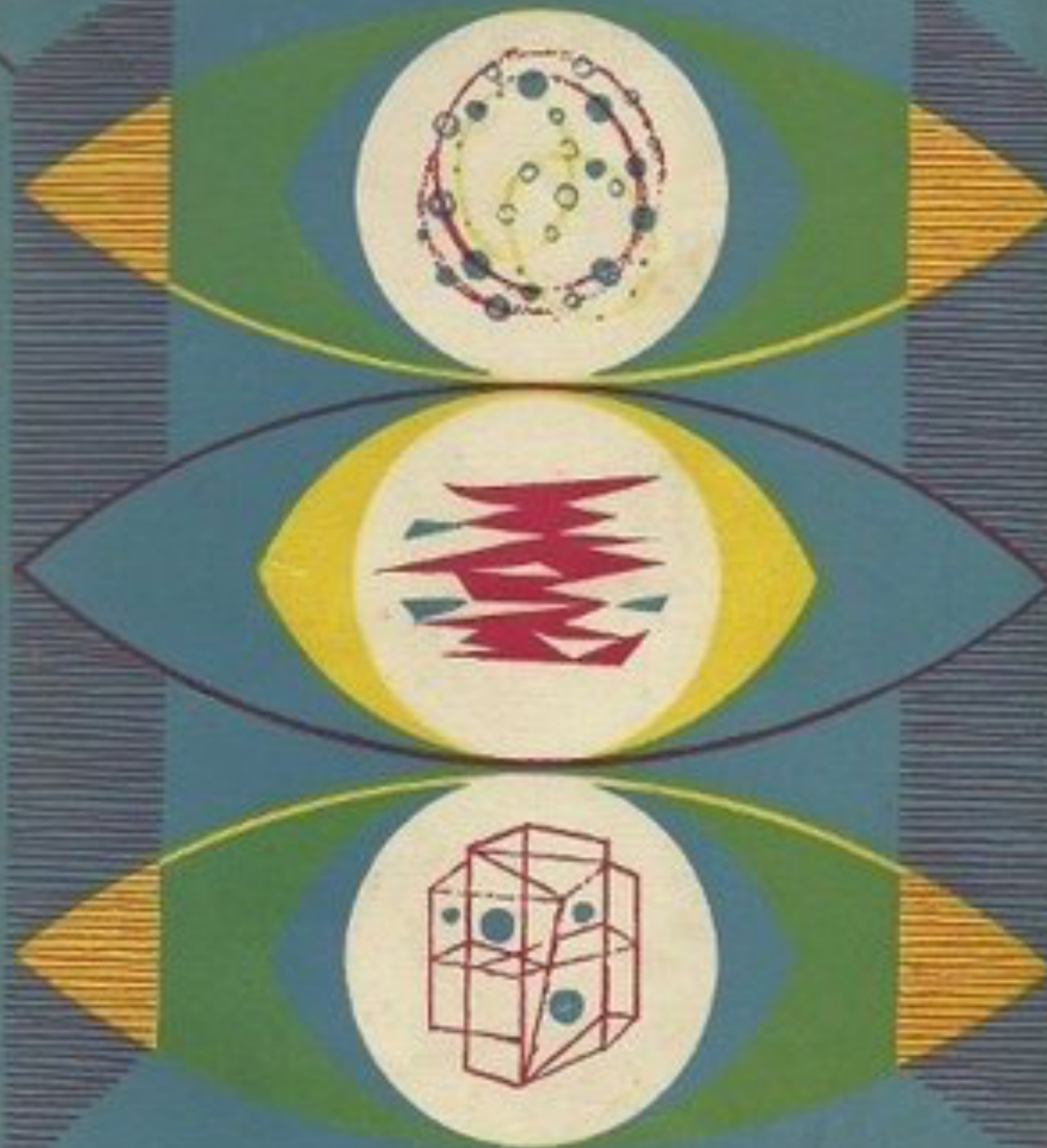


Mysticism and the Perennial Philosophy

Dr Andy Letcher



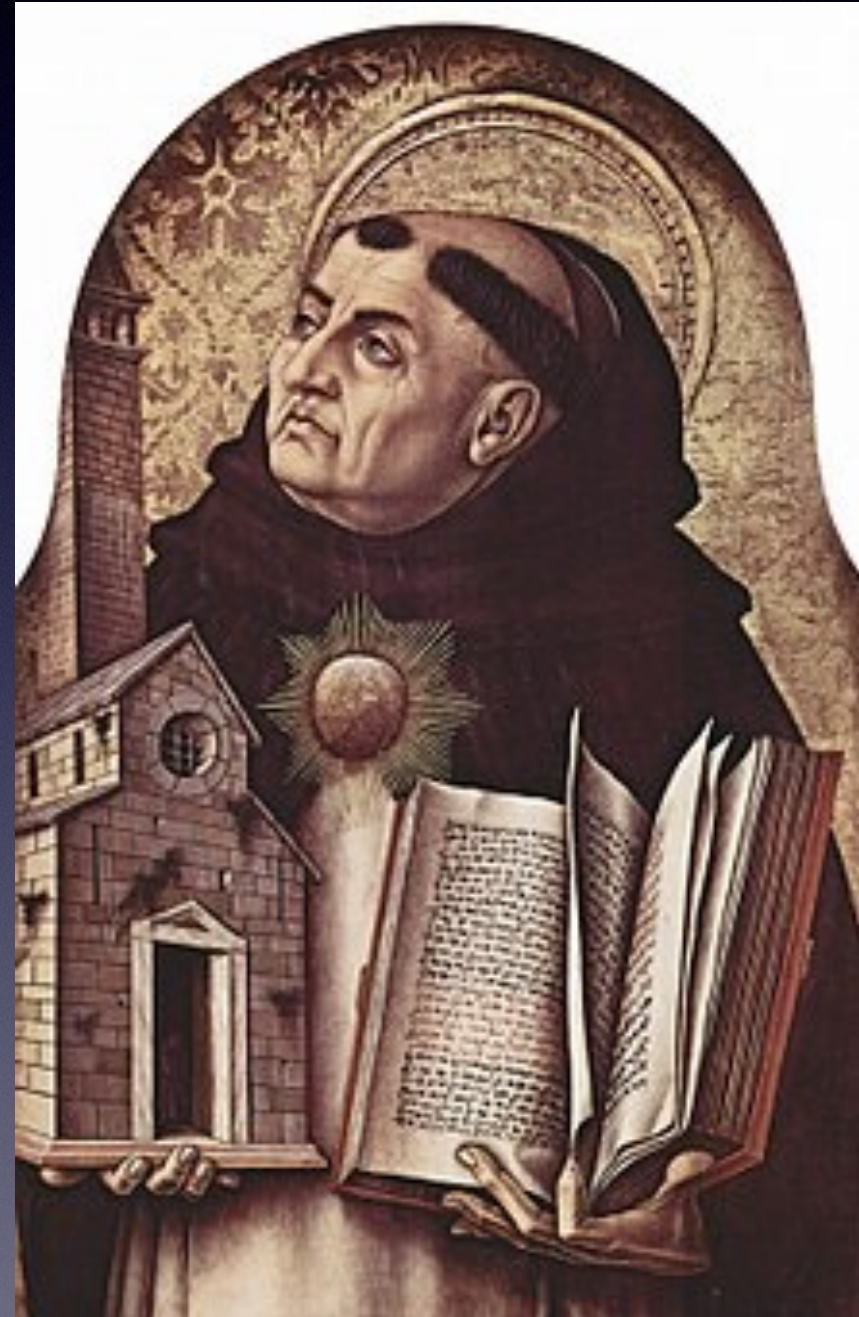
ALDOUS HUXLEY



The Doors of Perception

Active vs. contemplative life

- Thomas Aquinas
- must first be active, lead a moral life
- then contemplation may lead to the 'beatific vision'



The beatific vision?

