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Front Pages

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The *Athens Journal of Philosophy* (AJPHIL) is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas of philosophy. Many of the papers in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by Philosophy Unit of the Athens Institute. All papers are subject to Athens Institute's Publication Ethical Policy and Statement.

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The current issue is the fourth of the fourth volume of the *Athens Journal of Philosophy* (AJPHIL), by the published by the Philosophy Unit of ATINER

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute

Athens Institute for Education and Research

A World Association of Academics and Researchers

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25-29 May 2026, Athens, Greece

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- **Dr. William O'Meara,** Head, Philosophy Unit, Athens Institute & Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion, James Madison University, USA.
- **Dr. Mark Fagiano**, Deputy Head, Philosophy Unit, Athens Institute & Assistant Professor, Washington State University, USA.

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **3 February 2026**
- Acceptance of Abstract: **4 Weeks after Submission**
- Submission of Paper: **27 April 2026**

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Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **3 February 2026**
- Acceptance of Abstract: **4 Weeks after Submission**
- Submission of Paper: **27 April 2026**

Academic Member Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. William O'Meara,** Academic Member, Athens Institute & Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion, James Madison University, USA.

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- Delphi Visit
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Delineating Consciousness and Freedom as an Ontological Entanglement and Existential Phenomenon: Implication for Life and Liberty

*By Tennyson Samraj**

We can explain consciousness as a neural process, an emergent property, or a transduced phenomenon in the universe (Robert Forman, 2011). Either the brain generates (Emergent Theory,1992) or transduces consciousness. (Transduction theory, 2011). Brains are transducers of consciousness. In a narrow sense, cosmology and consciousness can be understood as the relationship between the mind and matter. In a broad sense, the relationship between consciousness and cosmology can be understood as an ontic entanglement, correlated with the manifestation of local Consciousness (the self) and nonlocal Consciousness (the global consciousness). Non-local consciousness must be understood as a global conceiver and creator, before nonlocal consciousness can be understood as an observer or perceiver. After Schrödinger's thought experiment, the need for an observer is understood as being fundamental/foundational if one is to understand anything about the universe. But the big question is whether the universe has a beginning, for most scientists think so. If so, was the universe conceived and created before it could be observed or perceived? There is a need for a conceiver and creator, without which there would be nothing to observe or perceive. Defining the universe demands the existence of consciousness as a conceiver/ creator/observer. (Schrödinger,1935; Stephen Priest, 2024). Two brute facts are a given: we are conscious and we are conscious of the universe. There is more and more evidence pointing to the necessity that consciousness is nonlocal. Understanding the relationship between local and non-local consciousness is more important than explaining the correlation between the mind and brain. Can we equate the existence of God with nonlocal consciousness? Can the manifestation of divine consciousness be equated as the basis for the nonlocality of consciousness? If freedom and intentionality are part of local consciousness, we can extrapolate that non-local consciousness is intentional and free, and much more. What is fundamental to local and nonlocal consciousness is intelligence and freedom.

Introduction
Origin of The Universe and The Question of Choice

Does the universe exist by choice or by chance? This question is best addressed when we understand the relationship between consciousness and cosmology. Understanding the relationship between cosmology and consciousness demands that we address the following questions: (1) Which comes first, consciousness or cosmology? (2) Is one the cause for the other, (3) Is consciousness contingent on cosmology, (4) Is the universe suffused with consciousness/is consciousness a substrate phenomenon?[1] While religious texts

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[1]Dan Falk, edited by Clara Moskowitz," Is consciousness Part of the Fabric of the Universe". 2

suggest that consciousness precedes cosmology, science indicates that cosmology precedes consciousness. Do physical processes in the universe create consciousness, or does consciousness create the universe?[2] "We don't know".[3] If the universe is created by consciousness, was the creation of the universe a conscious decision? Schrödinger points out the need for an observer, and by extension, a perceiver, and a conceiver if we are to understand the universe we find ourselves in. The question then would be, is consciousness part of the universe, or a fundamental part of the universe?[4] If consciousness is part of the universe, then the question of causation, contingency, and correlation of mental states to brain states would be significant. However, if consciousness is a fundamental part of the universe[5] then, the only question we have to address is Schrödinger's need for a non-local observer. Here, it is asserted that non-local consciousness can be considered global or as Divine consciousness.[6], and local Consciousness, as self-consciousness.

If the universe has a beginning, consciousness must be understood first as a conceiver, and later as a perceiver or observer. However, Schrödinger's observer is not a particular perceiver or conceiver, but a global observer, perceiver, and conceiver. If consciousness precedes the existence of cosmology, then the real question is not whether the universe had a beginning, but whether its beginning was a deliberate cognitive decision. Further, we cannot address whether the universe has a beginning without understanding whether the universe had an intelligent beginning. Energy and mass are interchangeable. But, does the change from energy to mass[7], or from mass to energy, require an agency, an agent that is cognitive and free, to make a cognitive choice to change one into the other? We know that we can choose to split the atom to create energy. We want to know whether an agent, that is intentional and free, was required to make a cognitive choice to create mass from energy.[8]. A cognitive agency may be the basis for the genesis of matter.[9] Consciousness cannot be the end process of creation; it is a fundamental part of the creation of anything.[10] Matter is a derivative of consciousness.[11] All matter is a result of consciousness. All matter originates and

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https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/is-consciousness-part-of-the-fabric-of-the-universe1/.

[2]Claire Levijoki, Is Consciousness nonlocal https://www.quora.com/Is-consciousness-nonlocal. 1.

[3]Ibid. 1.

[4]Entangling Conscious Agents, Donald Hoffman 28:00 -33:43, **(**34:27**)** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eWG7x_6Y5U.

[5]David Chalmers, Philosophy of Mind "Consciousness and its Place in Nature" Philosophy of Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 268.

[6]Exploring Non-local consciousness—The non-local consciousness 10:26-30 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6OKfVQSccs.

[7]David L. Ryan, The Conscious Universe: Non-locality and Its Implications. Journal of Psychiatry and Psychiatrics Disorders. Vol. 8 Issue 3 (2024). 98. DOI: 2650/jppd.2572-519X0215.

[8]Brain Keating, Donald Hoffman's New Approach To Consciousness, 1:46; 3:15; 27:23 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mU_WBela71Y.

[9]Lothar Schafer - Does Consciousness Cause the Cosmos. 7:32. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPfA83WRHrg. We know that we can choose to split an atom but Lothar Schafer seems to suggest that we cannot create an atom. It would take Divine consciousness to do so.

[10]Ibid., 7:32.

[11]Max Planck: The Father of Quantum Physics Believed in a Divine Mind https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQH5lI5rIEM. 1:08.

exists by consciousness[12], which is considered to be intelligent and free. The relationship between cosmology and consciousness regarding origins cannot be separated. To talk about origins is to speak simultaneously about both cosmology and consciousness. Human intelligence (meta-cognition) can explain how the universe came into existence. However, we can know how and why it exists only if we assume the existence of God or the necessity for nonlocal consciousness. For only the creator can explain why. If we cannot assume the existence of God or nonlocal consciousness, we have to join with Sartre and argue that the universe exists without cause, reason, or purpose[13], and there was never a time when the universe did not exist.[14] It has always existed, as the ancient Greek thinker Anaximander purported[15]. All matter is made of protons, neutrons, and electrons. And all protons and Neutrons are made up of 'up and down' quarks. What is beyond the world of quarks is the potential/unobserved world of reality. The suffused world of consciousness intentionally creates the material world of existence[16].

We cannot speak of the origin of consciousness like we talk about the origin of the cosmos. While consciousness can be defined as a neural process, an emergent property, or a phenomenon related to quantum entanglement, it cannot be purported to have an instantaneous beginning, as the Big Bang theory suggests for the birth of the universe. Several thinkers have recognized the necessity of consciousness:[17] (1) Berkeley asserted that to be is to be perceived,[18] in that perception is a necessary condition for existence. (2) Alexius Meinong argued that to be is to be conceived,[19] emphasizing the role of the mental in the structure of reality. (3) Erwin Schrödinger claimed that to be is to be observed,[20] aligning with the notion that observation is fundamental in determining any physical measurement. Together, these three thinkers suggest that consciousness is an ontological given; the universe cannot come into being without something that must be assumed as already present for anything to be or to be known. If consciousness is understood as necessary, then it cannot have a beginning in a temporal sense. By contrast, cosmology, the universe, is assumed to have a beginning, as purported by the Big Bang. If only one can have a beginning, it must be cosmology, not consciousness. In this paradigm, the universe's beginning presupposes consciousness, not vice versa. Therefore, we cannot

[12]Max Planck said" Max Planck said, "All matter originates and exists only by virtue of ..... matrix of all matter." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWnDS_4Jc5c. 0:35.
[13]Jean-Paul Sartre Being and Nothingness. Being and Nothingness, Tr. Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Washington: Square Press, 1977) 29.
[14]Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea,* tr. Robert Baldrick (Great Britain: Penguin Books 1965.) 192.
[15]Patrice Foutakis, "Human Consciousness Versus Cosmological Realty" European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, WWW.ej-social.org. 1.
https://ej-social.org/index.php/ejsocial/article/view/220.
[16]Is the Conscious Observer 'Creating' the Material Universe? | Prof. Bernard Carr & Bernardo Kastrup. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wL9CeVo087Y. 2:38.
[17]I used Open AI to enhace my thougbhts on Berkely, Alexius Meinong and Erwin Schrödinger
[18]Berkeley Three *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, 1713.
[19]Alexius Meinong Theory of objects 1904—existent and non-existent objects. (Sandford Encyclopedia).
[20]Schrödinger Cat is a thought experiment 1935.

speak of consciousness's origin as we do of matter, space, and time. Only when we understand consciousness as beginningless can we explore its role as a non-local perceiver, observer, and conceiver—the very ground of possibility for all that exists. When we have accounted for the universe's beginning, we can ask whether that agent was intelligent, free, and intentional in bringing the universe into existence. Because consciousness pre-exists cosmology, we can conclude that "essence precedes existence".

Plausible Explanation for Consciousness

Among the many explanations for consciousness, two plausible explanations need our attention: (1) The brain generates consciousness, i.e., the emergent theory of consciousness,[21] or (2) the brain transduces consciousness, i.e., the transduction theory of consciousness.[22] The first option relates to understanding consciousness as a neural process, or an emergent property. However, giving a reductive explanation for consciousness is like trying to extract milk from green grass. The contingency of consciousness on neural processes cannot be understood as the causation of consciousness by neural processes. The second option is related to the notion that consciousness is a fundamental part of the universe, and the facticity of local consciousness is only an extension of the reality of non-local consciousness. The brain is a conveyor of consciousness, not a producer. "Consciousness is mediated by the brain, not excreted by it"[23]. Consciousness is not produced, nor has it evolved[24]. The brain is a transducer, like a radio receiver; local consciousness is there because of the brain, but is not within it.[25] The brain is a consciousness-transducing device and a sentient processing entity. However, comparing the brain as a transducer raises the question of individuality. Individuality cannot be transduced. The unique self cannot be a transduced given, unless we see the unique self, likened to transducing different radio frequencies. Being sentient is detectable (i.e., MRI readings); however, subjectivity is an undetectable given. Understanding the need for a global consciousness became evident after Schrödinger's thought experiment. Here, Schrödinger postulates universal consciousness as a fundamental aspect of reality[26], manifested in individual consciousness.[27] Non-local consciousness is best explained

[21]John Searle, "The Irreducibility of Consciousness" in John Heil*, Philosophy of Mind,* (Oxford: Oxford Universe Press, 2004) 700-708.
[22]Robert Epstein, "Brain as Transducer: What if the brain is not a self-contained information processor? What if it is simply a transducer?" 9. https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.14293/S2199-1006.1.SOR-.PPICS3U.v1. (2021) 3.
[23]Ibid., 283.
[24]Stephen Priest, Quantum Physics and the Existence of God, 1. file:///C:/Users/tsamraj/Downloads/religions-15-00078%20(2).pdf.
[25]Robert Forman, (2011). An Emerging New Model for Consciousness: The Consciousness Field Model. In: Wallach, H., Schmidt, S., Jonas, W. (eds) Neuroscience, Consciousness and Spirituality. Studies in Neuroscience, Consciousness and Spirituality, vol 1. 279.
[26]What Schrödinger Meant by 'Consciousness is a Singular Entity. 2:40 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DSpRCKGCb4. 2:40.
[27]Schrodinger's Theory of Consciousness, 1:15. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rFl3CHDnl0.

in the context of God.[28] Only when we understand that consciousness precedes the existence of the universe, and that the universe began by choice, can we address why the universe exists. What is important to note here is that the traditional understanding that consciousness is a result of some physical and biological process, or emergence, is not as relevant as the notion that consciousness is a suffused substrate phenomenon. Consciousness can be either local or nonlocal, and either contingent or non-contingent. When consciousness is local, it appears to be contingent on the physical body or brain. While local consciousness may arise from physical substrates, consciousness is not reducible to the physical[29].

Knowing how we become conscious cannot answer why we are conscious or cognitive. We can understand that water is H2O, but we cannot know why water is H2O. However, we can know why, if there is a creator, and the creator is willing to tell us why[30]. The notion "in the beginning" implies the need for a cognitive conceiver, observer, and perceiver, before the universe can have a beginning. A conceiver, who conceives the universe's existence, an observer who observes the universe as it comes into existence, and a perceiver who perceives the secondary qualities in the universe.

The other option left is to accept consciousness and freedom as a brute given, in that freedom is the freedom to choose what to be conscious of, think, and act, without any explanation for the intentionality of consciousness. Thus, assuming the "freedom of the will" or "fact of consciousness"[31] as a brute given. There is a universe, and we are conscious of it. As such, any attempt to derive consciousness/ freedom from the material world or give a reductive explanation for consciousness from what it is mindful of is like trying to extract cow's milk from green grass. The human brain is composed mainly of water, but squeezing consciousness or freedom from water is impossible. Consciousness/freedom is a fundamental, unexplainable fact in the universe. This position suggests that we should not expect, or seek a basic explanation for consciousness or freedom, as it might not be possible. That is why Rousseau argued that we cannot renounce freedom and that we cannot separate life from liberty[32].

Consciousness and matter are connected; we cannot discuss one without referring to the other. Many thinkers have grappled with this relationship in history, offering many perspectives on how mind and matter coexist and interact[33]. René Descartes, a substance dualist, famously claimed that the essence of the self lies in thought. For him, "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito, ergo sum*) [34] purports certainty of

[28]Stephen Priest. Quantum Physics and the Existence of God file:///C:/Users/tsamraj/Downloads/religions-15-00078%20(1).pdf. 1.

[29]Andrew Lohrey and Bruce Boreham. The non-local Universe. COMMUNICATIVE & INTEGRATIVE BIOLOGY 2020, VOL. 13, NO. 1, page, 150.

[30]John, Lennox, AI as God, Deepfakes, and Consciousness. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XJnH1bI-8Q. 17:05-20:45.

[31] Ivanilde Francalossi "The Role Freedom in the Practical Philosophy of Kant and Reinhold". Athens Journal of Philosophy - Volume 1, Issue 1, March 2022, 35.

[32] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, 4. (Online).

[33]OpenAI, *ChatGPT*, August 16, 2025, https://chat.openai.com. AI-generated rewording of original idea."

[34]Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Lancaster University. 25. https://dn790005.ca.archive.org/0/items/RMCG0002/Descartes-Meditations-a1.pdf.

conscious experience. He did not say "I am, therefore I think,"[35] because it is the act of thinking that provides the basis for reality[36], not the other way around. In contrast, David Chalmers proposed that consciousness may be a fundamental feature of the universe[37], akin to space, time, and mass. Rather than being an emergent property of complex systems, it might be intrinsic to reality. Roger Penrose suggested that consciousness may be rooted in quantum processes within the brain, and proposed, alongside Stuart Hameroff, that conscious experience could be a quantum entanglement[38]. George Wald suggested that mind and matter are not separate substances but complementary aspects of a single underlying reality[39]. In this view, consciousness and the material world are not in opposition, but are two sides of the same coin, each necessary for a complete understanding of the other.