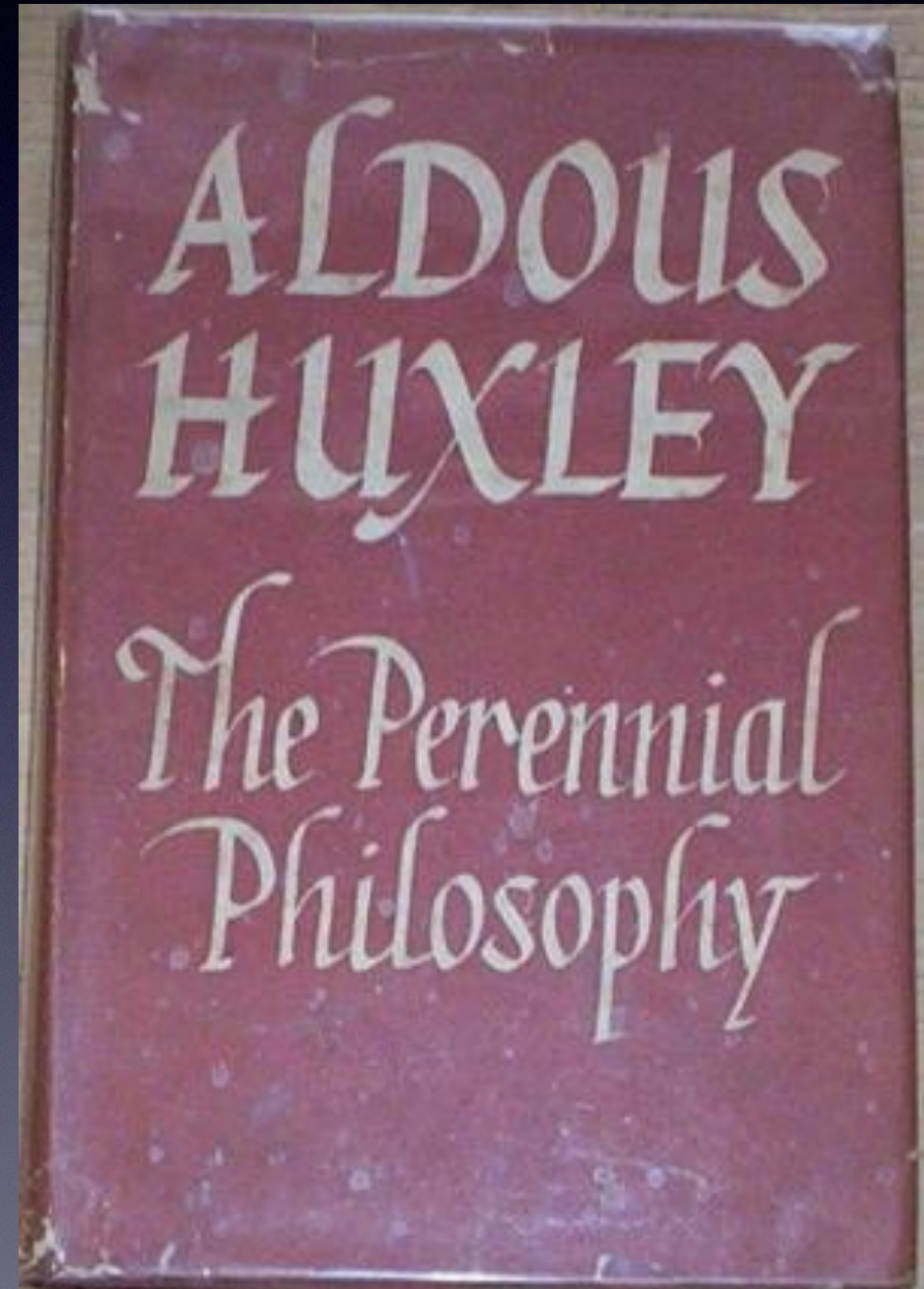
- not the beatific vision but a 'gratuitous grace'
- contemplation should include action and charity
- contemplation at its height, not its fullness
- urge for transcendence is universal
- may lead to better action

“There is...a certain blessedness lying at the heart of things, a mysterious blessedness, of whose existence occasional accidents or providences... make us obscurely, or it may be intensely...aware.”

–*Music at Night* 1931

1948

- Cross-cultural examination of mystical experience



Huxley's definition:

- the metaphysics that recognises a divine Reality substantial to the world of things, lives and minds
- the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine reality
- that ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of Being

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“Tat tvam asi.”

–Advaita Vedanta

“human personality is a multi-leveled manifestation or expression of a single Consciousness...which ranges from the Supreme Identity of cosmic-consciousness through several gradations or bands to the drastically narrowed sense of identity associated with egoic consciousness.”

—Ken Wilber



“in its farthest reaches, the psyche of each of us is essentially commensurate with all of existence and ultimately identical with the cosmic creative principle itself”

–Stan Grof



“In these uprooted times, there is a great need...to rediscover those truths that are immutable and eternal; a need for those who can speak of that eternal wisdom which is called the perennial philosophy.”

—Prince Charles

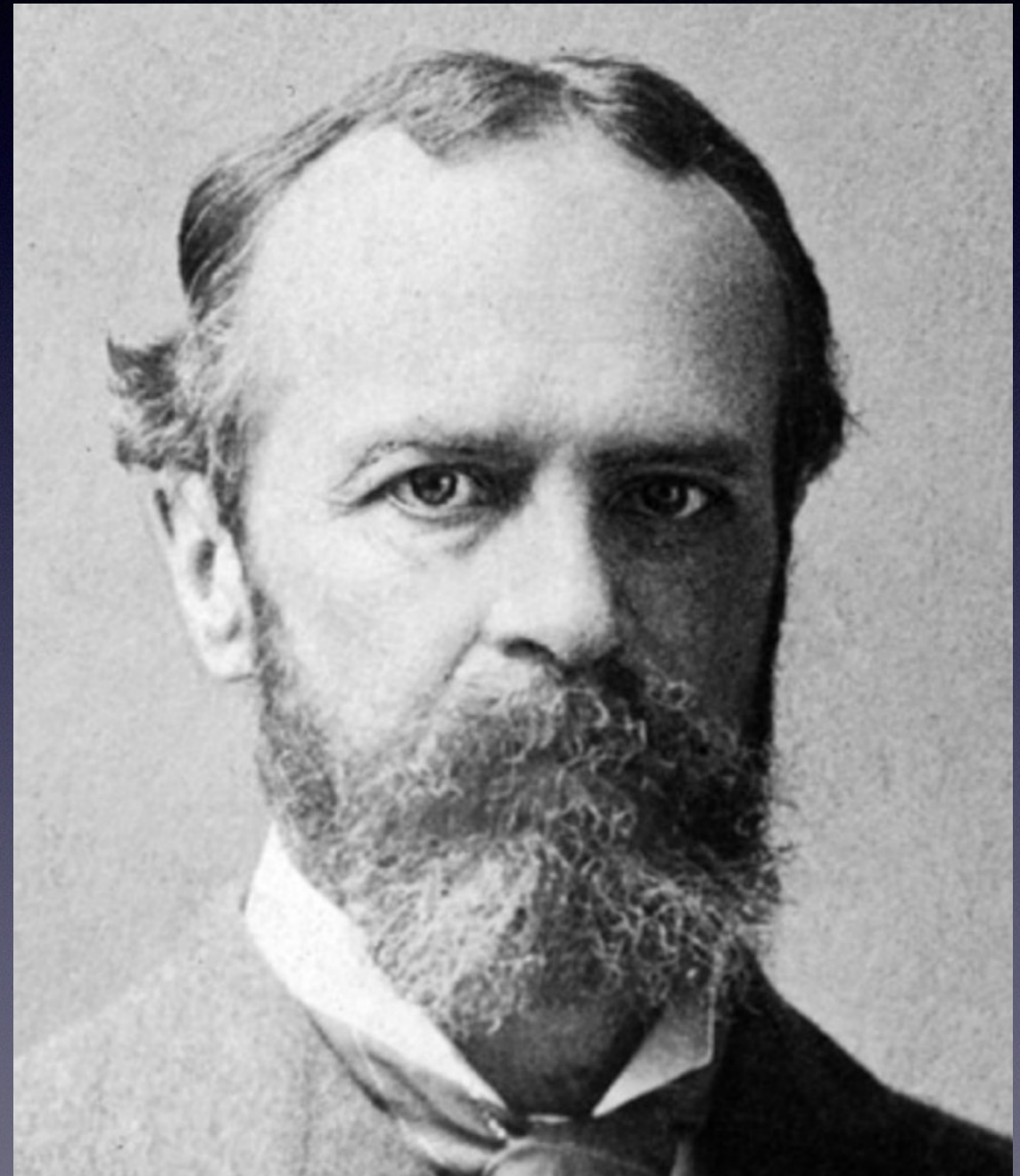


Precursors

- Philo of Alexandria
- St Augustine
- Agostino Steuco (re Marsilio Ficino)
- Leibniz