The Relationship between Local and Non-Local Consciousness

Scientists were first interested in defining the relationship between the brain and the mind. To date, the mind-brain interaction is a well-established fact[40]; now, scientists, especially physicists, are interested in knowing the relationship between cosmology and consciousness. However, what is most important about consciousness is not the connection between cosmology and consciousness, but understanding the relationship between local and non-local consciousness and the nature of consciousness. We have four options related to understanding the relationship between cosmology and consciousness. The first option is to continue the pursuit of science to investigate the relationship between brain states and mental states, in the context of causation, contingency, and the correlation between BS and MS.[41]. The second option is to accept cosmology and consciousness as brute facts[42], without knowing how and why we are conscious. Accepting the brute facticity of consciousness is to take the notion that how and why we are conscious is inexplicable. The third option is to believe in God or nonlocal consciousness, believing that only the creator can tell us how and why he chose to create us as conscious/cognitive beings. The fourth

[35]David L. Ryan "The Conscious Universe: Nonlocality and its Implications. Journal of Psychiatry and Psychiatric Disorders. Volume 8 Issue 3. 1.
[36]Associated with panpsychism or naturalistic dualism.
[37]David Chalmers, Philosophy of Mind "Consciousness and its Place in Nature" Philosophy of Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 268.
[38]Roger Penrose, "Quantum Physics of Consciousness "Closer to Truth. Oct 8, 2020 (4:50-6:03)
[39]John Pickering and Martin Skinner, "From Sentience to symbols". "George Wald" (Toronto: University of Toronto Press1990) 74.
[40]John C. Eccles "Evolution of consciousness" Vol. 89, No. 16 (Aug. 15, 1992), 7320 Published by: National Academy of Sciences https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2360081.pdf.
[41]U. T. Place "Is Consciousness a Brain Process" in David Chalmers, Philosophy of Mind (New York: Oxford University press, 2002) 55-60.
[42]Proponents of accepting consciousness as a brute given argue that the connection between physical states and conscious experience is a fundamental, unexplainable fact about the universe. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198758600.001.0001.

option is to understand the brain as a transducer.[43]The brain transduces consciousness, in that local consciousness is an extension of the non-local Consciousness, or Divine Consciousness.[44]. However, while the brain can be understood as a transducer of consciousness, this cannot account for how individual selves are transduced[45] or how, in the Christian paradigm, the "breath of life" (soul) [46] is transformed into the personal self. As such, the big question is not about the relationship between mental states and brain states, but the relationship between local (the self) and non-local (global) consciousness.

If we choose not to believe in God or nonlocal consciousness, we are left without a framework for understanding why we are conscious. While we can understand how consciousness functions or describe its physical correlates, the question of its origin will remain a mystery. Only if we accept the necessity of God, and only if God chooses to reveal why consciousness was given to us, can we begin to understand its content and extent. Without belief in God, it becomes impossible to determine whether consciousness precedes cosmology or arises from it. The question remains unresolved in purely materialistic or atheistic frameworks. In contrast, the God-option—not necessarily the God of traditional theism, but the God connected to non-local consciousness, offers a possible basis for understanding consciousness as inherently free and ontologically primary, in that it pre-exists cosmology[47]. However, when we recognize the uniqueness of the nature of consciousness, namely, freedom, and its relationship to a divine source, we understand the nature of freedom. Freedom is an essential feature of the nature of consciousness. For this reason, we cannot meaningfully speak of consciousness without also speaking of God, and we cannot talk of consciousness without invoking freedom. However, these three--God, consciousness, and freedom are abstract concepts we choose to believe or disbelieve. As such, we just don't exist; we exist as believers or disbelievers in God, consciousness, and freedom.

Defining the universe demands the existence of consciousness. After Schrödinger's thought experiment, there was an interest in understanding the relationship between local (individual self) and nonlocal consciousness. (nonlocal observer, perceiver, and conceiver). The question is not about the relationship between local consciousness and the brain, but the relationship between local and non-local consciousness. Freedom, intelligence, and intentionality are common between local and non-local consciousness. If intelligence, intentionality, and freedom are properties of local consciousness, then, more so, the same can be said of nonlocal consciousness. Suppose temporal local consciousness can comprehend timeless entities like triangles, there must be an infinite and eternal nonlocal observer, perceiver, and conceiver in whose mind timeless realities like triangles reside. We must assume that local

[43]Robert Epstein, "Brain as Transducer: What if the brain is not a self-contained information processor? What if it is simply a transducer?" 9. https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.14293/S2199-1006.1.SOR-.PPICS3U.v1. (2021) 3.

[44]Stephen Priest, Quantum Physics and the Existence of God, 1.

[45]Maybe different selves are like transducing different frequencies. Or like transmitting different radio signals.

[46]Bible: Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 12:7.

[47]OpenAI, *ChatGPT*, August 16, 2025, https://chat.openai.com. AI-generated rewording of original idea."

consciousness is possible only because of non-local consciousness. In the ancient world, the Greeks argued that the nonlocal consciousness was immortal, and the eternal soul was the user of the body[48]. Local consciousness, as a conceiver, can conceive of timeless triangles only because they were first conceived by nonlocal consciousness. If a local conceiver can choose to split atoms to create energy, then we can assume that nonlocal consciousness, or the conceiver, can choose to make atoms. To the Greeks, the soul cannot die, so death is not the death of anything.[49] It is only the separation of the body from the soul.[50] What would the existence of a nonlocal consciousness be like? We know it can be manifested in local consciousness as individual selves. Can nonlocal consciousness manifest itself as the divine self or God?[51] Does the awareness and cognition of local consciousness of an eternal God make such a reality necessary? When all discussions about the relationship between consciousness and cosmology end, we realise that the relationship between local and nonlocal consciousness is best understood in the context of God. Only the nature of consciousness can explain the reality of freedom. The nature of consciousness is the strongest argument for freedom and the existence of God.

Quantum theory of the mind suggests that consciousness is an entanglement and an existential phenomenon. The need for an observer, a perceiver, or a conceiver is essential to understand the universe we find ourselves in. Quantum theory projects the need for an observer. We can observe that the cat is either dead or alive. But before observation, the cat is dead and alive, now called a superposition. [52] All reality is in a superposition (qubits) until it is conceived, observed, or perceived.[53] Schrödinger was one of the first modern scientists to see the need for a conscious observer before one can make any scientific claim. Until there is a conscious observer, everything in the universe is superposed.[54] Things can be here and there, live and dead. The well-known connection between twin particles, even though separated in the universe, suggests a universe interconnected through consciousness[55]. Regardless of whether we can say consciousness is a reductive or non-reductive property, it must be accepted as a given. One feature of consciousness is its free nature. It is free to think, not only of itself, but of something other than itself, and importantly, think of something that does not exist and can bring it into existence. With a cognitive observer, things are here or there, and beings are either

[48]The Greeks understanding of the body/mind relationship.

[49]Pim Van Lommel, "Non-local Consciousness" Journal of Consciousness Studies, 20, No. 1–2, 2013, 11. https://pimvanlommel.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Pim-van-Lommel-Nonlocal-Consciousness-article-JCS-2013.pdf.

[50]Plato/Socrates, Phaedo.

[51]Stephen Priest, Quantum Physics and the Existence of God, 1.

[52]David L. Ryan "The Conscious Universe: Nonlocality and its Implications. Journal of Psychiatry and Psychiatric Disorders. Volume 8 Issue 3. 1.

[53]Narayan Kumar Bhadra, The Complex Quantum-State of Consciousness. IOSR Journal of Biotechnology and Biochemistry (IOSR-JBB), Volume 5, Issue 1, (Jan.-Feb.2019), 59. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317101682_The_Complex_Quantum-State_of_Consciousness.

[54]Federico Faggin: Consciousness & Quantum Panpsychism (30:01) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Okq3ibNtwDY. "Superposition is a quantum phenomenon where a qubit can exist in a combination of multiple states simultaneously, unlike a classical bit which can only be in one state (0 or 1)".

[55]The nonlocal Universe, Andrew Lohrey & Bruce Boreham, 149. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19420889.2020.1822583.

dead or alive, without a conscious observer, things are both here and there; live and dead. The collapse of the wave function is free will[56]. The quantum world is not algorithmic, but indeterminate,[57] where free will is present.[58]

Understanding the relationship between cosmology and consciousness has been a prolonged exercise in the history of thought. What is indubitable is that we are conscious and conscious of the universe. We want to know whether they are mutually independent of each other, or whether one causes the other. Traditional science suggests that the universe generates consciousness. Since Schrödinger, modern sciences indicate that an observer is necessary to know what exists and what does not exist. A local or nonlocal observer is required to see the universe as it is. But what are the features of both local and nonlocal observers? Is the observer cognitive, free, and intentional? Further, is the observer non-contingent? While it is assumed that the universe has a beginning, does the nonlocal observer have a beginning, and is the non-local observer non-contingent? The local observer appears to be temporal, and the non-local observer is understood as non-temporal. Both local and nonlocal consciousness are the same; the only difference is that one is temporal, contingent, and material, while the other is eternal, non-contingent, and immaterial.[59] One aspect of the quantum world is the qubit world of information. The qubit world of information is the world of possibilities, from which the conscious conceiver creates and observes.[60] This state is beyond algorithms.[61]. Non-local consciousness must be understood in the context of the quantum (qubit) field of information.[62], from which consciousness can choose to conceive, create, and later perceive or observe. Suffused non-local consciousness has no place or location.[63]

Local consciousness is individual selves; non-local consciousness is the self with a capital S.[64], or the great consciousness[65], the infinite sea of consciousness before time and space. Time and space are primary, only with the coming of objects and subjects[66]. Once there are objects and subjects, there is space and time. Where there are objects, there is space, and when events happen to subjects, there is time.[67]

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[56]Quantum Information Pan psychism Explained | Federico Faggin PhD. 30:05 (it from bit/ it from qubit—26:48) we can derive quantum physics from quantum information is (27:14) —quantum information is ontology 27:22. Quantum bit is one of the infinite possibility 27:40. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FUFewGHLLg&t=1797s.

[56]Ibid., 30:15.

[57]Quantum Information Pan psychism Explained | Federico Faggin PhD. 29:01. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FUFewGHLLg&t=1797s.

[58]Ibid., 30:05.

[59]Ori Z. Soltes, Athens Journal of Philosophy - Volume 4, Issue 1, March 2025, 12.

[60]Max Planck: The Father of Quantum Physics Believed in a Divine Mind https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQH5lI5rIEM. 1:08.

[61]Quantum Information Pan psychism Explained | Federico Faggin (30:03).

[62]Ibid. (30:03).

[63]George Wald, Life and Mind in the Universe" Edited by John Pickering & Martin Skinner, *From Sentience to Symbols.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 72.

[64]Exploring Non-local consciousness—The non-local consciousness 10:26-30. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6OKfVQSccs.

[65]Ibid 11:25.

[66]Ibid 12:07.

[67]Ibid 11:4.

What is the relationship between local and nonlocal consciousness? Do both share features or common properties? Subjectivity, intentionality, phenomenality, and freedom are features of both. Are these essential features of consciousness or accidental features of consciousness? The existential birth and death of the self are the most striking aspects of local consciousness.[68] While one can explain consciousness as a neural process, an emergent property, or a quantum phenomenon, we cannot explain the origin and existence of the existential self. The existential self appears at birth and disappears at death, while the atoms and the nonlocal consciousness continue to be the same. Again, we can explain the contingency, causation, and correlation of mental states to brain states, but find it challenging to explain the origin and existence of the unique existential self. Individuality cannot be transduced or caused. It seems we must accept the birth and death of the existential self as brute givens, while holding on to its connection to nonlocal consciousness, which is not subject to death.

Cognitive Features of Local and Non-local Consciousness: Intentional, Phenomenal, Volitional, and Intelligent

Intelligence, intentionality, phenomenality, and freedom are four cognitive features of local consciousness that can be assumed to be part of non-local consciousness. By cognitive, we mean that which is definable and defendable. Firstly, consciousness is intelligent. Intelligent, in that we can comprehend rational truths, knowing the difference between what is empirical or sense-evident and what is rational or self-evident. Secondly, consciousness is intentional. Intentional, in that we can choose what to be cognizant of, be it an idea or a concept of a thing. We can be cognizant about what exists, subsists, or absists. Thirdly, consciousness is phenomenal. It is phenomenal in that we are cognizant of what it is like to be[69], think, believe, and act. No one is phenomenally the same; subjectivity is unique in each[70]. Local and non-local consciousness share intentionality and intelligence, while maintaining distinct or strict individuality. Phenomenality is a distinctive feature of individuality. Defining the origin of the individual or existential self is difficult because individuality cannot be transduced; however, the birth and death of the individual self are brute givens. Death is the end of the individual self. Fourthly, consciousness is volitional. It is volitional, in that the essential feature of consciousness is the freedom to choose what to think, believe, and act on. Only those who argue for volition can choose to be moral[71], in that we believe we can choose to

[68]Robert Forman, (2011). An Emerging New Model for Consciousness: The Consciousness Field Model. In: Wallach, H., Schmidt, S., Jonas, W. (eds) Neuroscience, Consciousness and Spirituality. Studies in Neuroscience, Consciousness and Spirituality, vol 1. 280.

[69]Thomas Nagel. "What it is like to be" in David Chalmers, *Philosophy of Mind,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 202) 219-226.

[70]Christof Koch - Is Consciousness Fundamental? 0:24. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yqr2spzBtM.

[71]*Pim Van Lommel, "Non-local Consciousness"* Journal of Consciousness Studies, 20, No. 1–2, 2013, 8, 34.

live or die, choose to be good or bad, choose to believe or disbelieve in God[72], and choose to believe in an immortal life, or choose to live or die between the existential limits of birth and death.[73] Since local consciousness is intelligent, intelligent, phenomenal, and volitional, we can assume that nonlocal consciousness is intentional, intelligent, phenomenal, and volitional.

We can choose to conceive, perceive, or observe. In Quantum mechanics, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle states that speed and location are undetermined until measured or observed. More importantly, because the conceiver, perceiver, or observer chooses to conceive, perceive, or observe, there is certainty of what is created, perceived, or observed. As such, the freedom of the conceiver, perceiver, or observer to conceive, perceive, or observe is fundamental to the universe. Many thinkers have spoken about the entanglement of cosmology and consciousness, where the essential feature of consciousness is freedom. What is important in this study is to show that the central feature of Consciousness is freedom. Brentano argued that the essential feature of consciousness is intentionality,[74] which is always about something that is either caused or chosen. It is the latter that is of importance to this study. We can choose what to think, believe, or act. Sartre argued that the essential feature of consciousness is volition, in that "to be conscious is to choose, and to choose is to be conscious."[75]. What is necessary is to combine them. Freedom and intentionality are fundamental to the nature of consciousness. This means that while all consciousness is consciousness of something, we are cognizant of the fact that we choose what to think, believe, and act. We are not only aware, but we are cognizant,[76] of the fact that we can choose what to be conscious of. This is the difference between artificial intelligence and the intelligence that we have. Artificial intelligence does not have freedom and intentionality. Freedom and intentionality provide us with the basis to choose what to think, believe, and act upon. Sartre argued that we cannot separate consciousness from freedom, as such equated man with freedom by stating that "man is freedom."[77] To Sartre, the immateriality of consciousness provides the basis for the indeterminacy of consciousness.[78] When we acknowledge that what is fundamental to consciousness is freedom, and when

[72]Stephen J. Sullivan, Abrahamic Theism: Free will, and Eternal Torment. Athens Journal of Philosophy - Volume 3, Issue 1, March 2024. 13.

[73]What Soren Kierkegaard called as Either/Or. Tennyson Samraj, *What is Your Belief Quotient* {Lacombe: Monograph publishers 2001. 2007)). Here I have defined BQ—Belief Quotient as justified belief-decisions. For there are beliefs and belief-decisions. So BQ can be equated with Doxastic intelligence, (just like IQ is equated with Cognitive intelligence and EQ is equated with Emotional intelligence-AI) in that, we choose to believe or disbelieve for reasons we deem justified.

[74]Franz Brentano, "The Distinction between Mental and Physical Phenomena" in David J. Chalmers. Philosophy of Mind, (New York: Oxford University press, 2002) 479.

[75]Jean-Paul Sartre. Being and Nothingness, Tr. Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Washington: Square Press, 1977) 28.

[76]Vinod D. Deshmukh, Consciousness, Awareness, and Presence: A Neurobiological Perspective. International Journal of Yoga | Volume 15 | Issue 2 | May-August 2022. 144.

[77]Jean-Paul Sartre. Existentialism and Humanism, ts Philip Mariat (London: Methuem & Co Ltd. 1949) 34.

[78]Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, Tr. Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Washington: Square Press, 1977) 28.

we also acknowledge the connection between local consciousness and nonlocal consciousness, we can conclude that God is Freedom. Our understanding of freedom provides the basis for belief or disbelief in God, in that there is a correlation between belief in freedom and faith in God. To believe in freedom is to believe in God.[79] Those who believe in freedom tend to believe in God, and those who do not believe in freedom tend not to believe in God.

What is the nature of freedom? Freedom is the capacity to make choices. To live is to choose to live a life of making choices. To choose to die is to choose to end a life of making choices. Here are some characteristics of freedom. Firstly, every choice implies the negation of what is, and the projection of what is not[80]. Every choice is an attempt to create the world as we want it to be. Secondly, every choice implies the selection and elimination of other options. Thirdly, to choose is to have to choose. To have to choose is to having to have to choose. The facticity of making choices[81]. We cannot choose not to choose. For choosing not to choose is to choose not to choose[82]. Fourthly, to choose is to be conscious, and to be conscious is to choose. To choose is to perceptually choose. There are no free situations, only free human beings.[83] We do not choose to be conscious, have a conscience, or be free. We choose to believe that we are conscious, we have a conscience, and we are free, or better, we are "born for freedom"[84]. For instance, if we can choose to die rather than live, then we have freedom from life; if we can choose to die before natural death, then we have freedom from death. Doxastic intelligence affords us the ability to make justified belief-decisions[85].

To be is to be Conceived, Perceived, or Observed

To be can be understood as what exists, what subsists, or what absists.[86] To be is to exist, as in the material world of existence. To be is to subsist, as in the mathematical world of rationality. To be is to absist, as in the mental world of intentionality. If the material world of existence has a beginning, then its existence must be understood as temporal. If the mathematical world of existence has no beginning, then its rationality must be understood as non-temporal. If the intentional world of existence is to be understood, independent of having a beginning, then its being is to be understood as existential. If to be indeed is to exist, subsist, or absist, how must the following: (1) To be is to be conceived, (2) To be is to be perceived,

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[79]Some like Jean Paul Sartre in the book *Being and Nothingness* argue that God can human freedom cannot co-exist because if God exists then essence precedes existence and man cannot be free.
[80]Jean Paul Sartre Being and Nothingness, 650.
[81]Jean Paul Sartre Being and Nothingness, 644. What Sartre called the facticity of freedom.
[82]Jean Paul Sartre Being and Nothingness, 607.
[83]Jean Paul Sartre Being and Nothingness, 569.
[84]Zane Ozola, "Freedom as a Mode of thought: Hannah Arendt". Athens Journal of Philosophy - Volume 2, Issue 4, December 2023. 223.
[85]Tennyson Samraj, What is you Belief Quotient, 2007. BQ/Belief Quotient as opposed to IQ/ Cognitive intelligence and EQ, Emotional intelligence.
[86]To "exist" refers to material, temporal beings, to "subsist" refers to a non-temporal, abstract existence, to "absist" (or "being-given") simply means being an object, but not necessarily having being.

(3) To be is to be observed, be understood, and connected. To be is to be first conceived, and later, be perceived or observed. Berkeley argued that to be is to be perceived. Alexius Meinong argued that to be is to be conceived. Schrödinger argued that to be is to be observed. Consciousness is central to what is conceived, perceived, or observed. What is the relationship of the mind to the material objects, mathematical objects, and mental objects? Schrödinger's need for an observer brings into question both the need for a conceiver and a perceiver. But we must go further than Schrödinger. In Schrödinger's paradigm, we saw the need for an observer: to be is to be observed. However, to observe assumes one can conceive and create. Only what is conceived and intended can be later observed. So, to be an observer is first to be a conceiver and a creator. If consciousness is central to what is conceived, created, or observed, then two essential characteristics must be highlighted: (1) consciousness is intelligent, and (2) consciousness is volitional.

If Quantum entanglement describes the behavior of two subatomic particles that were once entangled,[87] but remain connected, even though separated over a long distance, with no physical connection, there is a need for nonlocal consciousness.[88]. However, the only way we can accept nonlocal consciousness is to reject the notion that consciousness is a neural process or contingent on matter. Nonlocal consciousness can be cognitive beyond the reach of the brain.[89] Here, the brain is simply a receptor, rather than the creator of what is known. That is why it is referred to as an ontological phenomenon, rather than a quantum process. Consciousness cannot be accounted for in physical terms. For consciousness is fundamental.[90] It cannot be accounted for in terms of anything physical. When we understand that consciousness is fundamental or non-local, we can realize its entanglement with local consciousness.

If consciousness is foundational, then we could argue that where there is a universe, there is consciousness, which pre-exists the universe. The implicit nonlocal consciousness embeds each individual's local or explicit conscious mind within itself.[91] Unlike local realism[92], understanding nonlocal realism "encompasses meaning, mind, and universal consciousness[93]. The future of science rests on changing its ontological orientation frame, from local realism to that of nonlocal realism. Nonlocal realism is the term used to represent an integrated worldview that displays the reality of a singular, integrated, interconnected universal field of relationships.[94] While local realism posits that objects' properties exist independent of observation,

[87]Darren Orf, "Quantum Entanglement In Your Brain Is What Generates Consciousness, Radical Study Suggests." https://www.popularmechanics.com/science/a61854962/quantum-entanglement-consciousness/.
[88]Andrew Lohrey and Bruce Boreham. "The non-local Universe." COMMUNICATIVE & INTEGRATIVE BIOLOGY 2020, VOL. 13, NO. 1, 152.
[89]Pim Van Lommel, "Non-local Consciousness" Journal of Consciousness Studies, 20, No. 1–2, 2013, 8, 39. https://pimvanlommel.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Pim-van-Lommel-Nonlocal-Consciousness-article-JCS-2013.pdf.
[90]David Chalmers, Philosophy of Mind "Consciousness and its Place in Nature" Philosophy of Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 268.
[91]Ibid., 151.
[92]Ibid., 150-151.
[93]Ibid., 147.
[94]Ibid., 149.

non-local realism posits that objects lack definite properties until measured or observed.[95] The universe we perceive and observe is nonlocal.[96] Having noted the relationship between local and nonlocal realism, we must understand what distinguishes between local and nonlocal universes. The universe can be understood as local or non-local, depending on whether things are connected, at the speed of light, or by something faster than the speed of light, or in "no time".[97] Suppose we are connected, faster than the speed of light, then there must be an ontic cognitive agent that can connect, or be linked to things in the universe instantaneously.[98]

Conclusion

Either cosmology generates consciousness, or consciousness creates cosmology. The current explanation is that cosmology has a beginning, and its beginning is attributed to the nonlocal consciousness. After Schrödinger's thought experiment, more and more thinkers argue that while cosmology has a beginning, consciousness does not have a beginning. Only the universe has a beginning, and that the beginning of the universe is the result of an intelligent choice. The splitting of the atom is just as much of a choice as the creation of the atom. The universe as we know it came into existence and remains in existence by choice. The need for an observer (nonlocal realism) and the need for instant connectivity between two particles separated in the universe, faster than the speed of light (nonlocal universe), necessitate the basis for why nonlocal consciousness/freedom is considered a fundamental aspect of the universe.

If consciousness pre-exists cosmology and freedom is fundamental to the nature of consciousness, we can conclude that the universe exists and continues to exist only by choice. This is a paradigm shift to the traditional understanding that consciousness results from a cosmic process. If cosmology precedes consciousness, we can give a reductive explanation for consciousness, in that consciousness is either a neural process or an emergent property. However, if consciousness pre-exists cosmology, then we can purport that the brain does not generate consciousness, but that the brain transduces consciousness. The option related to consciousness as either a neural process or an emergent property cannot be valid if consciousness is understood as a foundational or fundamental part of the universe. However, all evidence that purports consciousness as a neural process, an emergent property, or a quantum phenomenon can only establish the causal relationship between brain states and mental states. It cannot establish the relationship between local and global consciousness. It is necessary to establish the relationship between local and non-local consciousness, for nonlocal

[95]David L. Ryan "The Conscious Universe: Nonlocality and its Implications. Journal of Psychiatry and Psychiatric Disorders. Volume 8 Issue 3. 1. 98. Deepak Chopra. Local vs. Non-Local Realism, 1:30. https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=620171470404798.

[96]Andrew Lohrey and Bruce Boreham. The non-local Universe, 152.

[97]Robert Nadeau and Menas Kafatos, *The Non-local Universe*, (New York: Oxford Press, 1999) 2. https://www.google.com/search?q=local+and+nonlocal+realism&rlz=1C1CHBF_enCA1024CA1024&oq=local+and+nonlocal+realism&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRifBdIBCjE5OTk3ajBqMTWoAgiwAgHxBXSW8-fwzlRm&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8*Ibid.*

[98]Andrew Lohrey and Bruce Boreham. The non-local Universe, 153.

consciousness not only pre-exists cosmology but also does not have a beginning. Nonlocal consciousness is understood as eternal, and local consciousness as temporal. Connectivity between local and non-local consciousness can be established, but arguing for individuality and subjectivity will remain a challenge. The appearance of the self at birth and the disappearance of the self at death are existential givens; however, atoms and the reality of nonlocal consciousness continue to remain the same.

Consciousness pre-exists in the universe only if we believe in God or in nonlocal consciousness. If one does not believe in God or nonlocal consciousness, we must assume that consciousness is a suffused phenomenon. As such, consciousness is not a neural process, an emergent property, but a suffused or substrate phenomenon. The universe does not cause consciousness; consciousness is not contingent on the universe and is not a correlate but a suffused/substrate given. It is not something separate, as substance dualists purport; it is not a property of matter like property dualists purport; it is not inherently part of every atom, as panpsychists purport, but a suffused substrate phenomenon. It is simply there, suffused with the universe without any explanation. It is a brute given. This is the only option left if one does not believe in God or nonlocal consciousness. Science for years has refused to address this existential phenomenon; now, it is front and centre to every honest scientist. We are left with only two options: either we accept consciousness as (1) a brute given, as such, inexplicable, or (2) local consciousness is linked with non-local consciousness as a transduced existential phenomenon. When belief in God or in nonlocal consciousness is a given, we can argue that nonlocal consciousness not only precedes cosmology; it is the basis for cosmology.

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Shaping God in Modernity: From Descartes to Spinoza

*By Ori Z Soltes**

Both Descartes and Spinoza are credited with pushing medieval thought toward modernity, but their respective foci on questions pertaining to God are very different from each other; they are informed, in part, by their respective experiences as a Catholic and a Jew. Descartes' thought is shaped within and against a Jesuit context; Spinoza's thought is shaped within and against a rabbinic context. Each pushes beyond those contexts. Descartes began his education at a Jesuit institution barely two years after the Jesuits had been permitted to return to France; he spent most of his mature adult life away from France—in the Netherlands. Spinoza was a brilliant pre-rabbinical student in Amsterdam, part of a—specifically Sephardic Jewish—community the leadership of which attacked his thinking in part because of their experience and fear of the Catholic Inquisition as it had developed in the Iberia from which most of them had come not long before. Whereas Descartes' Discourse on the Method and Meditations famously introduce the issue of radical doubt, when he arrives at his proof of God's existence, his method follows a process shaped centuries earlier by St Anselm of Canterbury; Spinoza introduces an entirely new vocabulary for God in his Ethics and his Theologico-Political Treatise—new enough so that his panhenotheistic perspective was and often is confused with both pantheism and atheism. They open doors into modern thought regarding God and the divine interface with humanity. The implications extend from their era to our own.

Introduction

As much as both Descartes and Spinoza are credited with pushing medieval thought toward modernity, their respective foci on questions pertaining to God—informed, in part, by their respective experiences as a Catholic (albeit with close connections to the Protestant world) and a Jew—are significantly different. Descartes' thought is itself shaped within and against a Jesuit context; Spinoza's thought is shaped within and against a rabbinic context. The thinking of each is honed by an important intellectual-spiritual tradition, but each pushes beyond the bounds of his tradition.

Descartes's Complexly Catholic Life

Descartes (1596-1650) is largely seen as responsible for the increased attention given to epistemology in the 17th century. He is credited with laying the foundations for 17th-century continental rationalism as a systematic school of philosophy. Although his family was Roman Catholic, the Poitou region where he was born and raised was controlled by the Protestant Huguenots. He was schooled at a Jesuit institution, but the initial fulfillment of his ambition to become a professional military

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officer came when, in 1618, he joined the Protestant Dutch States Army in Breda, as a mercenary, under the command of Maurice of Nassau. According to his first biographer, Adrien Baillet, (1649-1706) on the night of November 10–11, 1619 (St. Martin's Day), while stationed in Neuburg an der Donau, Descartes shut himself in a room with a stove to escape the cold. While there he had three dreams, and believed that a divine spirit had revealed to him a new philosophy.

He left the army the following year and travelled somewhat before returning to France, spending time in Paris during the next few years, but returning to the Dutch Republic in 1628. In 1629, he attended the University of Franeker, in Friesland, either living with a Catholic family or renting in the Sjaerdemaslot castle. The next year, under the name "Poitevin," he enrolled at Leiden University—a Protestant institution. He studied both mathematics and astronomy. In Amsterdam, he had a relationship with Helena Jans van der Strom, with whom he had a daughter, Francine, who was born in 1635 and baptized a Protestant. She died of scarlet fever at the age of 5. Descartes wept and was prompted to write about the validity of human emotion and its expression in *The Passions of the Soul*. Significantly, he wrote all of his major work during his more than 20 years in the Netherlands, initiating a revolution in mathematics and philosophy.

By 1649 Descartes had become famous. Queen Christina of Sweden invited him to her court to organize a new scientific academy and tutor her in his ideas about love. Descartes accepted, and moved to Sweden in mid-winter. The Queen was interested in and stimulated Descartes to publish *The Passions of the Soul*. On February 1, 1650, he contracted pneumonia and died on 11 February. In his 2009 book, German philosopher Theodor Ebert argued that Descartes was poisoned by Jacques Viogué, a Catholic missionary who opposed his religious views.[1] As evidence, Ebert suggests that Catherine Descartes, Descartes' niece, made a veiled reference to the poisoning when her uncle was administered "communion" two days before his death, in her 1693 *Report on the Death of M. Descartes, the Philosopher*.[2]

Embedded for decades in the Protestant world, Descartes considered himself to be a devout Catholic, and one of the purposes of the *Meditations* was to defend the Catholic faith. His attempt to ground theological beliefs on reason nonetheless encountered intense opposition in his time. Blaise Pascal (1623-42) accused him of deism, and the renowned Dutch polymath, Martin Schoock (1614-69), accused him of atheist beliefs—although Descartes had offered an explicit critique of atheism in his *Meditations*. The Catholic Church prohibited his books in 1663.

Descartes' Journey from the *Cogito* to a Proof of God's Perfection, Infinity and Existence

Descartes' best-known (and for our purposes most important) pair of philosophical works—part of the beginning of modern philosophy—*The Discourse on the Method* and *The Meditations on First Philosophy,* were published in 1637 and 1641 respectively.

[1]Theodor Ebert, *Der rästelhafte Tod des René Descartes* (in German).
[2]See Theodor *Ebert, "Did Descartes Die of Poisoning?" Early Science and Medicine, 142–185.*

In his first *Discourse* he notes that, after reverencing theology and philosophy he eventually emerged "from the tutelage of my teachers [and] abandoned the study of letters altogether, and resolv[ed] to study no other mode of knowing than that which I could find within myself or else in the great book of the world." Thus "I learned not to believe too firmly those things that I had been persuaded to accept by example and custom only; and in this way I freed myself gradually from many errors that obscure the natural light of our understanding and render us less capable of reason." His goal was to understand reality entirely through reason. Although the "faith" that he has abandoned pertains to what he learned from his teachers (and has therefore learned only indirectly) could (and perhaps will) in the end also pertain to the sort of faith we engage when we consider God.

The second and third *Discourses* lead him and his readers to the radical new idea that he arrives at in *Discourse 4* in the context of his stated conviction "to concentrate solely on the search for truth," which includes abandoning any reliance on the senses, "because our senses sometimes play us false." For example (mine, not Descartes'): while walking in the early fog-ridden morning on the beach, from 120 yards away I imagine that I am seeing a dog, but when I get within 20 yards of it, I realize that what I am seeing is a fireplug—but then why do I suppose that my deceiving eyes are any more truthful at 20 yards than at 120 yards, or at one yard, for that matter? Could I still be mistaken? So Descartes will reject the testimony of his senses as unreliable, as well as rejecting "as false all the reasonings [particularly those passed on from others] I had hitherto accepted as proofs."

He determines to start from ground level, asking whether there is anything of which we can be absolutely certain? Well "while I decided to think that everything was false, it followed necessarily that I who thought this must be something; and observing that this truth: *I am thinking therefore I am*, was so certain and so evident that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were not capable of shaking it, I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking." The one thing of which he decides that he can be certain is that he exists, since however much he doubts anything and everything, there must be a "he"—a Rene Descartes—who is doing the doubting.[3]

He goes on to imagine that he had no body: still his thinking would prove his existence and, moreover *what he is*, as opposed to *that he is*, is a thinking being, "a substance, of which the whole essence or nature consists in thinking….so that this 'I', that is to say, the mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body.. [and] even if the body were not, it [the 'I'] would not cease to be all that it is." Moreover, he continues,

[3]This iconic formulation is typically rendered as "I think, therefore I am," In English. Please indulge my linguistic pomposity: In both Latin, *Cogito*, and in French, its equivalent, *Je pense*, may be translated into English as "I think," or "I do think," or "I am thinking." English offers nuances in its present-tense verbal forms that Latin and French do not. "I think" refers to my *capacity* to think, whereas "I am thinking" refers to the fact that, right now, I am engaged in the *process* of thinking. Clearly Descartes has the latter in mind: it is the fact that he is in the process of having the thoughts that he is having that proves his existence. Hence my translation.