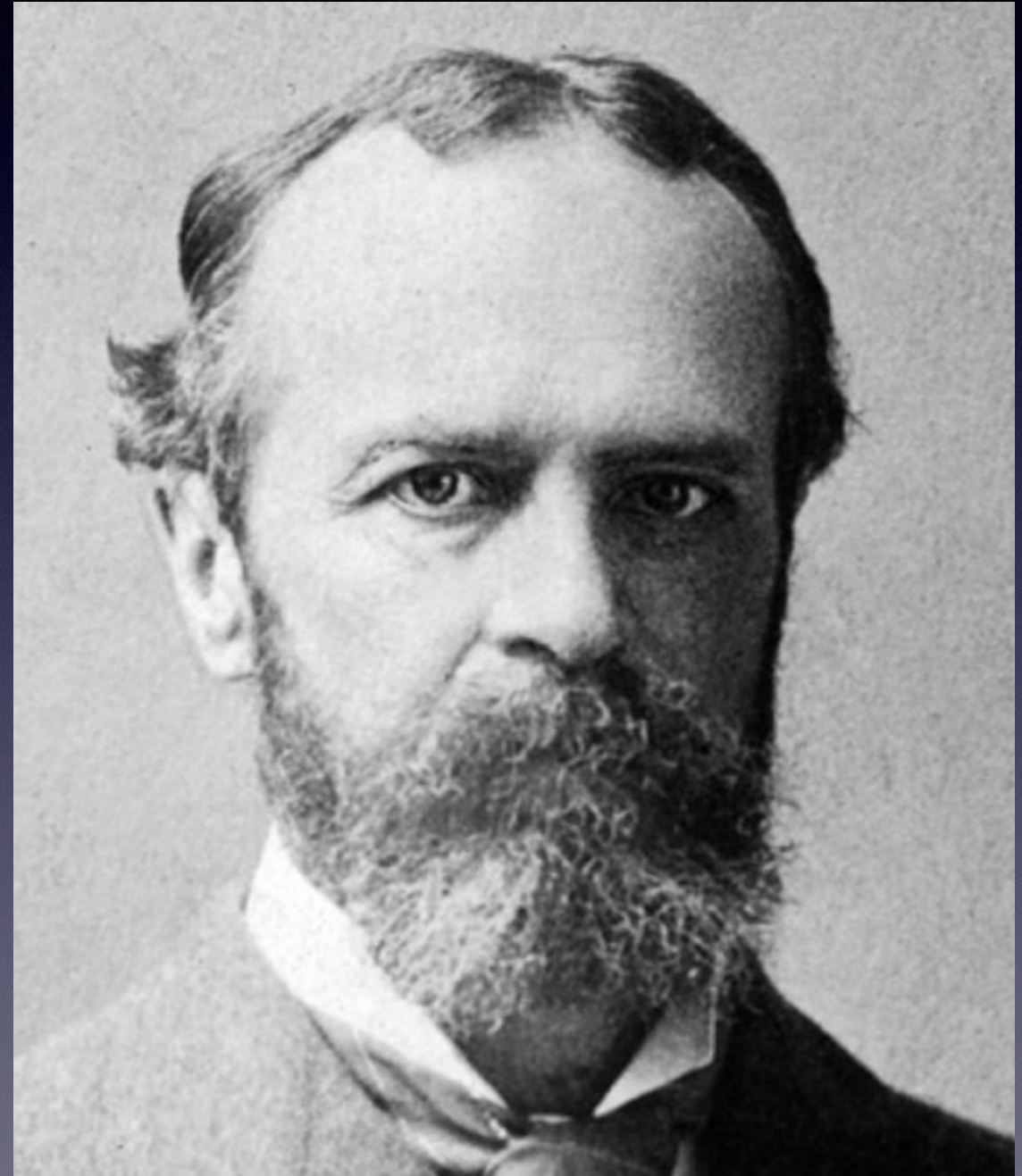
William James (1842-1920)

- can study religious experience empirically
- visible world part of greater, spiritual realm
- unity with that realm is goal of life
- experience conveys knowledge of that realm
- techniques channel spiritual energy to our world
- offers believers profound peace