> …reflecting on the fact that I had doubts and that consequently my being was not completely perfect, for I saw clearly that it was a greater perfection to know than to doubt, I decided to inquire whence I had learned to think of something more perfect than myself; and I clearly recognized that this must have been from some nature that was in fact more perfect… for to hold it from nothing was something manifestly impossible; and because it is no less contradictory that the more perfect should proceed from and depend on the less perfect, than it is that something should emerge out of nothing,[4] I could not hold it from myself; with the result that it remained that it must have been put into me by a being whose nature was truly more perfect than mine and which even had in itself all the perfections of which I could have any idea, that is to say, in a single word, which was God…. There must of necessity be another more perfect, upon whom I depended, and from whom I had acquired all I had…
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> …because I had already recognized in myself very clearly that intelligent nature is distinct from the corporeal, considering that all composition [entities composed of more than one element] is evidence of dependency, and that dependency is manifestly a defect, I thence judged that it could not be a perfection in God to be composed of these two natures, and that, consequently, He was not so composed…
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> …I found that existence was comprised of the idea [of perfection] in the same way that the equality of the three angles of a triangle to two right angles is comprised in the idea of a triangle or, as in the idea of a sphere, the fact that all its parts are equidistant from its center, or even more obviously so; and that consequently it is at least as certain that God, who is this perfect being is, or exists, as any geometric demonstration can be.

A sequence of issues intersects in the discussion in the fourth *Discourse*, from which I have quoted the essential parts. The idea of an absolutely certain proposition: the certainty that I, who am engaged in the process of thinking, doubting, asking questions, necessarily exists. The reduction of what I am to the intelligence that is thusly engaged, apart from my physical being—and even if it should turn out that my physical being is an illusion. The notion that, as a being who doubts and needs to ask, I am imperfect. The idea of perfection and the question of what would be the source for my idea of perfection, given that I myself am imperfect. The conclusion that I can only have gotten the idea from a perfect being—and that such a being is called "God." The further conclusion that God, as a perfect being, must be as perfectly singular as a sphere or a triangle would be: as such geometric forms are by definition comprised, respectively, of an entity of which its three angles equal two right angles or one from which every single inch of its periphery is exactly the same distance from its center.

One might make three observations about this discussion, once it has arrived to the God issue. One is that the closest approximation that Descartes can provide to divine perfection is the idea of perfect mathematical ideas which exist as Ideas (in the Platonic sense): there are no absolutely perfect triangles or spheres in the immanent realm in which we exist. The second is that he is standing on the shoulders of the Aristotelian-style articulation, by St Anselm of Canterbury, of the

[4]There is some (unintended) irony in his use of this phrase, since it references a line from the poem, *De Rerum Natura—nihil ex nihilo fit* (*"nothing comes from nothing"*)—by the 1st century BCE Roman poet, Lucretius. The poem is an exposition of the thinking of Epicurus, who, by the way, seriously doubts the existence of the gods.

Ontological Argument, as a signal part of the by-then centuries-long Christian tradition of needing to prove God's existence—as an exercise, since no medieval Christian actually doubts God's existence—although Descartes stretches further. If there is a flaw in Descartes' discussion it is the *given*—analogous to a mathematical given—that God exists and that God is defined as a perfect being—which is one of the flaws in Anselm's original argument.

Descartes' conclusion is that there must be a perfect being—God—because the concept "perfection" exists in his mind (his primary premise) and that he, an imperfect being, couldn't conceive of the idea of perfection and of a perfect being (his secondary premise) himself. So the syllogism is *restructured*—God as a perfect being is not a given (Anselm's primary premise), nor that it is simply more perfect to exist than not to exist (Anselm's secondary premise)—but both thinkers nonetheless arrive at the same incontrovertible conclusion: that God as a perfect being must exist. But what if that perfect being is not what Descartes, Anselm, and others think of as God? What if, like the idea of a perfect sphere or triangle, it doesn't exist but somehow we can make the leap of theological intellect to conceive of a perfect God as we make the leap of geometric intellect, from not-quite perfect forms, to conceive of a perfect triangle or sphere? There is a circularity to both of their arguments in the end, revolving around the notion that God *is* and is defined as *perfect*.

The third observation is that these concerns are not abandoned by Descartes after the discussion in the *Discourse on the Method*; on the contrary, he returns to them and expands upon them four years later in his *Meditations*. He turns again, in his *First Meditation*, to the issue of the unreliability of the senses and more broadly, comparative nature and doubt. In returning to the starting point of doubting, his first step out of doubt is to point out, from a different angle, that there are certain things the existence of which I can be certain, so that even under conditions when I am imagining actions involving those things (I am asleep in my bed and dream/imagine that my hand is being bitten by a dog or that I am running along the beach; the actions are not taking place, but the hand and legs that I imagine engaged in these actions exist)—which he immediately thereafter distinguishes from imagined entities that don't exist, such as Sirens and Satyrs. Similarly, in the realm of "arithmetic, geometry and other sciences of this nature… whether I am awake or sleeping, two and three added together always make five, and a square never has more than four sides."

This drives him rather rapidly toward the question of God's existence, in the very next paragraph:

> I have for a long time had in my mind the belief that there is a God who is all-powerful and by whom I was created and made as I am… [But] it is possible that God has wished that I should be deceived every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square.
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> …I shall suppose …that there is not a true God, who is the sovereign source of truth, but some evil demon, no less cunning and deceiving than powerful, who has used all his artifice to deceive me [about these things].

He has upped the ante with regard to doubt by including the existence of God in the traditional way in which he has defined God among the totality of what he will doubt.

This brings him, in his *Second Meditation*, to suppose that "there is some deceiver both very powerful and very cunning who uses his wiles to deceive me. *There is therefore no doubt that I exist*, if he deceives me; and let him deceive me as much as he likes, he can never cause me to be nothing: *so long as I am thinking I am something*" (both emphases added). So the first important issue raised in the *Discourse* is re-affirmed in the *Meditations*: that the fact that I think—and the concomitants of thinking, including dreaming, hallucinating, and doubting—prove that I exist; that I may be reduced, in a sense, to a *res cogitans* (a "thinking thing"); that, however, the fact that I doubt makes me imperfect; the idea of "perfection" must therefore come from outside myself, which means that there must be a perfect being, and that perfect being is God.

In his *Third Meditation* Descartes returns to this last part of the edifice of reality that he has rebuilt, and asserts:

> There remains, then, only the idea of God, in which I must consider whether there is anything that could not have come from me. By the name of God, I understand an infinite substance, eternal, immutable, independent, omniscient, omnipotent, and by which I and all the other things exist (if it be true that any such exist) have been created and produced.[5] But these attributes are so great and eminent, that the more attentively I consider them, the less I am persuaded that the idea that I have of them can originate in me alone. And consequently, I must necessarily conclude from all I have said hitherto, that God exists; for, although the idea of substance is in me, for the very reason that I am a substance, I would not, nevertheless, have the idea of an infinite substance, since I am a finite being, unless the idea had been put into me by some substance that was truly infinite.

So not only does the concept of perfection come from a perfect being that must, then, exist, (lest it be less than perfect), but the concept of infinity must also come from an infinite being, which being must therefore necessarily exist—and God is both perfect and infinite and must therefore exist.

As much as Descartes introduces a new series of angles—stepping beyond Anselm, and medieval Christian thought—from which to arrive at an irrefutable proof of God's existence, he is necessarily still embedded in the same circular syllogistic reasoning as they are. He has simply changed the specific terms of the syllogism slightly: instead of it being "more perfect to be (exist) than not to be (exist)," the concept of "perfection" (as well as the concept of "infinity") cannot have entered my mind except through a being that is perfect (and infinite). He, like Anselm, is still beginning from a definitional *given* regarding God—that God is both perfect and infinite as well as contrived of a series of extraordinary attributes that cannot, by the way, be separated from each other within God's singular substance—as well as embracing as a given the notion that the concepts of perfection and infinity can only enter my consciousness from such a source.

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[5]It is important, lest we get confused, to keep in mind that what is being rendered here as "substance" is not the common-parlance usage of the term to imply something with a concrete physical reality (for example, flesh and blood), but on the contrary, following the lead of Aristotle, is a more-than-physical concept, referring to the "essential reality" of the entity (in this case, God, as opposed, say, to humans) whose substance is under discussion.

One could argue that even what I imagine as perfect or infinite is not—that I am incapable of really grasping *absolute* perfection or infinity, since these properties don't exist in my immanent reality—or conversely that, as much as I can conceive of the idea of a perfect triangle or square, none actually exists in our immanent reality; we just imagine and understand what these ideas are by inferring from the nearly-perfect but not quite perfect triangles and squares that we can find or make in our own reality.

In the end we come back to the beginning of the same (im)perfect circle: God's existence is proven by and for those who believe both in God's existence and that God is defined as thinkers like Anselm and Descartes define God. If, for the sake of argument, I don't believe in God or in that kind of God, then their arguments fall short.

Spinoza's Complicated Jewish Life and His Anti-Supercessionim

There are, however, other directions in which the God question leads into early modern thought in the West. One of the starting points of "modern" philosophy—the thinking of Descartes—is more connected to traditional medieval Christian beliefs and concerns than one might at first suppose—it is engaged in proving the existence of a God conceived as having attributes that add up to perfection, one of which attributes is in fact to exist—yet it begins to push open doors through which others will walk. Descartes spent more than twenty years living in different parts of the Netherlands, including three stretches of more than a year each in Amsterdam. Among the individuals he influenced was a former Jesuit free-freethinker, by the name of Franciscus van den Enden, who would later become the teacher of Latin and mentor to the young Jewish thinker, Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza (1632–77).

Spinoza was a brilliant student—whose teachers may have hoped that he would become a rabbi—in the Sephardic community that traced its origins to Portugal and Spain and found refuge in a city that was the capital of a republic that had both gained political independence from Spain in the late sixteenth century, and that also remained largely open to diverse religious beliefs. Spinoza would transform the vocabulary of philosophy with regard to the relationship between immanence and transcendence—the vocabulary of referencing God—and so further the journey of philosophy into a new era.

Spinoza's thought is antithetical to—even hostile to—traditional religious thinking, if we understand such thinking as based on narrow considerations of "chosenness." Thus the two religious communities with which he was most intimately familiar, the Jewish and the Christian, each thought of itself as uniquely chosen by God with regard to a covenantal relationship, and as such, spiritually superior to the other (as well as to all others).[6] The main thrust of Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise* is to

[6]The Jews interpreted their relationship to the Israelite-Judaean past and the unique Covenant with God embraced by the Israelites at and beyond Sinai as a condition of divine preference; the Christians interpreted the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the *mashiah/khristos* as having led to God's rejection of Jews as chosen: that Christianity had superseded Judaism in God's affections.

undercut this sort of sensibility.[7] He asserts that the biblical text itself offers a God who proclaims, "My Name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered in My Name, and a pure offering; for My Name is great among the heathen, says the Lord of Hosts," and that such words "abundantly testify that the Jews of that time were not more beloved by God than other nations."[8] This is part of a lengthy argument part of the point of which is to assert, among other things, that supersessionist ideas of any sort miss the point of true religion.

Spinoza may be understood to be the beginning point of a modernist approach to analyzing and understanding the Bible. The *Theologico-Political Treatise* is precisely that: the first work that exhaustively and in detail considers the text of the Bible in a manner that may be considered both rational and very little affected by particularist prejudices. Indeed, consistent with this non-particularist viewpoint, although Spinoza's primary focus is the Hebrew Bible, he makes no distinction between it and the New Testament as "Bible." Trained as a Jewish biblical scholar, he demonstrates his viewpoint that is both Christian and Jewish—or rather, neither of these, per se. His statement that "the Bible clearly implies that God has a form, and that Moses when he heard God speaking was permitted to behold it, or at least its hinder part,"[9] reflects a remarkably literalist reading for someone trained in the Jewish rabbinic tradition that considers any reference to physicality with respect to God as allegorical. Viewing God as having a physical aspect would be considered heretical from a Jewish viewpoint—half a step from outright apostasy.

One must keep in mind that Spinoza's community, including the rabbis who would pronounce the *heirem* against him,[10] was not simply a Sephardic community, but one that had been melted in the crucible of several generations of forced or at least unhappy conversions, in the course of which—as Yirmiyahu Yovel points out in his magisterial volume, *The Marrano of Reason*—they had necessarily shaped what, in effect, was an offspring between traditional Jewish and traditional Christian thought that was different from either parent.[11] He asserts that for many crypto-Jews,

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[7]As Steven Nadler concisely notes, he sought pointblank to disabuse his reader of the notion that God, through Moses, had authored the Torah, as opposed to human beings. See Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction*, 18.

[8]Benedict Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, trans. R. H. M., Elwes, chap. 3, p. 48. This edition is a reprint of the Bohn Library Edition containing the R. H. M. Elwes translation of the Latin original published by George Bell Camp & Sons in 1883.

[9]Ibid, 17.

[10]The *heirem* was the rabbinic excommunication that completely cut off the individual so-designated from the community. Given the fact that Judaism lacks a real "hell" concept or even a proper term for hell in Hebrew, the implications are entirely related to the here and now and not the thereafter. The verbiage of the Amsterdam *heirem*s meted out against Spinoza and several others (see fn 13) emulated the Catholic style in invoking God and the angels and damning the individual, but even so, without post-mortem implications.

[11]Yovel's work, *Spinoza and Other Heretics* consists of two volumes, *The Marrano of Reason* and *The Adventures in Immanence*, in which he also seeks to redeem the community that spat Spinoza out as broader-thinking and more worldly than is traditionally thought. I beg to disagree, at least where the key *heirem*-pronouncing rabbinic figure, Saul Morteira was concerned (although he was a serious intellectual of sorts)—and am inclined to agree where Rabbi Manasseh Ben Israel was concerned. But that's a story for another day. More importantly, he argues that Spinoza's reduction of reality to immanence (first volume) paved the way to the Enlightenment and secularism (second volume). As will be obvious from what follows, I believe that Spinoza found the transcendent God

the lives that they led in the face of the Inquisition (hiding their Judaism or, even if not, facing the constant fear if not of discovery then of accusation) "mixed Judaism and Christianity in ways that undermined both religions and led to rational skepticism and secularism, and to an opposition between inner and outer life, …. a this-worldly disposition, a split religious identity, metaphysical skepticism, a quest for salvation that opposes the official doctrine, an opposition between inner belief and the outer world" and a gift for what was essential for survival: equivocation and the use of language with dual meanings.[12]

Spinoza was not the first nor the last to be accused of heretical beliefs in the Amsterdam Sephardic congregation, but the most extraordinary, and the one whose reshaping of traditional Jewish and Christian thought blew open further than Descartes the door to modernity.[13] But Spinoza never *abandoned* his Judaism for Christianity—although he was forced (or chose) to leave the Jewish community—for to trade one particularist creed for another would not have been an appropriate path for a seeker of universalist truth.

His departure came from accusations of apostasy—although at the time he had not yet written the works that those of limited minds would construe that way—as an outcome (to be brief) of a property dispute with his half-sister and her husband, and his decision to take the matter to the Dutch court for adjudication, rather than the community rabbinical court. The rabbis were ego-struck, but also fearful that the Dutch Reform majority might respond by removing the welcome mat from Iberian Jews, and/or that, in the Age of Religious wars, Catholicism and with it the Inquisition, might regain political and religious control of the Dutch Republic.

Refusing to respond to, much less to recant, the heretical charges leveled against him, Spinoza was exiled from the community—not something that seems to have disturbed him overly much. In exile from the community, he ground lenses for a living and wrote assiduously. Included within Spinoza's thinking is the beginning of an idea for which he would perhaps become best known—and most commonly misunderstood: a kind of equation of God with Nature: "Nature herself is the power of God under another name, and our ignorance of God is co-extensive with our ignorance of Nature."[14] Later on, in the *Ethics*, he would use the phrase *Deus sive Natura*—"God or Nature" (Part IV, Prop IV, Proof)[15] —to summarize that equation. But in the sentence that immediately precedes the one that I quoted from the *Treatise*, he

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in the immanent world, not reducing everything to immanence, but changing the vocabulary of both transcendence and immanence. Other excellent recent works presenting the context of Spinoza's life and thought include Steven Nadler's *Spinoza: A Life*, and Rebecca Goldstein's *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave US Modernity*. Both do enviable jobs of weaving the biography with the thinking that pushed his era into position as the beginning of our own era.

[12]Yoval, *Adventures*, Preface, IX-X.

[13]I would mention just two others: Uriel Acosta, the former Catholic ecclesiastic who left Portugal in order to return to the Judaism from which his ancestors had been force-converted, but found it impossible to reconcile his own view of "proper" Judaism with that of the rabbis—and committed suicide when Spinoza was seven years old; and the physician, Juan de Prado (not to be confused with a Catholic priest of the same name who was martyred by the Muslims).

[14]Ibid, 25.

[15]Where the *Ethics* are concerned I am not referring to page numbers since the sections in *Works of Spinoza: On the Improvement of the Understanding*, *Ethic*s, *Selected Letters*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, are discreet enough for anyone to easily locate.

observes that "[e]verything takes place by the power of God," which statement is part of his articulation of God's omnipresence and engagement in the world.

Spinoza's Turn to New Terminology for God

This is hardly the perspective of an atheist—of which perspective Spinoza was accused by many of his contemporaries—or of one who views God as the power that engendered our reality and then turned away from it, leaving us on our own to find *telos* ("goal," "purpose") in our existence by ourselves.[16]

His turn to new terminology constitutes a small but critical revolution toward "modern" thought. Thus by "nature" (*natura*), he means God, literally (to repeat) equating God and Nature—also equating them in part IV, Preface, with "eternal and infinite Being." He may be said to have a threefold intention with this formulation. One: to replace a *personified* understanding of God with something that, in lacking a personified condition, lacks a *personalized* relationship with humans (or with creation in general). As such, "God" would certainly appear to be other than God as that term is traditionally used by Christians and Jews, for such a God might be construed as an entity that created the world but, having done so, retains no particular interest in its progress through time. So, too, those slaughtering others in the name of God do so by being possessive of that personified and therefore personal God.

Such a God, however, *might* be construed as one that created the world and then turned away from it. But everything that Spinoza says about God, whether he uses the term *Deus* or the term *Natura*, militates *against* the understanding of God as disengaged: the complete verbal equation that he offers—between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata* ("nature naturing" and "nature natured")—at the very least suggests a more intimate relationship between God and creation, since by definition, given this pair of phrases, God is embedded within us, within the natural world—within everything. This is a panhenotheistic (aka panentheistic) view of the one (*heno*) God (*theos*) embedded in everything (*pan*).

Of course, one could still suppose that the mind of God becomes disconnected from creation once that mind has finished creating: a father can deposit part of himself (sperm) into what eventuates as his offspring and, having done so, disappear without ever having a relationship with that offspring. But that is clearly not his view. Those who saw or see Spinoza as disconnecting a personified God from creation would be missing both the third aspect of understanding the *Deus sive Natura* equation and Spinoza's own discussion of God that peppers the *Ethics*. In the first place, that third aspect is by means of the rabbinic notion of God's Name as *ineffable*. Whatever term one uses falls short—humans simply lack the capacity for such knowledge—every term is ultimately a circumlocution for God's true Name, particularly if, like Spinoza, we understand what a *name* is in traditional terms: that it conveys the essence of its bearer. How can humans convey absolute and perfect

[16]Among those arguing not only against the accusation of Spinoza as an atheist, but noting that his panhenotheistic view was consistent with certain previous rabbinic discussions, in particular Maimonides, is Yitzhak Y, Melamid, in his chapter, "Spinoza's 'Atheism', the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologici-Politicus*," in Garber, et al, *Spinoza: Reason, Religion, & Politics*.

Being in words developed in an imperfect world of predication, where everything that exists, exists *as* something?

Spinoza recognizes this and alludes to the conversation between Moses and God in Exodus 3:14—in which the latter responds to Moses's question to God regarding who God is ("who shall I say sent me?") with the words "I am/will be that am/will be." He writes of Moses's understanding of God as "a Being Who has always existed, does exist, and will always exist, and for this cause he calls Him by the name J-H-V-H ["isness"]."[17] This important moment of biblical exegesis becomes the basis for Spinoza's statement that "the existence of God and His essence are one and the same" (Part I, Prop. XX). God is the only Being of which this may be stated: *that* God is, is *what* God is, and *what* God is, is *that* God is. God and God's mind, like God and God's Name, are one and the same and not only eternal but the *same* as eternity.

Embedded within this—and embellished by other, related issues that fall outside the range of this brief discussion—are several further issues to which I would draw particular attention. One is that everything Spinoza writes about God, no matter how rational the arguments, is both predicated on his belief, like that of Descartes, when all is said and done, that such a God—a God of pure Being, of all-encompassing infinity, eternity, and perfection: all-everything—*exists*, and to whatever extent he might wish to prove God's existence, say, by reference to Scripture, he is caught up in the circularity that is inevitable and inherent in dealing with the realm of the unknown in its divine aspect.

Circularity in Reasoning About God

Spinoza's discussion is circular on two levels. It is circular because in validating its points by reference to the Scriptures, it takes them to be the unquestionable word of God (which is a function of belief and not objectively provable) and because, as with Descartes, it presupposes not only God's existence, but God as commonly defined: all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good, and interested and involved in our world. In commenting, for example, on the issue of false revelations, he notes that "God never deceives the good, nor His chosen, but (according to the ancient proverb, and as appears in the history of Abigail and her speech), God uses the good as instruments of goodness and the wicked as means to execute his wrath…(28)."[18] Indeed, to repeat, far from being heretical, much less atheist, Spinoza's sense of God is perfectly consistent with the traditions he has inherited; where he diverges from those traditions is in his unequivocal non-nonsectarian viewpoint (that God is not drawn more to one group than to another) and in the introduction of terminology that has been too often misconstrued—first by his own contemporaries and then by subsequent commentators.

That circularity is most concisely—and perhaps unconsciously—expressed in the *Ethics* (Part II, Prop. XI, Proof) when Spinoza writes, regarding the nature of the human

[17]Ibid., chap. 2, 36.
[18]Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, 28.

mind, that "an idea is the first element constituting the human mind . . .… [but] the idea itself cannot be said to exist; it must therefore be the idea of something actually existing. But not an infinite thing [i.e., God, for there is no other infinite thing]. For an infinite thing . . …. must always necessarily exist… Therefore the first element, which constitutes the actual being of the human mind, is the idea of something actually existing. Q.E.D."

Put otherwise: my mind cannot conceive of God if God does not exist, so God must exist or I could not imagine that there is a God. The *Theologico-Political Treatise* was published in 1670—anonymously, and in Latin, rather than in the vernacular—and raised a storm of controversy. Surely what distressed some of its readers, at least, was not what it said regarding Scripture or God—it does not really question the validity of either—but the fact that it does undercut the supersessionist sensibilities of Christians and the superior sensibilities of Jews vis-à-visa-vis each other (and vis-à-vis all others). Blinded by the offense taken at Spinoza's universalism, his critics railed against him as a heretic or worse.

Two: God's existence is in any case not his main preoccupation, however—as it rarely is within the rabbinic tradition in which he was trained. That tradition seems to take the existence of God, defined as an all-everything reality, for granted, without feeling the need to prove it, even as an exercise. The rabbis are far less occupied with theology than with the implications and applications of such a God's relationship with humans for our ways of being in the world. Spinoza turns from that tradition (and from the Christian tradition as well) in his unequivocal non-sectarian viewpoint and in his introduction of novel terminology to refer to God.

Reason and Mysticism

Three: On the other hand, his entire discussion of God and our relationship to God draws not simply from a philosophical vocabulary of pure reason, with which Descartes is understood to engage in new ways, but also from its apparent opposite, that most intense branch of religion: mysticism. He writes, for example, in Part IV, Prop. XXVIII that "the mind's highest good is the knowledge of God and the mind's highest virtue is to know God," explaining in his accompanying proof that "the mind is not capable of understanding anything higher than God, that is, than a Being absolutely infinite [referencing his own definition 6 in Part I—"Concerning God"—of the *Ethics*]. . . . The mind's highest utility or good is the knowledge of God." This sort of statement reflects the very sensibility of the mystic who seeks that knowledge and believes it achievable without sacerdotal intermediation.

This is further clarified when Spinoza specifies that this sort of knowledge—he calls it *conatus*—is of a particular sort. It is beyond everyday knowledge of everyday things—the first sort of such knowledge is called opinion or imagination, and the second sort is called reason (Part II, Prop. XL, Note 2)—and is called by him intuition, "a third kind of knowledge . . . [that] proceeds from an adequate idea of the absolute essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things" (ibid.). From this third kind of knowledge "arises the intellectual love of God .

. . [from which] arises pleasure accompanied by the idea of God as cause" (Part V, Prop. XXII, Corollary).

"The intellectual love of God . . . is eternal" (part 5, prop. 33 and Proof), he continues. That sort of love, like the knowledge with which it is synonymous, is both accessible to anybody and hidden from easy access. Such hidden, esoteric knowledge—knowledge of the *mysterion* (the hiddenness of God)[19]—is what the mystic seeks and believes he can attain, against all reasonable and logical odds. Such knowledge is a subsidence *into* the *mysterion*. It is what, for example, the early 13th-century Sufi Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240) asserts when he observes that "he who knows himself understands that his existence is not his own existence, but his existence is the Existence of God."[20] That individual becomes the Complete, Perfect Man (*al-Insan al-kamil*).[21]

Again and again, the mystical process of seeking that knowledge is associated with a transcendental love, which is precisely where Spinoza takes the discussion: "He who loves God cannot endeavor that God should love him in return" (part 5, prop. 19), for to do so, "he would desire that God, whom he loves, should not be God" (Proof), yet "this love towards God is the highest good which we can seek for under the guidance of reason" (Part IV, Prop. XX, Proof). Reason is still embraced, even as it is transcended. And further, it turns out, since "God loves Himself with an infinite intellectual love" (Part V, Prop. XXXV) and "the intellectual love of the mind towards God is that very love of God whereby God loves Himself" (Prop. XXXVI), "it follows that God, in so far as he loves Himself, loves man, and consequently, that the love of God towards men, and the intellectual love of the minds towards God are identical" (Corollary).

The mystic, subsumed into and swallowed up by love for God, does not expect God's love back—that would be too *egocentric*, and the mystic must be *emptied* of ego to be filled with God—but at the same time that s/he seeks God, s/he believes that God is seeking him/her, so God, paradoxically, does love the mystic as the mystic loves God. The successful mystic can no longer distinguish him/herself from God and God from her/himself: lover, love, and beloved become three elements that can no longer be distinguished from one another. This notion is conveyed in *Kabbalah* by the term *Shekhinah*—the "presence" or "indwelling" of God, conceived as a loving, paradoxically (because God is beyond gender) female aspect of God, with which the mystic (in the kabbalistic tradition: a male above the age of thirty-six or forty) merges. It is expressed in Sufism by a range of thinkers, from Rabi'a to Rumi, whose imagery is filled with the vocabulary of love.[22] It extends in Christian mysticism to the passionate imagery of women mystics, from Hildegard of Bingen to—most famously—Teresa of Avila, whose articulation of the ecstatic sense of loving

[19]From the Greek verb, *mystein*, meaning to close and by extension, to hide.
[20]Ibn Al'Arabi, *The Treatise on Being (Risale t-ul-Wujudiyyah)*, trl. T. H. Wier.
[21]Given that Muhammad, Seal of the Prophets, is the one understood to be *al-Insan al-kamil*, then we understand the implications of Ibn 'Arabi's comment: every mystic has the potential to become like a prophet—an intermediary through whom God communicates to humanity. This is, of course, consistent with what every mystical tradition asserts as its aspiration: for the practitioner to become a sacerdotal conduit analogous to the prophets.
[22]See Coleman Barks and John Moyne, transl., *The Essential Rumi*, especially 88, 106, 122, 165-8.

mergence with God is in part facilitated by the idea that God assumes human form on one unique historical occasion as a male, so that she can, as a female, merge spiritually with Him.

It is against the background of this very mystical turn of discussion that Spinoza's universalism may be understood. To be clear: there is no specific evidence to suggest that Spinoza had studied Kabbalah, per se—whereas, on the contrary, he had studied medieval thinkers like Maimonides, apparently—but I am suggesting that his instincts mirror those of a mystic, whether or not he was actually aware of mysticism as a mode of thinking similar to his own. His philosophy of universal *embrace* (and not merely *tolerance*)—is based on his conviction that God equally embraces us all, that prophecy is not found only in one group or that God choses one group over another to love. As each prophet envisions God differently, because God impresses Itself upon each in accordance with that individual's particular capacities,[23] so God relates to all peoples with equal fervor, however different the particular words of divine revelation may be from one people and its texts to the next. And the mystic, emptied of ego in order to be filled with God, recognizes (most often) that a particularist/supersessionist perspective on God—that I and my group alone possesses the truth about God—is the ego speaking.[24]

Conclusions

The biographical framework for Spinoza includes being part of a—specifically Sephardic Jewish—community the leadership of which attacked his thinking in part because of their experience and fear of the Dominican-articulated Catholic Inquisition as it had gone awry in the Spain and Portugal from which most of them had come within the previous generation or more. Both Descartes and Spinoza were surrounded, during their lifetimes, by the most intense phase of the Age of Religious Wars—the Thirty Years' War (1618-48)—but Spinoza must surely have heard of and ruminated about the massive massacres of his fellow Jews that began virtually at the end of that period, to the east, as the Chmelnitski-led (Orthodox) Ukrainians fought for their independence from (Catholic) Poland—which era of massacres continued until 1666. His need to extract humanity from its violence-inducing possessive attitude toward God would have been profound.

Both Spinoza, the Jew, and Descartes, the Catholic, sought to remain committed to their respective traditions while pushing strenuously against key aspects of their fundamental norms. Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* and *Meditations* famously introduce the novel issue of radical doubt, but when he arrives at his proof of God's existence, his method follows a process shaped centuries earlier by St Anselm of Canterbury. Spinoza introduces a new vocabulary for God in his *Ethics* and his *Theologico-Political Treatise*—new enough so that his panhenotheistic perspective was confused by his contemporaries (and is by others) with both pantheism and atheism.

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[23]Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, chap. 2, 30-42.

[24]For more details on mysticism in the Abrahamic traditions, See Ori Z Soltes, *Mysticism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Searching for Oneness*, Introduction.

Descartes both leaves behind but also remains connected to Christian medieval thought where the discussion of God is concerned in a very distinct way. Spinoza—as Warren Zev Harvey points out int his "Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean"—uses medieval *Jewish* thought as an instrument informing his criticism of Descartes.[25] And when he turns specifically to God and God's relationship to human beings, he turns in a new direction—that, paradoxically turns formally away from Maimonidean rationalism toward mysticism—and introduces a new vocabulary that militates against the particularism of which Maimonides, Descartes, and everybody else connected to this narrative were part.

Descartes' *cogito* opens a door into modern *theologico-philosophy.* Spinoza's *natura* opens a door into modern *theologico-philosophico-sociology* and the question of God's interface with humanity.[26] The questions of God and humanity to which they point us are profoundly relevant, whether in the Age of Religious Wars in which they both lived, or the era of Genocidal violence—as heirs to the Holocaust and other twentieth-century genocides, from Armenia to Rwanda, together with the unanswerable question of theodicy addressed by a plethora of theologians, philosophers, and visual artists—in which we live today.

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[25]Warren Zev Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19 (2): 151-72 (1981). Harvey has written a good deal more about the relationship between Spinoza's thought and the thought of Maimonides, as, for example, in "Spinoza and Maimonides and Spinoza on True Religion," in Yitzhak Y. Melamed, *A Companion to Spinoza*. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 41–46.

[26]More specifics regarding how in particular the 1670 *Theological-Political Treatise*, which so scandalized so many contemporary readers, opened the passage toward liberal, democratic, and also secular thinking is presented eloquently, against the backdrop of the Dutch Golden Age by Steven Nadler in his 2013 volume, *A Book Forged in Hell*.

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The Hundred Schools of Thought in Pre-Qin Period and the Early Academic Prosperity in the Central Plains

By Zhao Zhihao[1]

The Hundred Schools of Thought in the Pre-Qin period represents the first large-scale academic prosperity in the history of Chinese thought. It took place in the Central Plains region during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770–221 BC). At that time, various schools of thought engaged in intense debates in philosophy, politics, ethics, and other fields, forming a diverse system of ideas. Confucianism, represented by Confucius and Mencius, advocated "benevolent governance" and "rites"; Taoism, represented by Laozi and Zhuangzi, promoted "the way of nature" and reflected on the alienation of civilization; Mohism championed "universal love" and "opposition to offensive warfare"; and Legalism, represented by Shang Yang and Han Fei, emphasized institutional innovation and centralized power. Military Strategists, Yin-Yang School, Logicians, and other schools also showcased their strengths, creating a "harmony in diversity" intellectual ecosystem. The emergence of academic institutions such as the Jixia Academy facilitated the institutionalization of intellectual exchanges. The contention of the Hundred Schools in the Central Plains not only promoted the spread of ideas but also provided theoretical resources for the unification of China under the Qin and Han dynasties. It shaped the inclusive nature of Chinese culture, and its legacy continues to influence the spiritual structure of East Asian civilization to this day.