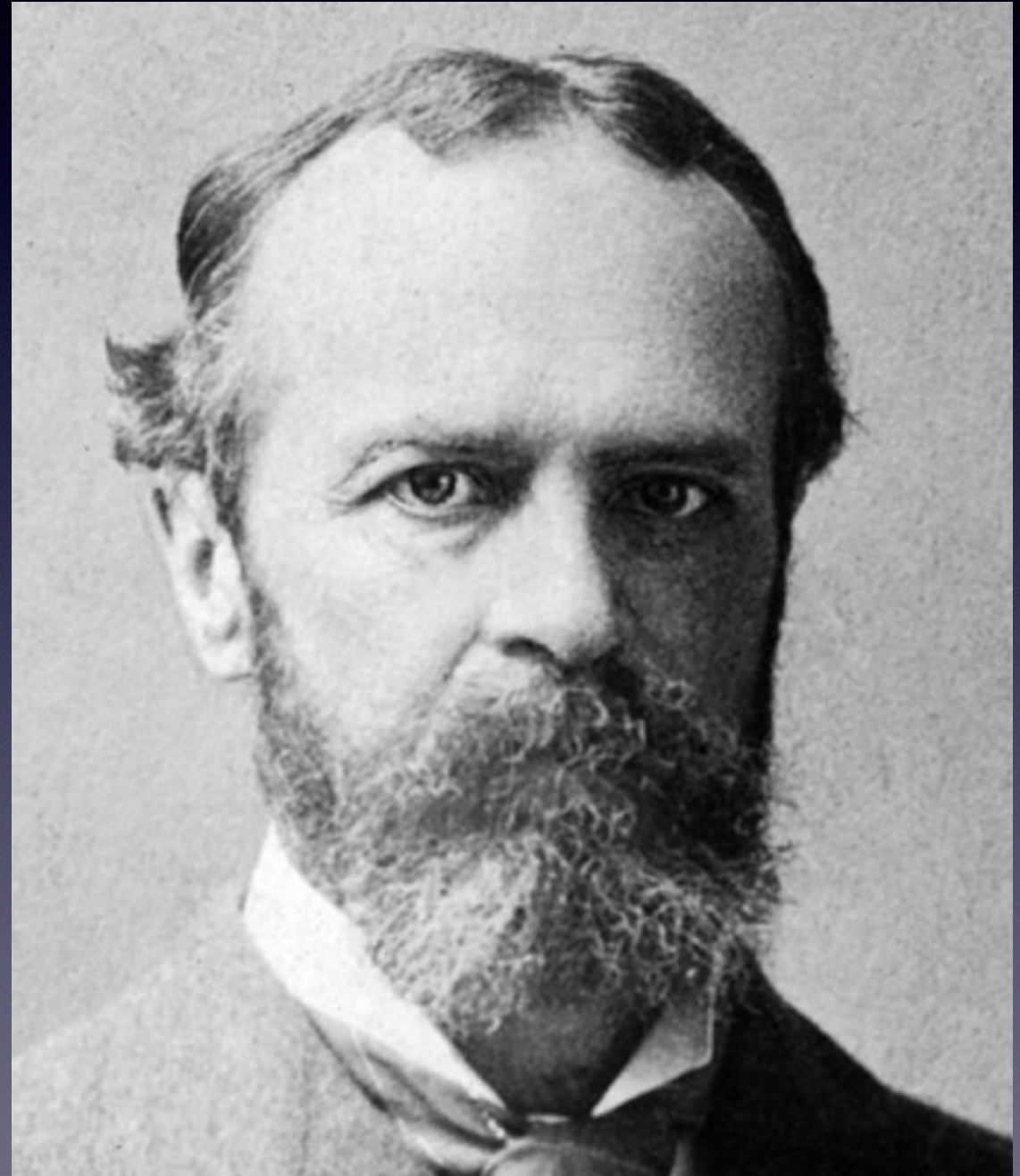
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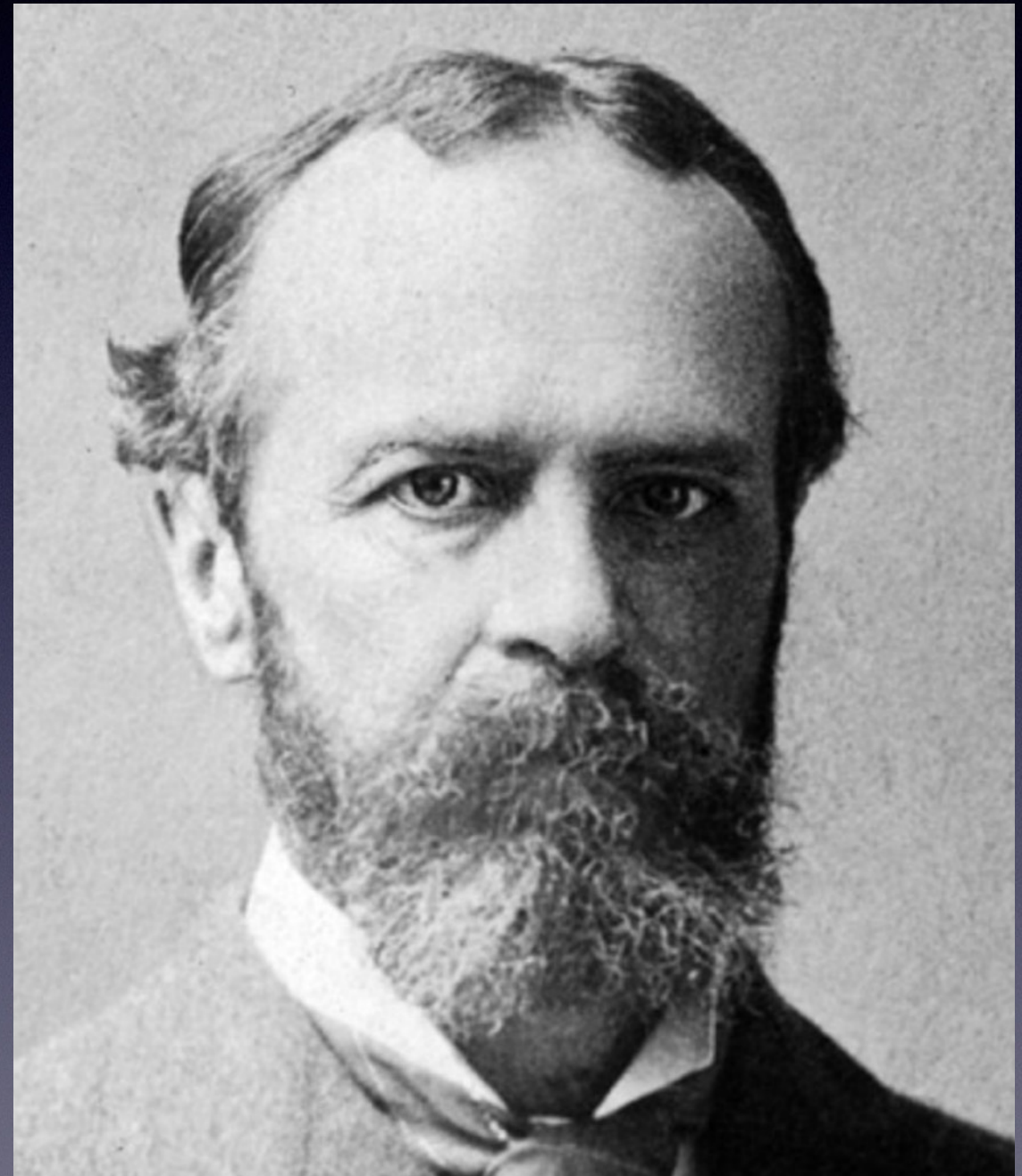
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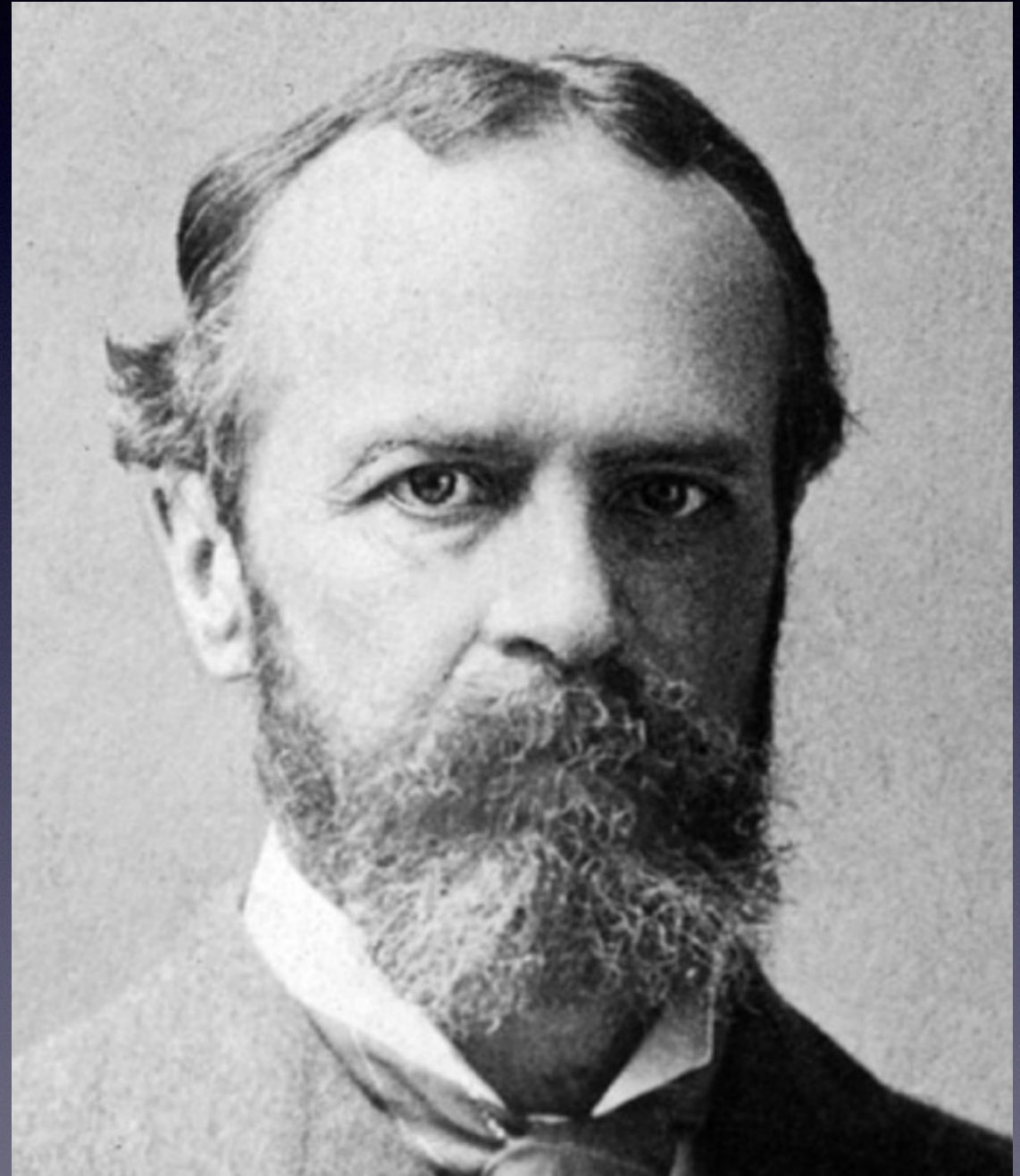
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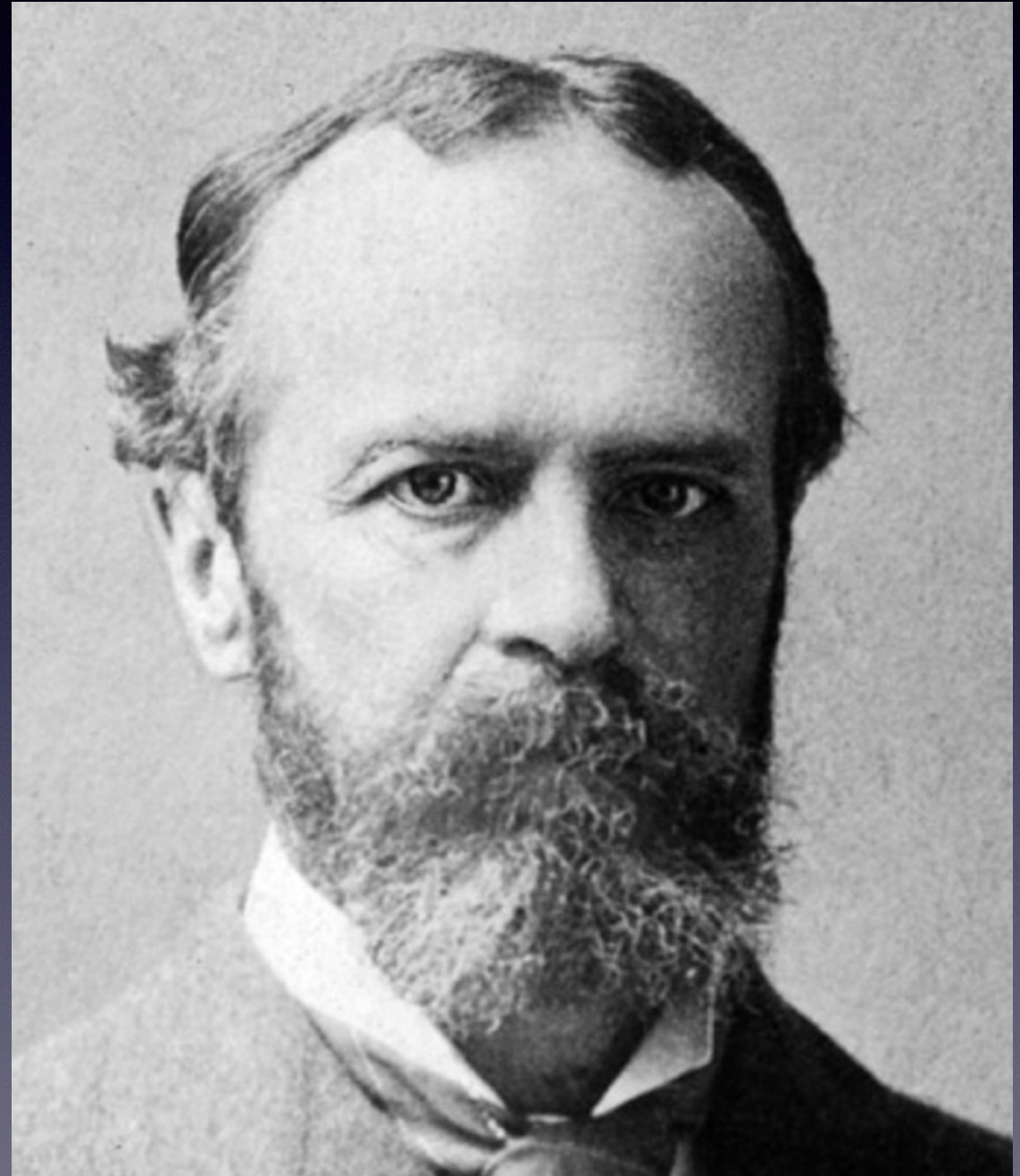
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Conversion epitomises religious experience

unsettlement ➡ resolution



something **More**



a moral life



Rudolph Otto (1869-1937)

A PELICAN BOOK

RUDOLF OTTO

The Idea of the Holy

An inquiry into the
non-rational factor in
the idea of the divine
and its relation to
the rational



A PELICAN BOOK

316

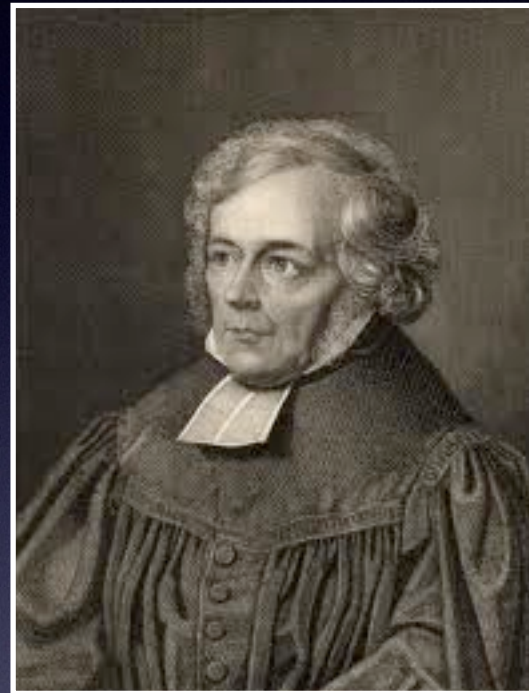
1917

Religion rests upon the numinous

‘non-rational, non-sensory experience or feeling
whose primary and immediate object is outside
the self’

Characterised by

- *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*
- fearful and fascinating mystery



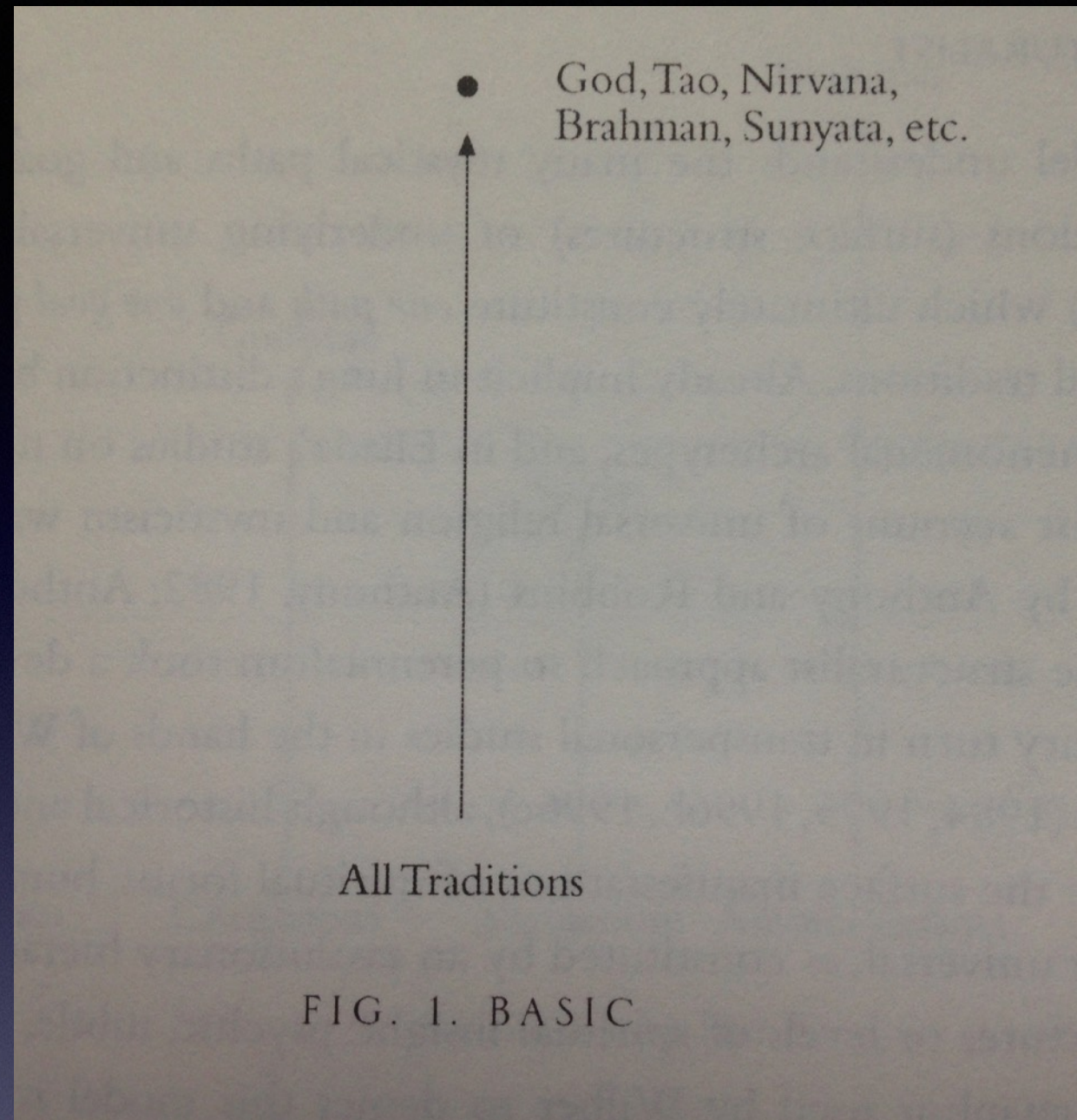
Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)