Keywords: *Pre-Qin; Hundred Schools of Thought; Central Plains; Academic Prosperity; Thought and Culture*

Introduction: The Intellectual Code of Pre-Qin Academic Prosperity and Its Contemporary Implications

The Pre-Qin period (770–221 BC) is the "Axial Age" in the history of Chinese thought. The academic boom of the Hundred Schools of Thought not only laid the spiritual foundation for Chinese civilization but also had a profound impact on the history of East Asian and global thought. This period of academic prosperity, centered in the Central Plains and symbolized by the Jixia Academy, formed a pluralistic and competitive intellectual landscape of Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, Legalism, Logicians, and other schools. Its historical significance lies not only in the originality of the thought systems but also in the interaction and integration among the schools. For example, Xunzi's "combination of rites and law" represents a comprehensive innovation, and the Huang-Lao school's reconciliation of Taoism and Legalism provided paradigms for subsequent political systems, ethical norms, and cultural inheritance. In the long river of human civilization, the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods in China presented a unique intellectual spectacle. The collapse of the Zhou royal house, like the key to Pandora's box, released an unprecedented burst of intellectual energy. Over more than five

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hundred years, the Hundred Schools of Thought engaged in a fierce intellectual competition in the cradle of civilization along the Yellow River. The density and depth of their intellectual exchanges are unparalleled in the history of world civilizations. This period, known as the "Axial Age," not only shaped the basic character of Chinese civilization but also provided Eastern wisdom for dealing with civilizational conflicts.

This study aims to reconstruct the dynamic picture of Pre-Qin academia and provide intellectual resources for contemporary cultural innovation and governance practices.

Fission and Rebirth: The Historical Soil of Pre-Qin Academic Prosperity

The disintegration of the feudal system in the Zhou dynasty was like a precise social experiment. The collapse of the ritual and music system released tremendous social energy. The widespread use of iron tools spurred an agricultural revolution, the rise of urban civilization gave birth to the scholar class, and the needs of the warring states stimulated intellectual innovation. In this transformative era, where "high banks become valleys and deep valleys become hills," the intellectual class broke through the shackles of "officialdom-based learning" and initiated private teaching. Confucius taught under the apricot altar, Mozi gathered crowds for lectures, and the Jixia Academy hosted a hundred schools of thought. The democratization of knowledge spread, providing a broad stage for intellectual collisions. The integration of regional cultures catalyzed the evolution of thought. The land of Qi and Lu gave birth to Confucian benevolent governance, the Chu mountains and rivers nurtured Taoist mysticism, and the plains of the Three Jins gave rise to Legalist reforms. Diverse civilizations interwove and collided on the Central Plains. The warring states' monarchs, in their quest for wealth and military strength, competed to attract talents, forming a unique political ecology where "those who obtain scholars prosper." This competitive talent market provided the impetus for intellectual innovation, creating a virtuous interaction between academic exploration and political practice (Guo 1954).

Eternal Coordinates of the Intellectual Firmament

The thoughts of the Hundred Schools constitute the genetic blueprint of Chinese civilization. Confucianism elevated ethical order to the philosophy of "benevolence," Taoism sought ultimate truth in "the way of nature," Legalism forged political tools of "law, artifice, and power," and Mohism built blueprints for an ideal state with "universal love and opposition to offensive warfare." These thought systems did not exist in isolation but continuously corrected and improved each other through mutual debate. Mencius criticized Yang Zhu, Han Fei interpreted and explained Laozi, and Zhuangzi ridiculed Confucianism and Mohism. This intellectually dynamic interaction formed the unique Chinese tradition of "harmony in diversity." The prosperity of Central Plains academia reshaped the spiritual map of the East Asian civilization circle. The Qin and Han empires injected Confucian ethics into a Legalist framework, forming a governance paradigm of "Confucianism on the outside and Legalism on the inside"; the Huang-Lao school dominated the recuperative policies in the early Western Han Dynasty; Mohist technological thought continued in the "Kao Gong Ji." This hybrid variation of thought genes gave Chinese civilization a strong ability to renew itself, maintaining civilizational continuity through dynastic changes.

Contemporary Echoes of Axial Wisdom

Today's global civilizational conflicts and value clashes are like an amplified version of the "Hundred Schools of Thought." The wisdom of the Pre-Qin scholars in dealing with the coexistence of diverse cultures provides a mirror for global dialogue in the modern era. The Confucian spirit of "harmony in diversity," the Taoist dialectical thinking of "opposites complement each other," and the Legalist consciousness of "timely reform" show surprising foresight in modern issues such as artificial intelligence ethics and ecological crisis response. Digital-age cultural innovation needs the inspiration of axial wisdom. The courage of the Hundred Schools to break conventions, their broad-mindedness in cross-school integration, and their critical spirit in facing reality are important intellectual resources for solving modern dilemmas. When quantum physics encounters Taoist cosmology, and when communitarianism dialogues with Confucian ethics, this cross-temporal intellectual resonance heralds a new creative transformation of Chinese civilization.

The Pre-Qin contention can be seen as an "intellectual laboratory" that proposed wisdom for dealing with complex societies. For example, Mohist "universal love" is strongly associated with contemporary community governance, and Legalist "rule of law" is related to institutional innovation. The Jixia Academy's demonstration of the true spirit of "academic independence" and "freedom of thought" remains at the core of contemporary civilizational dialogue and development. It can be said that the Pre-Qin Hundred Schools of Thought is not only the "spiritual gene bank" of Chinese civilization but also a historical reference for the coexistence of diverse civilizations in the globalized era.

Currently, the civilizational dialogue and value conflicts in the context of globalization give new practical significance to the study of Pre-Qin thought. For example, the inclusiveness of Confucian "harmony in diversity," the Taoist ecological view of "the way of nature," and the Legalist consciousness of "timely reform" all provide historical mirrors for modern social governance and technological ethics. Standing at the crossroads of civilizational dialogue, looking back at the intellectual torch lit by the Pre-Qin scholars on the banks of the Yellow River, we can better understand Fei Xiaotong's deep meaning of "appreciating one's own beauty and others' beauty." The era of the Hundred Schools of Thought teaches us that true civilizational confidence does not lie in adhering to certain dogmas but in maintaining an open and inclusive mind, achieving self-renewal through dialogue. This cultural gene is the ultimate code for the Chinese civilization to remain vibrant after five thousand years of vicissitudes.

The Development of Early Academic Thought in the Central Plains

Between Witchcraft and Historiography: The Origins of Central Plains Academic Thought and the Axial Breakthrough

At the time of the transition from the Shang to the Zhou dynasties, the inscriptions on bronze vessels often contained the words "rites and war." These two words not only

reveal the core propositions of early civilization but also hint at the deep-seated genes of Central Plains academic thought. When we look beyond the splendid picture of the Hundred Schools of Thought, in the cracks of oracle bones and the taotie patterns on bronze vessels, we can catch a glimpse of the initial stirrings of Chinese academia.

The Development of Early Academic thought in the Central Plains Knowledge Embryos in Theocratic Order

First, the embryonic knowledge in the theocratic order. The divinatory inscriptions on the oracle bones of the Yin ruins were the passwords for shamans to communicate with the divine. The divination practice of the Shang kings, who obtained the will of heaven by burning turtle shells, may seem like a primitive religious ritual, but in fact, it constructed the earliest symbolic system and logical thinking. The arrangement of ritual vessels in sacrifices, the astronomical knowledge in star observation, and the creation of writing in oracle bone inscriptions all grew quietly under the shelter of theocracy. When the Duke of Zhou established rites and music, he transformed this theocratic thinking into a moral mandate of heaven. The Nine Categories system in the "Book of Documents - Hong Fan" is a clear example of the systematization of this knowledge.

Second, the knowledge monopoly of the royal officials. The Western Zhou dynasty established the system of "learning in the officialdom," creating a unique academic ecosystem. The group of historians in the Grand Historian's office monopolized the inheritance of astronomy, calendars, institutions, poetry, and music, forming the "Six Arts" educational system. The "Zhou Li" records that "the Baoshi taught the sons of the state with the Six Arts." which in fact encoded knowledge as a tool to maintain the feudal order (Gu 1982). The inscriptions on bronze ritual vessels, the odes in the ancestral temples, and the oaths on the alliance documents all reinforced this symbiotic structure of knowledge and power. This institutional guarantee allowed the classics such as the "Book of Songs" and the "Book of Documents" to be systematically collated, providing the original texts for later academic studies.

Third, the liberation of knowledge amidst the collapse of rites and music. The political upheaval caused by the Eastern Migration of King Ping caused the royal officials' learning to scatter among the common people. The originally secret books of the royal family were dispersed to various states with the exiled nobles, as recorded in history, "The Son of Heaven lost his officials, and learning was among the barbarians." This downward shift of knowledge gave birth to new ways of knowledge production: Confucianism was nurtured in the lands of Zou and Lu through the inheritance of the "Book of Songs" and the "Book of Documents," the Legalists of the Three Jins extracted statecraft from the study of penal names, and Taoism in the Chu region sublimated cosmology from the tradition of shamanism. Although the Hundred Schools of Thought seemed to hold different views, they actually shared the genetic knowledge of the royal officials' learning and completed the key leap from the "tradition of shamans and historians" to "philosophical breakthrough." (Li 2014) From the turtle shells of shamans to the bamboo slips of the Hundred Schools, the academic thought in the Central Plains underwent a thrilling transformation. The contention of the Hundred Schools of Thought was not a thought flower that bloomed out of nowhere, but a towering tree deeply rooted in the soil of the civilization of the Three Dynasties. When Confucius expressed his

academic creation with "I transmit but do not create," he revealed the intellectual code of this axial age: the greatest creation often begins with the creative transformation of tradition. This dialectical movement of knowledge inheritance and innovation has forged the unique academic character of Chinese civilization.

The Shift of Academic Focus and the Awakening of the Intellectual Class

In the smoke of the Eastern Migration of the Zhou royal house, the elegant music of bronze chime bells was gradually replaced by the clanging of iron tools. When the order of "learning in the officialdom" collapsed along with the system of rites and music, the chain of knowledge inheritance broke into countless stars, and the Central Plains witnessed a great migration of academic focus that shocked the ages.

First, the disintegration of the royal officials' learning and the downward shift of knowledge. The Western Zhou established the system of "hereditary scholars," which solidified knowledge of astronomy, calendars, and rituals in hereditary official positions. However, after the Eastern Migration of King Ping, the decline of the royal house triggered the dramatic change of "The Son of Heaven lost his officials, and learning was among the barbarians" (Zuo Zhuan - Duke Zhao, Year 17). The description by Guan Shefu of Chu that "the officials of heaven, earth, spirits, people, and all things" scattered among the feudal lords was actually a portrayal of the structural disintegration of the intellectual class. The trend of "valuing the worthy" caused by the struggle for hegemony among the feudal lords made the classical books of the "Book of Songs" and the "Book of Documents," which were originally confined to the ancestral temples, flow into the marketplace. For example, when Shuxiang of Jin visited Lu to observe the books, and when Zichan of Zheng cast the penal code on a tripod, these all signified the transfer of the monopoly of knowledge.

Second, the rise of the scholar class and the private educational ecosystem. The iron revolution, which gave birth to new production relations, dismantled the established order of "commerce and industry feeding on officialdom." A large number of displaced royal officials became wandering scholars, and commoner's children changed their fate through knowledge. As recorded in "Guanzi - Xiao Kuang," the bloodline barrier of "the son of a scholar is always a scholar" had already loosened. The trend of "nurturing scholars" among the feudal lords prevailed, and the Jixia Academy in Qi "opened broad avenues and honored them with high gates and large houses" (Records of the Grand Historian - Mencius and Xunzi). This trend of knowledge marketization turned the ideal of "those who excel in learning shall serve the government" into a realistic path. The trajectory of wandering scholars traveling among the states objectively constituted a cross-border intellectual network.

Third, Confucius' founding and the revolutionary academic paradigm. In 522 BC, Confucius' declaration of "education for all without discrimination" broke the educational privilege of "the noble and wandering sons of the state learn" (Rites of Zhou - Minister of Land). His teaching practice, which used the "Six Arts" as textbooks and aimed at personality cultivation, created a new paradigm for knowledge production: compiling the "Spring and Autumn Annals" to pioneer the tradition of private historiography, editing the "Book of Songs" to construct a cultural classic system, and the collective mourning of his disciples for "three years of mourning" formed the

embryo of an academic community. This pioneering act of injecting moral ideals into knowledge transmission made Confucian private schools a cradle for hatching bureaucratic scholars and provided an organizational paradigm for the Mohist "Grand Master" system and the Legalist "law, artifice, and power" theory (Lü 2009).

The Fission of Ideas in Diverse Collisions

The rise of private schools gave birth to "free discussions among scholars," which built an intellectual laboratory in the gaps between the standing states. The debates between Confucianism and Mohism in the Song state gave birth to the sprouts of logic, the "discussions on Huang-Lao" at the Jixia Academy nurtured a systematic theory of governance, and the political discussion trend in the local schools of Zheng state foreshadowed the emergence of a public discourse space. Different schools formed intellectual competition through "leading their followers and debating their talks" (Xunzi - Proper Discussion), and completed the tempering of theory in mutual attacks. This free debating academic ecosystem made the Central Plains bloom with brilliant wisdom amidst the iron and blood conquests.

When the masters carried their disciples and traveled among the states, what they carried on their backs were not only bamboo slips and classics, but also the spiritual genes of the entire civilization. The wave of knowledge democratization triggered by the rise of private schools not only reshaped the intellectual pattern of Chinese civilization, but also, in the process of "the art of the way was split for the world," laid a deep ideological foundation for the unified civilization of the Qin and Han dynasties and beyond. This academic revolution, which began with educational reform, proves that true intellectual prosperity is always rooted in an open and fluid knowledge ecosystem.

The Major Schools of Thought and Their Ideological Characteristics during the Hundred Schools of Thought

Confucian School

Confucius, the founder of the Confucian school, was born between 551 and 479 BC. He came from a declining noble family and showed a strong interest in ancient rituals from a young age. In his youth, Confucius was diligent and eager to learn, having sought teachings on rites from Laozi and learned to play the zither from Shi Xiang. During his political career in the State of Lu, he advocated for strengthening the monarch's power and weakening the influence of the nobility. However, due to resistance, he eventually left Lu and embarked on a 13-year journey visiting various states. In his later years, Confucius returned to Lu, dedicating himself to education and cultural heritage. He compiled and edited the Six Classics: the "Book of Poetry," "Book of Documents," "Book of Rites," "Book of Music," "I Ching" (Book of Changes), and "Spring and Autumn Annals." The core of Confucius's thought is "benevolence" (ren) and "rites" (li). "Benevolence" emphasizes mutual respect and care among people, such as the principle "Do not do unto others what you do not want

done to yourself." "Rites" focus on social order and institutions to maintain harmony and stability. He also introduced the concept of the "gentleman," emphasizing personal cultivation and moral character, believing that a gentleman should possess virtues such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness. Confucius had many disciples, among whom 72 were particularly distinguished. They inherited and spread his teachings. For example, Yan Hui was known for his moral integrity, Zeng Shen for his filial piety, Zi Lu for his bravery, and Zi Gong for his eloquence and business acumen.

During the Pre-Qin period, the Confucian school gradually took shape and developed. Confucius founded Confucianism, which was further developed by Mencius and Xunzi. Mencius proposed the "doctrine of the goodness of human nature," emphasizing benevolent governance and people-oriented thinking. In contrast, Xunzi advocated the "doctrine of the badness of human nature," emphasizing the combined use of rites and laws. After the Han Dynasty, Confucianism became the official ideology. Dong Zhongshu put forward the theories of "correspondence between heaven and humanity" and "the divine right of kings," closely integrating Confucianism with political power. During the Song Dynasty, Confucianism evolved into Neo-Confucianism, with Zhu Xi becoming its most prominent synthesizer. The reason why the Confucian school became the mainstream ideology is that its emphasis on moral cultivation and social harmony aligned with the feudal rulers' need to maintain social stability and long-term peace. Moreover, Confucianism's emphasis on education and the cultivation of a large number of talents laid the foundation for its dissemination and development. Confucian thought played an important role in maintaining social order. By emphasizing the norms of "rites," it clarified social hierarchy and interpersonal relationships, making society run more orderly. In regulating interpersonal relationships, the concept of "benevolence" promoted harmonious coexistence among people. Confucian thought also valued cultural heritage; for example, the Six Classics compiled by Confucius became important classics for cultural education in later generations.