- German protestant theologian
- Tried to square theology with the new Enlightenment rationalism

The source of religion is a feeling

- the feeling of absolute dependence on God

Types of perennialism



From Jorge Ferrer *Revisioning Transpersonal
Psychology*

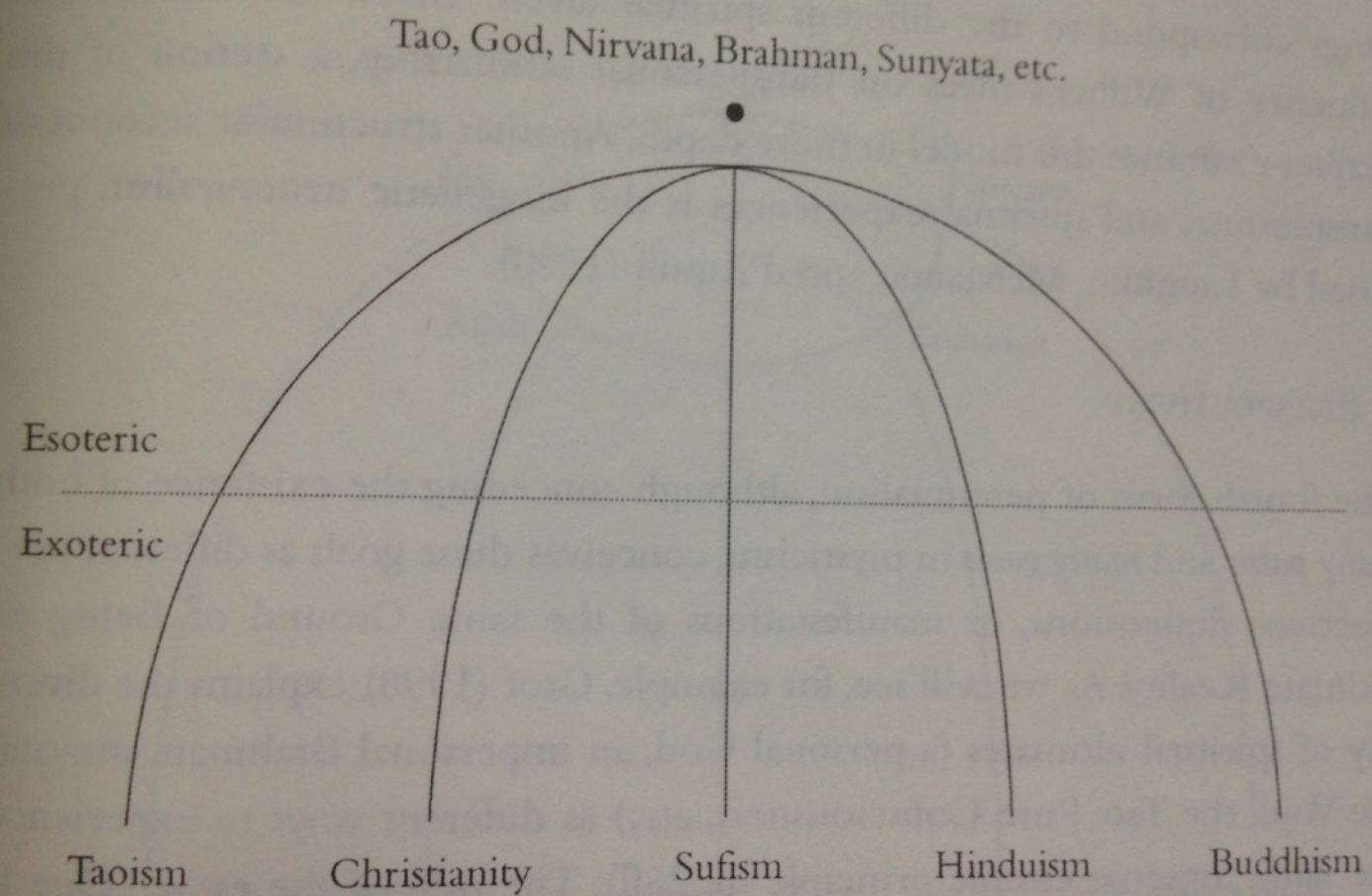


FIG. 2. ESOTERICIST

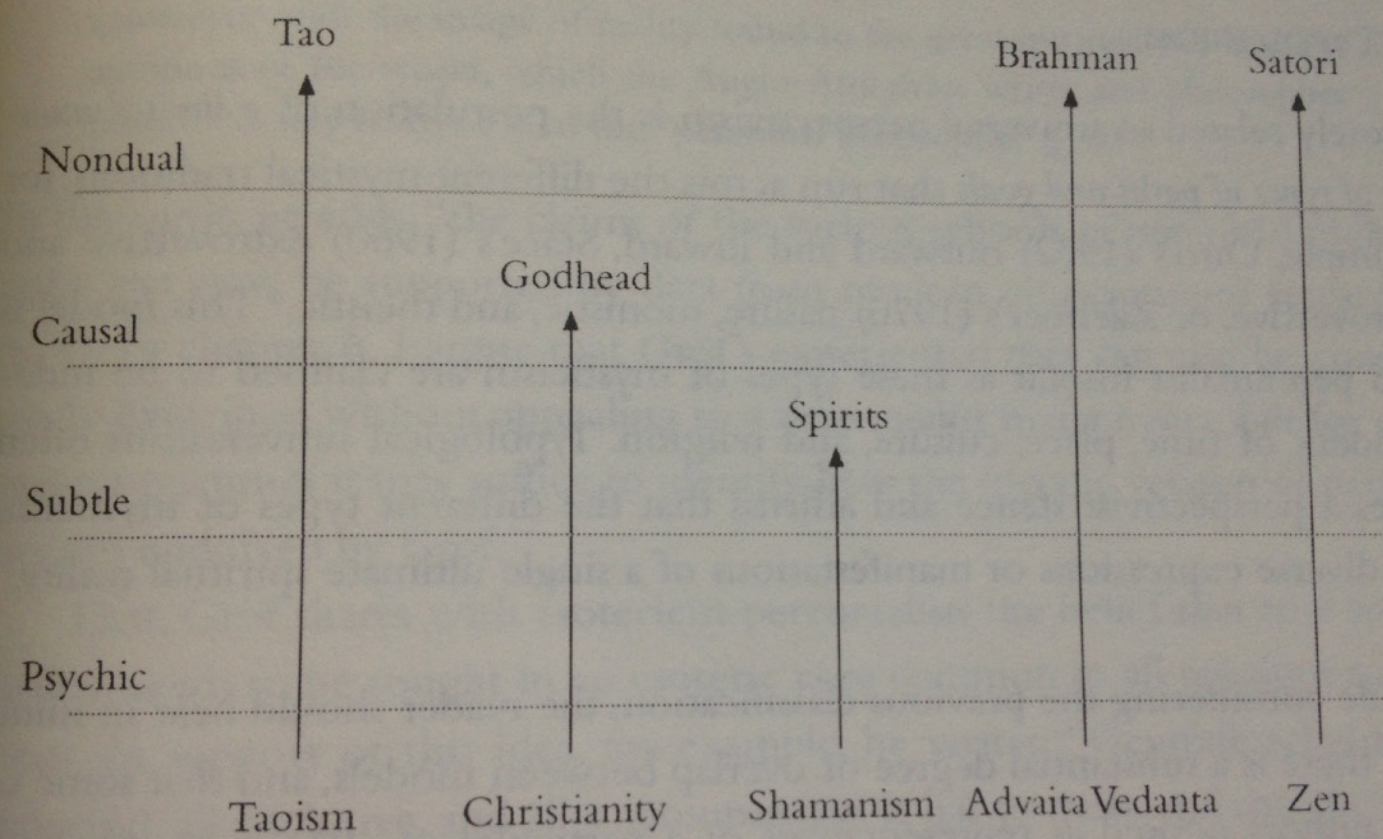


FIG. 3. STRUCTURALIST

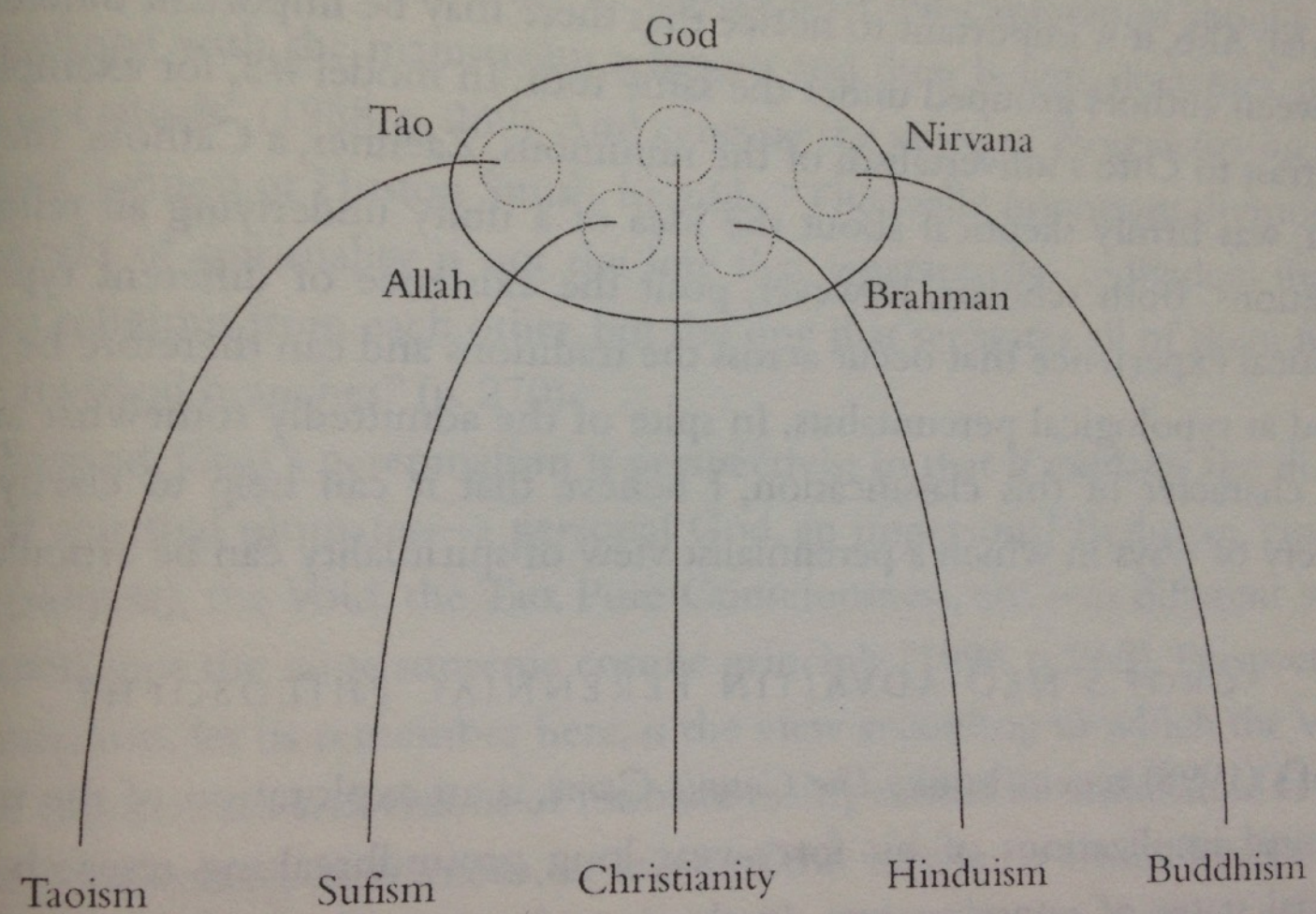


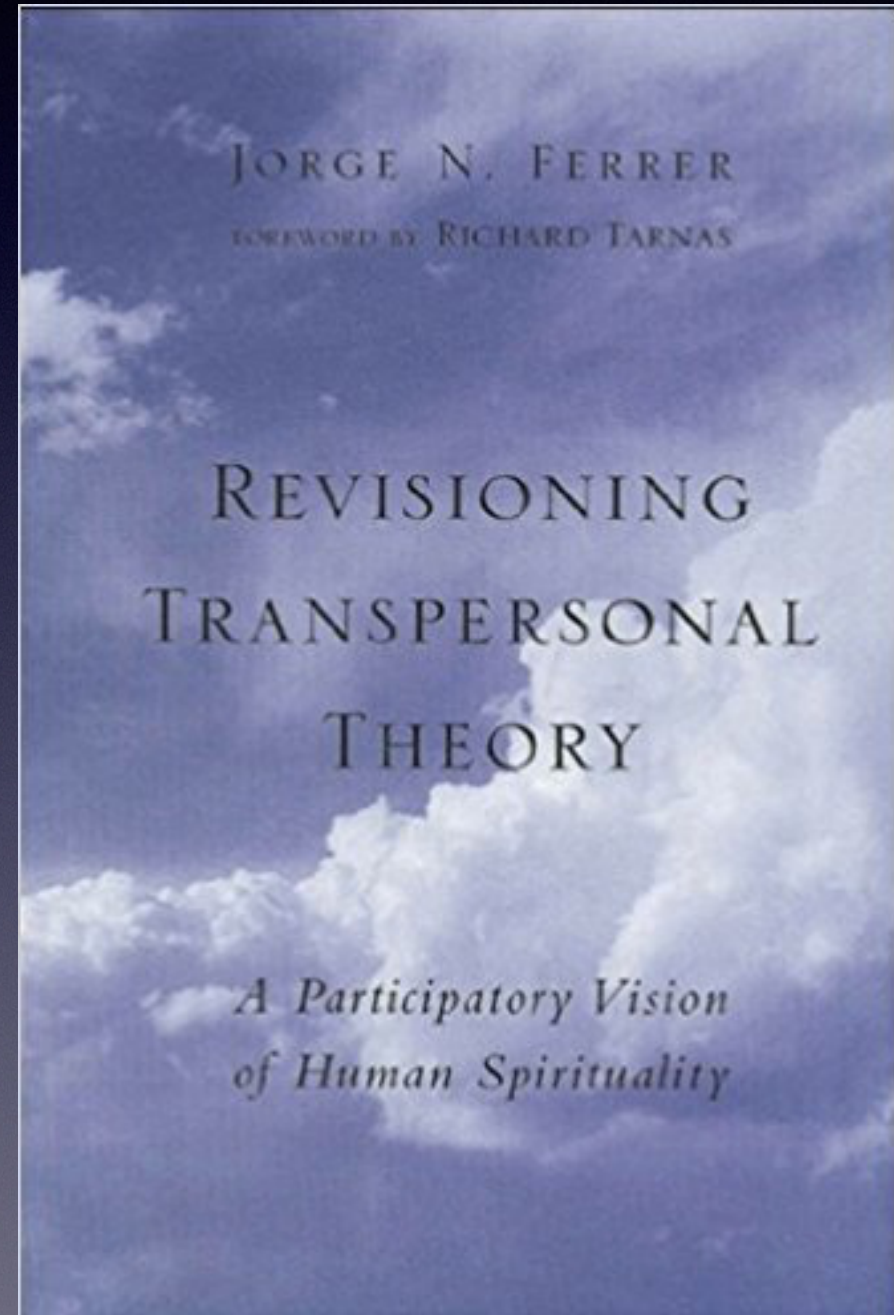
FIG. 4. PERSPECTIVIST

Typological

- there are different types of perennial experience
- W. Stace: introvertive/extrovertive
- R. C. Zaehner: nature/monistic/theistic