Mohist School

Mozi (c. 468–376 BC), the founder of the Mohist school, came from the lower strata of laborers and had a deep understanding of the suffering of the common people. His ideological origins differed from those of Confucianism. He criticized the elaborate rituals of Confucianism and advocated pragmatism. The core ideas of Mohism include "universal love," "opposition to offensive warfare," "elevation of the worthy," and "frugality." "Universal love" advocates loving all people without distinction, in contrast to the Confucian idea of love based on closeness and distance. "Opposition to offensive warfare" opposes unjust wars and advocates peaceful coexistence. "Elevation of the worthy" advocates appointing capable and virtuous people to govern the state. "Frugality" emphasizes the conservation of resources and opposes extravagance and waste. Mohist thought paid close attention to and criticized social realities. Mozi opposed the frequent wars of his time and advocated peaceful coexistence, which had significant practical significance for society at that time. Mohism had a wide influence in society, with many followers forming an organized group. There were clear

similarities and differences between Mohism and Confucianism in terms of ideological concepts and social propositions. The similarity lies in their focus on social realities and attempts to improve society through morality and institutions. The difference is that Confucianism emphasizes hierarchical order and rituals, while Mohism advocates equality and pragmatism. The main reasons for the decline of Mohism in later generations are that its ideas were overly idealistic and difficult to fully implement in the complex social reality. Moreover, as Confucianism became the official ideology, the influence of Mohism gradually weakened (Chen 2003).

Taoist School

Laozi is the founder of the Taoist school. His work, the "Tao Te Ching" (also known as the "Laozi"), is the classic of Taoism. Laozi introduced the concept of the "Tao," considering it the origin and ultimate truth of the universe. He also advocated "governing by doing nothing that goes against nature," believing that by following natural laws without excessive intervention, society would naturally achieve harmony. Zhuangzi inherited and developed Laozi's ideas. His work, the "Zhuangzi," further elaborates on Taoist philosophy. Zhuangzi proposed the "doctrine of the equality of things," arguing that all things are equal without absolute distinctions of high and low, noble and base. He also emphasized "free and easy wandering," pursuing spiritual freedom and liberation. Taoist thought has a unique understanding of the universe, nature, life, and society. It stresses following nature and not going against natural laws. This philosophy has had a broad influence on later generations in the fields of philosophy, literature, art, and religion. For example, Taoist views of nature have influenced Chinese landscape painting and poetry creation. The Taoist concept of "doing nothing that goes against nature" also provided a governance philosophy for later politicians (Hu 2011).

Legalist School

The Legalist school emerged during the Warring States period, with representative figures such as Shang Yang and Han Fei. Legalists advocated governing the country by law, emphasizing the authority and strict enforcement of laws. Shang Yang implemented reforms in the State of Qin, which rapidly strengthened the state. Han Fei further developed Legalist thought, proposing the governance concept of combining "law," "tactics," and "legitimacy." Legalist thought played an important role in the reforms and self-strengthening of various states during the Warring States period. It broke the traditional constraints of rites and established a social order based on law. However, Legalist thought, with its overemphasis on severe punishments and neglect of moral education, has been subject to criticism in later generations (Wang 2010).

Other Schools

In addition to Confucianism, Mohism, Taoism, and Legalism, other schools such as the School of Names, the Yin-Yang School, the Diplomatists, and the Eclectics also emerged during the Pre-Qin period. The School of Names focused on debating issues of names and realities, with Gongsun Long as a representative

figure. The Yin-Yang School centered on the theory of yin and yang and the Five Elements, with Zou Yan as a representative. The Diplomatists advocated diplomatic strategies of vertical and horizontal alliances, with Su Qin and Zhang Yi as representatives. The Eclectics were inclusive, integrating ideas from various schools. Although these schools had different academic statuses during the Pre-Qin period, they all contributed to the contention of the Hundred Schools of Thought. They enriched the intellectual culture of the time and promoted academic prosperity.

In summary, the Confucian, Mohist, Taoist, Legalist, and other schools each had their own characteristics during the Pre-Qin period, together forming a rich and diverse system of ancient Chinese thought and culture. The ideas of these schools played important roles in society at that time and had profound influences on later generations in terms of culture, politics, and society in China.

The Intrinsic Connection between the Hundred Schools of Thought and the Early Academic Prosperity in the Central Plains

Intellectual Collision and Academic Innovation

During the Pre-Qin period, the contention of the Hundred Schools of Thought represented a significant transformation in the realm of intellectual culture. The various schools engaged in mutual criticism, debate, and mutual learning and borrowing, and this intellectual collision greatly stimulated the vitality of academic innovation and promoted the deepening and development of academic thought.

Take the Confucian and Mohist schools as an example. Mozi criticized the Confucian "rites," arguing that they were too complicated and wasteful of resources, while Confucianism emphasized the importance of "rites" in maintaining social order. This mutual criticism prompted both sides to constantly reflect on and adjust their views, driving the deepening of thought. Mohism's ideas of "universal love" and "opposition to offensive warfare" were gradually refined through debates with Confucianism, forming a unique theoretical system. In response to Mohist criticism, Confucianism further developed the concept of "benevolence," emphasizing the combination of "benevolence" and "rites."

Legalism also absorbed elements from other schools during intellectual exchanges. For example, in the Jixia Academy, Legalists interacted with the Huang-Lao school and absorbed the Taoist idea of "the Way gives birth to law," forming their unique governance concept that combines "law," "tactics," and "legitimacy." This intellectual collision not only enriched the theoretical system of Legalism but also laid the foundation for the rule-of-law thought in later generations.

These new ideas had a profound impact on society at that time. For example, Mohism's idea of "opposition to offensive warfare" to some extent curbed the frequent occurrence of wars and brought relative peace to society. Legalism's concept of combining "law," "tactics," and "legitimacy" provided theoretical support for the reforms and self-strengthening of various states during the Warring States period, promoting social progress (Mu 1985).

Academic Exchange and Cultural Dissemination

During the Pre-Qin period, the Central Plains region served as a center for cultural exchange, facilitating academic interaction and the spread of culture among various schools. Convenient transportation and frequent population movement provided favorable conditions for academic exchange. For example, the Jixia Academy, as an important platform for academic exchange at that time, attracted numerous scholars, forming a hub of intellectual interaction.

In the Jixia Academy, scholars from various schools exchanged ideas and debated, promoting the dissemination and integration of academic thought. The ideas of the Huang-Lao school, Guanzi school, Confucianism, Legalism, and others collided here, creating a diverse intellectual and cultural atmosphere. This academic exchange not only propelled the early academic prosperity of the Central Plains but also allowed the intellectual ideas of the region to spread to surrounding areas through various channels.

The academic ideas of the Central Plains were disseminated to surrounding regions through scholars' travels and lectures, playing an important role in the formation and development of the Huaxia cultural sphere. For example, after Confucianism was formed in the Central Plains, it gradually spread to neighboring states through the travels and teachings of Confucius and his disciples, eventually becoming an important part of Huaxia culture (Yang 2003).

Academic Atmosphere and the Emergence of Talents

During the Pre-Qin period, the relaxed and free academic atmosphere of the Central Plains provided favorable conditions for the growth of talents. The emphasis on and recruitment of talents by the various feudal states, such as the prevailing trend of "nurturing scholars," attracted numerous scholars to the Central Plains, leading to a surge of talented individuals.

For example, the Jixia Academy in the State of Qi, with its orientation of "engaging in discussion without governance," provided a platform for free exchange among scholars. Thisrelaxed and free academic atmosphere attracted many scholars to give lectures and conduct research, creating a prosperous academic scene. In this environment, Xunzi served three times as the head of the Jixia Academy, becoming an authoritative figure in the academic world at that time.

The emergence of prominent scholars in the Central Plains during the Pre-Qin period and their academic achievements played an important role in promoting the early academic prosperity of the region. For example, Confucius founded Confucianism, Mencius developed the Confucian idea of benevolent governance, Mozi established the Mohist school and proposed important ideas such as "universal love" and "opposition to offensive warfare," and Han Fei developed Legalist thought, putting forward the governance concept that combines "law," "tactics," and "legitimacy."

The emergence of these talents not only enriched the academic ideas of the Central Plains but also laid a solid foundation for the academic development of later generations. For example, Xunzi's idea of "emphasizing rites and valuing law" provided a theoretical basis for the later political concept that combines Confucianism

and Legalism. Han Fei's Legalist thought also provided important theoretical support for the construction of a rule-of-law society in later generations (Chen 1982).

In summary, there is a close intrinsic connection between the contention of the Hundred Schools of Thought and the early academic prosperity in the Central Plains. Intellectual collision stimulated the vitality of academic innovation, academic exchange promoted the spread of culture, and the relaxed academic atmosphere attracted a large number of talents to the Central Plains. These factors worked together to promote the early academic prosperity of the Central Plains and laid a solid foundation for the academic development of later generations.

The Influence of the Pre-Qin Academic Prosperity on Later Generations

Inheritance and Development of Intellectual Culture

The academic thought of the Pre-Qin period laid a solid foundation for the development of Chinese intellectual culture. The ideas of schools such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism were continuously inherited and evolved in later generations, integrating into the mainstream of traditional Chinese culture and profoundly influencing the Chinese people's values, ways of thinking, moral standards, and aesthetic tastes.

Confucianism: After becoming the official ideology in the Han Dynasty, Confucian ideas such as "benevolent governance" and "rule by virtue" became important components of subsequent political culture. The values emphasized by Confucianism, such as "benevolence," "honesty," and "propriety," became the core of the Chinese moral code. In the field of literature, the Confucian idea that "literature should convey the Way" influenced the creative direction of later literati, emphasizing the social function and moral edification of literature. In the field of art, the Confucian aesthetic concept of "moderation and harmony" influenced the style of Chinese painting, music, and other art forms.

Taoism: Taoist ideas such as "governing by doing nothing that goes against nature" and "following nature" were also widely disseminated in later generations. Taoist thought had a profound impact on literary creation, with many literati using Taoist ideas to express their longing for freedom and nature. In the field of philosophy, Taoist concepts such as "the Way" and "non-action" became important categories for later philosophical contemplation.

Legalism: The Legalist idea of "rule of law" had an important influence on subsequent political systems. The Legalist concept of combining "law," "tactics," and "legitimacy" in governance provided theoretical support for the construction of a rule-of-law society in later generations. In social governance, Legalist policies such as "emphasizing agriculture over commerce" and "severe punishment" were applied to varying degrees in feudal societies.

Political Systems and Social Governance

The political ideas of the various schools during the Pre-Qin period had a

profound influence on China's subsequent political systems and models of social governance. The Confucian ideas of "benevolent governance" and "rule by virtue" were widely applied in later political practices. For example, the Han Dynasty's policy of "dismissing all other schools of thought and exclusively honoring Confucianism" made Confucian thought the mainstream ideology of feudal society, with its principle of "governing the country by virtue" becoming an important governance principle for later rulers.

The Legalist idea of "rule of law" also played an important role in later political practices. Shang Yang's reforms rapidly strengthened the State of Qin, laying the foundation for the unification of the six states by Qin. The Legalist concept of combining "law," "tactics," and "legitimacy" in governance provided theoretical support for the construction of a rule-of-law society in later generations. In feudal societies, the Legalist idea of "severe punishment" was used to maintain social order and national rule.

These ideas collectively shaped the political culture and governance concepts of ancient China, playing an important role in the long-term stability and social stability of feudal society. The Confucian idea of "benevolent governance" emphasized that rulers should govern the country by virtue and pay attention to people's livelihoods, while the Legalist idea of "rule of law" emphasized the authority of the law and strict enforcement to maintain social order.

Educational Philosophy and Talent Cultivation

The rise and development of private schools during the Pre-Qin period had a profound influence on China's subsequent educational system and talent cultivation model. Confucius founded private schools, breaking the monopoly of "learning in the officialdom" and making education accessible to the common people. Confucius's educational philosophy and teaching methods provided important insights and references for later education. His educational ideas such as "education for all without discrimination," "teaching according to students' aptitude," and "never tiring of learning and teaching" became important principles of traditional Chinese education.

The academic debates and exchanges during the Pre-Qin period cultivated the independent thinking and innovative spirit of later scholars. The Jixia Academy, as the center of academic exchange at that time, attracted many scholars to gather and created a free academic atmosphere. This academic atmosphere provided a model for later academic development and promoted the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese education (Han 2010).

The academic prosperity of the Pre-Qin period not only laid the foundation for Chinese intellectual culture but also had a profound influence on subsequent political systems, social governance, and educational philosophy. The inheritance and development of these ideas and concepts in later generations provided a strong impetus for the continuation and development of traditional Chinese culture.

Conclusion

The Pre-Qin period, especially the Spring and Autumn and Warring States

periods, was an extremely active phase in the intellectual and cultural history of China. The academic prosperity of this period is marked by the "contention of the Hundred Schools of Thought," with the Central Plains region being the core area of this intellectual feast. The emergence of the Hundred Schools of Thought was closely related to the drastic social transformations of the time. The development of productive forces, changes in social structure, and the turbulent political landscape provided fertile ground for intellectual collisions and innovations. During this period, numerous schools of thought such as Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, and Legalism emerged. These schools engaged in mutual criticism and debate, as well as borrowing and absorption from one another, which greatly propelled the deepening and development of academic thought.

As the political, economic, and cultural center at that time, the Central Plains region enjoyed convenient transportation and frequent population movement, providing unique conditions for academic exchange. The establishment of academic institutions such as the Jixia Academy offered scholars a platform for free communication, promoting the dissemination and integration of academic ideas. The relaxed and free academic atmosphere, coupled with the emphasis on and recruitment of talents by the various feudal states—such as the prevailing trend of "nurturing scholars"—attracted numerous scholars to the Central Plains, leading to a surge of talented individuals. Renowned scholars such as Confucius, Mozi, Mencius, Xunzi, and Han Feizi emerged during this period. Their ideas and works not only had a profound impact on society at that time but also laid a solid foundation for the academic development of later generations.

There is a close intrinsic connection between the contention of the Hundred Schools of Thought and the early academic prosperity in the Central Plains. Intellectual collisions stimulated the vitality of academic innovation, academic exchanges promoted the spread of culture, and the relaxed academic atmosphere attracted a large number of talents to the Central Plains. These factors interacted with each other, jointly promoting the early academic prosperity of the Central Plains. The academic development of this period had a profound influence on later generations. The ideas of schools such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism were continuously inherited and evolved in later generations, integrating into the mainstream of traditional Chinese culture and profoundly influencing the Chinese people's values, ways of thinking, moral standards, and aesthetic tastes.

The main ideological characteristics of each school, as well as their status and value in the history of academia, are also very significant. Confucianism emphasizes "benevolence" and "rites," advocates "rule by virtue" and "benevolent governance," and focuses on personal cultivation and social harmony. Its ideas became the mainstream ideology of subsequent feudal societies. Taoism advocates "the way of nature" and "governing by doing nothing that goes against nature," emphasizing following nature and inaction, and its ideas have had a broad influence on philosophy, literature, art, and other fields in later generations. Mohism promotes "universal love," "opposition to offensive warfare," "elevation of the worthy," and "frugality," paying attention to the interests of the lower strata of society, and its ideas had strong practical significance at that time. Legalism advocates "rule of law" and emphasizes the authority and strict enforcement of laws, providing

theoretical support for the reforms and self-strengthening of various states during the Warring States period.

However, this study still has some shortcomings. For example, the interactive relationship between the academic thought of the Pre-Qin period and the socio-economic foundation of the time, as well as the ideological origins and the line of transmission of the various schools, could be further explored in greater depth. Future research can focus more on these aspects in the hope of making greater contributions to the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese culture.

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Heterotopia, Ritual, Egregor – The Structural Formula for Mass Manipulation

By Claudia Simone Dorchain[*]

This article develops a new structural theory of mass manipulation in the media, based on the combination of three concepts: heterotopia, ritual and egregor. Starting from Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, it shows that these spatial othernesses are not only special cultural forms, but are also deliberately used to shape the psychological disposition of collective forms of consciousness. The formula 'heterotopia + ritual = egregor' forms the theoretical framework. Heterotopias are systematically differentiated here for the first time into corrective (Apollonian) and de-individualising (Dionysian) types. Their architectural coding follows spatial structures – linear, rectangular, circular – with specific psychopolitical effects. In the analysis of ritual dynamics as amplifiers and catalysts of collective recoding, the egregor is reconstructed as an emergent group consciousness. Finally, the model is placed in the context of digital modernity: in a borderless world without stable orientation, newly defined spaces for rituality are needed to counteract fragmentation. The text thus contributes to the systematic theory of symbolically coded mass dynamics in postmodern space.