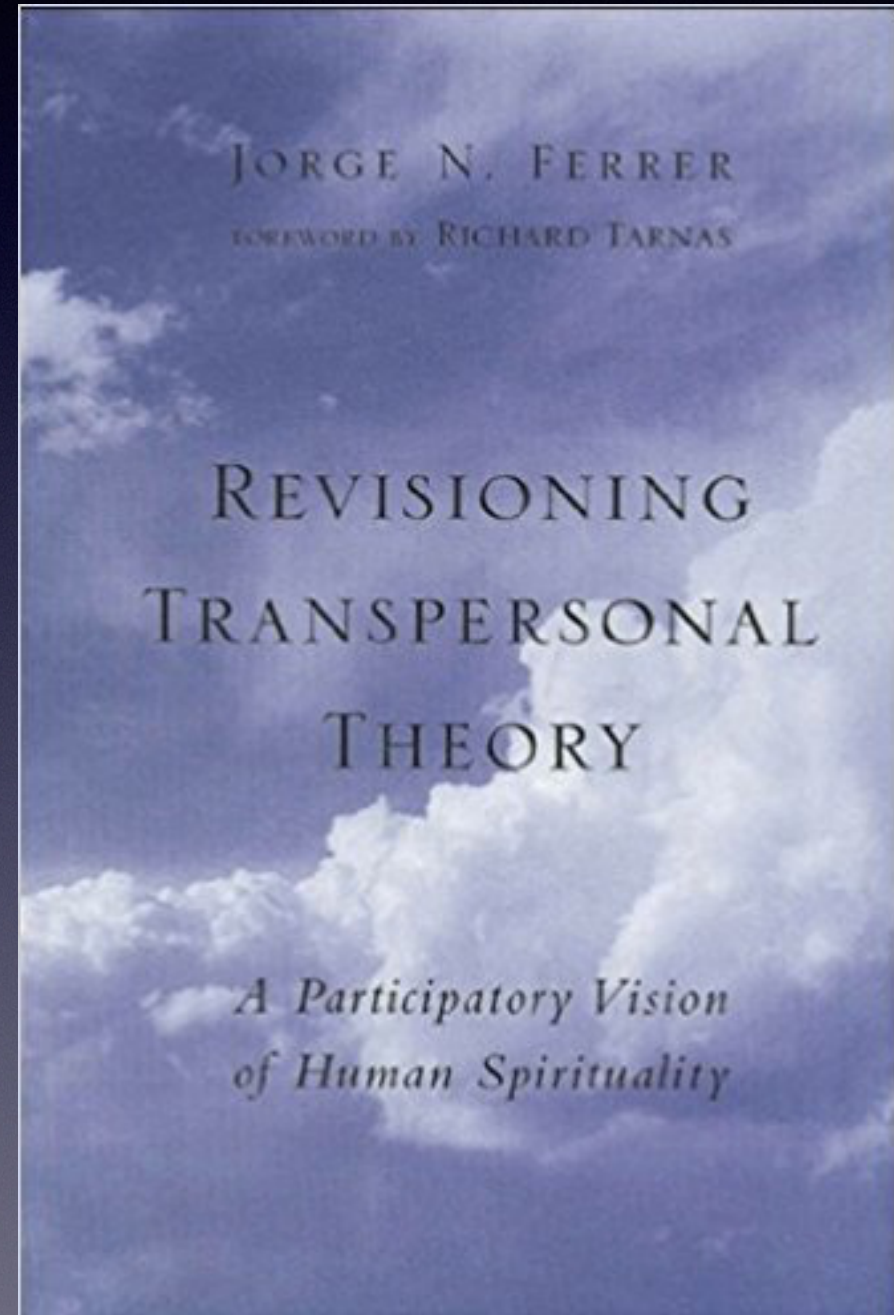
Criticisms

1. All religions are not the same
2. Perennialism ranks religions
3. Empiricism and reductionism



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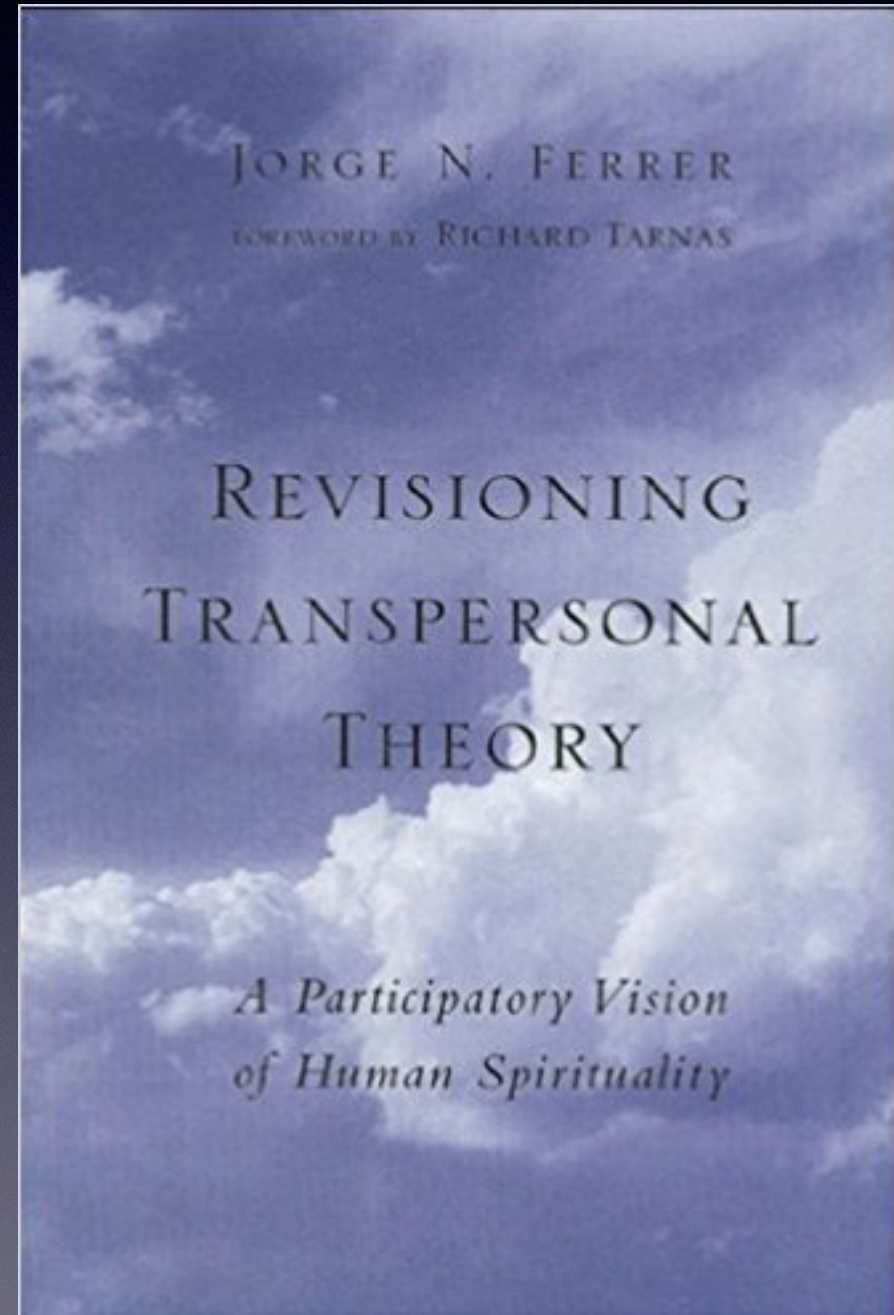
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1. All religions are not the same
2. Perennialism ranks religions
3. Empiricism and reductionism



Over-reliance on:

Advaita Vedanta.

“Non-Dual” Vedanta. Also called
“Monist”.

Principal idea is that only Brahman is
real, everything else is maya.

Everything that makes you think that
you are an individual, with distinct
existence, in a world of things, is
illusory.

Swami Vivekananda

- 19th century Hindu monk
- 1893 spoke for India at World Parliament of Religions
- set up missions in US



Gerald Heard (1889-1971)

- Disciple of Swami Prabhavananda in California
- Introduced Aldous Huxley to advaita vedanta



Advaita ignores

- “the troublesome mess of dualisms, qualified nondualisms, and nondual dualisms...and the luxuriant theisms that constituted unexported Hindu spirituality”