Keywords: *Heterotopia, Ritual, Egregor, Mass Manipulation, Liquid Modernity*

In earlier work, I have dealt extensively with Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia – the spatial "otherness" that arises within cultures to reflect, reverse or question normative structures. Originally formulated as a spatial theory of cultural difference, heterotopia helped explain theatres, prisons, cemeteries and other extraordinary institutions as zones of normative deviation. Yet in light of recent global spectacles of media culture, the concept invites a new interpretation: not merely as spatial anomaly, but as a structural mechanism for affective mass alignment. Events like the synchronised opening ceremony of the 2024 Olympic Games – where flags, fire, music and emotion merged in a choreographed symbolic unity – raise the question: Are heterotopias the architectures through which media orchestrate collective states of consciousness? Based on this question, I propose a new theoretical framework as a structural formula for mass manipulation: heterotopia + ritual = egregor. This paper introduces a psychological-spatial typology of heterotopias, defines ritual as transformative symbolic repetition, and describes the egregor as the collective mind-state that emerges from their interplay. The resulting formula, I argue, reveals a powerful symbolic logic behind contemporary mass persuasion – a logic that operates through spatial staging, ritual synchronisation, and affective resonance without explicit discourse. In an era where shared meaning is increasingly fragile, and aesthetic coherence often overrides critical reflection, this structural interplay becomes a key tool in the architecture of media-driven influence.

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From Spectacle to Theory

What makes us feel empathy for a flag, for music, for light? Why do mass media spectacles, with their collective fascination for symbols, institutionalised space, and choreographed emotion, exert such powerful effects on human consciousness? Michel Foucault, a pioneer of postmodern theory, made a lasting contribution to cultural thought with his idea of heterotopia – spatial "otherworlds" that function as control zones for social perception. [1] This essay builds on his insight and extends it toward media analysis: Can Foucault's concept of the otherworld also be understood as a powerful structural principle of mass manipulation in the media?

Foucault's concept of heterotopia opens up a fascinating possibility: to define places not only as physical locations, but also as categories of order. In his words, heterotopias are *"real places…which are formed in the very founding of society… and…effectively enacted utopias in which the real sites…are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."*[2] In contrast to utopia, which has never existed and is often used only as a thought experiment or escapism, a heterotopia is a real space that can be entered, marvelled at, filled with life and played with – and is. The significance of heterotopias in the design of urban architectures and institutions, as well as their echoes in literature and cultural philosophy, is widely recognised today. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter understand Foucault's otherworld in relation to today's cities as *"a heuristic concept to understand spatial practices that do not follow the dominant logic of public space, yet reveal its ideological and aesthetic structures."*[3] However, if we also understand the otherworld as a place where events are staged according to a plan and with the aim of achieving a consciousness-shaping effect, the structural formula emerges: *'heterotopia + ritual = egregor.'* All three components of this new structural formula are discussed below.

Rethinking Heterotopia

Foucault defines three structural criteria for heterotopias: they are culturally immanent (there is no culture without otherworlds, there is no otherworld without a cultural context), they are dynamic (otherworlds change over time – often their change is also an indicator of epochal cultural breaks) and they deal intensively with norms.[4] However, the other worlds described by Foucault are significant precisely because of their relationship to normativity, i.e. to the implicit or explicit set of norms of mainstream society. By experiencing other worlds, the average society can be read normatively in a vivid way, in two respects, depending on the type of other world. Foucault describes how heterotopias reinforce norms on the one hand, but on the other hand can also critically reflect on them and possibly even suspend them for a short time.

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[1]Foucault, M. (1986/1967), p.24
[2]Ibid.
[3]Dehaene, M., & De Cauter, L. (2008), p.3
[4]See Foucault, M. (1986/1967), p.24

Let us look at the examples Foucault himself cites: *"rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, prisons, etc. [...], fairs or vacation villages, [...], cemeteries, hammams, prisons, brothels."*[5] We find an open catalogue that depicts an astonishing juxtaposition of spaces of order with completely different relationships to normativity – some reinforcing norms, others reflecting on or suspending them. Although Foucault also classified his concept of heterotopia in terms of time, i.e. he spoke of temporary heterotopias that are *"[...] accumulating time, like museums and libraries"*,[6] he did not provide an ontological-functional classification, even though this is even more meaningful for spaces of order than the time component.[7] I would like to attempt this classification of being and intention for the first time in the following by distinguishing between *corrective* and *de-individualising* heterotopias. Otherworlds, which according to Foucault's definition are inherent in culture, dynamic and normative, can ontologically be distinguished by their orientation: either corrective, reinforcing norms, or de-individualising, suspending and transgressing them. Since, as Aurélie Charles notes, in every culture, the human self is identified with conformity to norms, as they *"define who we are and how we are perceived"*[8], corrective and de-individualising heterotopias allow different experiences of identity.

Ontology of Heterotopias

Foucault (1967)	*Dorchain (2025)*
culturally immanent	
dynamic	
normative	
	corrective
	de-individualising

Corrective heterotopias are all institutions of a permanent or temporary nature that are oriented towards the norms of mainstream society and reinforce them, e.g. in the case of deviation: prisons, military academies, psychiatric hospitals, barracks and the like. *De-individualising* heterotopias, on the other hand, are institutions of a permanent or temporary nature that enable the norms of mainstream society to be critically examined, rejected or temporarily suspended, such as the theatre, the brothel, the hammam, the fairground and the like. In the dichotomous scheme of corrective and de-individualising heterotopias, the cemetery, which Foucault saw as a heterotopia allowing for the regulation of access (an inclusive and exclusive mechanism),[9] plays a special role. At first glance, it seems like the prime example of a de-individualising heterotopia, since the ego is permanently dissolved here, but one characteristic of these places is the implicit or explicit confirmation of order, which offers a corrective aspect: until late modernity, for example, suicides were not buried in Christian cemeteries.

[5]Ibid.
[6]Ibid.
[7]Ibid., p. 26
[8]Charles, A. (2012), p.38
[9]Ibid.

While the cemetery already exemplifies the semantic complexity of heterotopic sites by combining corrective and de-individualising aspects, the deeper logic of their normative orientation becomes more intelligible when viewed through a philosophical framework. A compelling foundation for this typological distinction is found in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), where he introduces the aesthetic polarity of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Apollonian, in Nietzsche's terms, stands for *"clarity, individuation and separation,"* whereas the Dionysian denotes *"excessive unity, dissolution of subjectivity."* [10] When transposed into the spatial-symbolic register of heterotopia, this polarity offers a profound ontological lens: heterotopias can be understood as either *Apollonian-corrective*, reinforcing normative structures through order, discipline and containment, or *Dionysian-de-individualising*, dissolving those structures in favour of transgressive, ecstatic, and affectively unbounded experiences. Corrective heterotopias work through the spatial enforcement of ideals – be they moral, social or epistemic – while de-individualising heterotopias defer or reverse these norms in order to allow for affective excess, temporary liberation, or ritualised subversion. The contrast between these modalities also invites a set of questions: How do these forms of heterotopia differ in their normative teleology, their architectural language, and their affective mechanisms? What symbolic role do they play in modern societies' attempts to regulate, ritualise, or release the self? Moreover, positioning media environments and large-scale aesthetic productions within this typological scheme offers new insights into their performative role: these productions do not merely reflect cultural norms but often enact them, subtly shaping public consciousness. Understanding this mechanism can significantly sharpen our awareness of the symbolic logic and emotional choreography that drive mass-mediated influence.

Architecture of the otherworld

A comparison of the physical elements of *corrective* and *de-individualising heterotopias* further reveals that their architectural design often mirrors their normative intention. However, there is no clear assignment of temporal stability. Corrective heterotopias can be permanent – such as a barracks – but also temporary, such as drill exercises at a military academy or a pilgrimage or procession. De-individualising heterotopias can be permanent, such as theatre buildings, or temporary, such as mystery plays, ritual circles or dance circles. Since temporality does not align consistently with the heterotopic dichotomy, ontological structure becomes the decisive foundation – and from it, *intentional* orientation follows. Drawing on Nietzsche's distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, one may interpret corrective heterotopias as ego-structuring and order-imposing (Apollonian), whereas de-individualising ones dissolve boundaries of the self and invite collective affect (Dionysian).[11] Corrective heterotopias aim to educate visitors towards a social, intellectual, religious or generally normative ideal – either through the practice of symbolically conveyed normativity or through isolating punishment for deviating

[10]Nietzsche, F. (1993/1872), pp.5-6
[11]Ibid.

from it, temporarily or permanently. Thus, there is a fundamental shared normative purpose between all corrective heterotopias that isolate visitors from normative society, whether temporarily due to their age or stage of development, e.g. school until a certain age is reached, temporarily due to results, e.g. prisons and psychiatric institutions until an improvement in the normative state is achieved, or ontologically permanent, e.g. nursing homes until death.

It is therefore logical that all corrective heterotopias tend to follow a similar structural scheme – typically a linear, rectilinear one. Architectural axes, frontal alignments, and sequential corridors function as spatial metaphors of control, hierarchy, and directionality. This architectural language materialises disciplinary intention in built form. As Frank Lloyd Wright observed, *"form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union"*[12] – a maxim that finds architectural realisation in structures designed for the internalisation of normative behaviour. Compare, for example, the monumental architecture of Plato's Academy, the Louvre in Paris, the West Point Military Academy in New York or the Stasi headquarters in Berlin, and you will see everywhere a dominance of rectangular shapes, straight lines and corridors.[13]

In contrast to this is the architecture of de-individualised space, which is circular in design: the ancient theatre of Epidaurus or the Globe Theatre in London, the Pantheon in Rome or the circular architecture of the Apple Park campus in Cupertino.[14] Circular structures create integration, rotation and synchronisation, often with a community-building or boundary-breaking function, creating a focus on a centre or dissolution into a common field.

Phenomenology of Heterotopias

	Linear (axial)	*Circular (centred)*
Corrective	Prison, school, barracks	Panopticon, therapy circle
De-individualising	Procession, ritual path	Theatre, dance circle, festival
Hybrid	Gothic cathedral, Mardi Gras, sacred building, circus tent	

While corrective and de-individualising heterotopias are structurally and functionally distinct, their manifestations in real-world contexts are not always strictly separable. Hybrid forms often emerge: spaces in which normative reinforcement and ego-dissolution intersect in complex symbolic constellations. A compelling example of such hybridity is found in the Gothic cathedral as a Gesamtkunstwerk. Its architecture stages a spatial narrative: the worshipper moves from the shadowed westwork – an elongated, axial corridor – toward the luminous apse in the east, which forms a circle or half-circle. This progression not only reinforces a theological ideal but also invites an affective transformation at the altar, where individual subjectivity is temporarily suspended in devotional immersion. As Philippe Plagnieux notes, the cathedral interior *"symbolised the obstacles and twists of the journey toward*

[12]Wright, F.L. (1954), p.34
[13]See Shekawat, K.R. & Duarte, J.P. (2017), pp.395-411
[14]See Pedersen, P.B. (2020), p.45-62

salvation,"[15] thus uniting corrective orientation with de-individualising experience in a single spatial dramaturgy.

Further examples of hybrid heterotopias can be found in cultural rituals where spatial setting and symbolic performance temporarily converge. Unlike institutional sites such as the Gothic cathedral, in which space and ritual are permanently co-constitutive, events like Mardi Gras represent a fleeting coincidence of location and performative excess – a temporal heterotopic fusion that blurs the boundary between corrective order and de-individualising transgression. Although the carnival procession follows a linear, city-bound trajectory that suggests order and sequence, its symbolic and affective structure (manifested through costuming, satire, rhythmic repetition, and collective ecstasy) disrupts normative constraints. As William Jankowiak notes, it is *"a ritualized reversal of everyday norms,"*[16] highlighting its transformative potential. The tension between spatial form and social function renders this event a hybrid heterotopia of considerable symbolic force—one in which corrective structure and de-individualising release converge, inviting a more nuanced interpretation of heterotopic design and intention.

In contrast, there are also de-individualising heterotopias that serve not to dissolve norms but to correct them: for example, morning circles in educational contexts or therapeutic sitting circles – often within corrective heterotopias such as psychiatric institutions and schools. Significantly, in his *Panopticon* (1791), Jeremy Bentham described his circular design as *"a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example,"*[17] arguing that this structure could be equally applied to prisons, schools, hospitals, and asylums – thus extending the logic of corrective heterotopia via spatially embodied surveillance. Foucault himself revisited this concept in his reflections on the surveillance society in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), describing circular architecture as a prerequisite for visibility and control, where individuals are exposed to constant observation and effectively disciplined by the omnipresent gaze of power of the few.[18] However, as I have argued in my reflections on what I term reciprocal surveillance, postmodernity – building on and transcending Bentham's and Foucault's models – has evolved into a technologically mediated system in which surveillance is no longer a privilege: all watch all.[19]

In summary: Heterotopias are real, culturally embedded spaces that reflect, challenge, or temporarily suspend societal norms. They exist in two main forms: *corrective* heterotopias, which reinforce normative ideals through spatial discipline and symbolic order (e.g., prisons, schools), and *de-individualising* heterotopias, which dissolve identity and suspend norms through symbolic immersion and circular structure (e.g., theatres, festivals).

1. Both types of heterotopias (corrective/de-individualising) can be either temporary or permanent.

[15]Plagnieux, G. (2003), p.45
[16]Jankowiak, W.R. (2004), p.275
[17]See Bentham, J. (1995/1791), p.43
[18]Foucault, M. (1977), p. 200
[19]Dorchain (2012), p. 355

2. Corrective heterotopias tend to follow linear, axial structures; de-individualising ones are often circular or centripetal.
3. Hybrid and inverted forms occur, where function and form do not align.

Ritual and Symbolic Repetition

The architectural framing of heterotopia prepares the ground for its symbolic intensification: what space alone cannot enforce, ritual completes – through repetition, rhythm, and affective binding. Heterotopia – whether corrective, de-individualising or hybrid – represents the space for events that are rituals and produce a sense of obligation. Walter Burkert described rituals as *"basic communicative acts … up to the complex religious performances"* and as *"grounded in very basic… demonstrative communication."*[20] This already reveals the structural similarity to mass suggestive phenomena, as a ritual is communicative and has a symbolic content that can be read subconsciously, in a figurative sense. But a ritual has an even deeper meaning, which Mircea Eliade defines as reactualisation of myth. Eliade contends that *"myth and ritual…are symbols of the sacred…[and] the manifestation of the sacred is narrated in myth and re-enacted in ritual."* [21] However, rituals are by no means limited to religious, esoteric or occult contexts in the narrow sense, but can also occur in the profane sphere. This permeability of ritual events to religious and everyday contexts stems from the fact that the *myths* underlying and legitimising them are also permeable, as I have noted in my remarks on modern sacrifice.[22]

What makes this continuity particularly significant in the present is the mediatisation of ritual: modern media do not merely transmit ritual forms – they actively produce them. In formats ranging from televised ceremonies and political broadcasts to viral social media performances, the symbolic structure of ritual persists: repetition, rhythm, collective witnessing, and emotional synchronisation. This transfer of ritual into media contexts underscores the ongoing relevance of Burkert's and Eliade's definitions, even in thoroughly secularised arenas.

Crucially, these media rituals divide along the same symbolic boundary developed here: they can be corrective or de-individualising. Corrective media rituals include uniformly scripted news formats, presidential New Year's addresses, sermons, or orchestrated ethical appeals like *#MeToo* or *#JeSuisCharlie*. As Nick Couldry observes in *Media Rituals* (2003), *"news formats themselves constitute a ritual space through which symbolic power is enacted."*[23] By contrast, de-individualising rituals dominate the affective architecture of entertainment: music competitions, dance formats, or reality TV shows that suspend social roles, dissolve fixed identities, and stage ecstatic departures from normativity. These rituals do not reinforce order – they rupture it, if only temporarily. Rituals, whether in their original cultic-sacred sense or in their profane and often mass-media sense, have everywhere the effect that Victor

[20]Burkert, W. (1979), pp. 10-11
[21]Eliade, M. (1959), p.13
[22]Dorchain (2012), p. 349
[23]Couldry, N. (2003), p.1

Turner attributes to them: *"ritual is transformative."*[24] However, corrective rituals – often, but not always, located in corrective heterotopias – transform towards an ideal self that represents a social ideal, while de-individualising rituals allow an often longed-for distance from it.

In summary: *A ritual is a structured, symbolically charged act performed repetitively in a socially or emotionally significant context. It serves to synchronise perception and emotion, creating a shared experiential framework that can amplify meaning, foster identity, and modulate group dynamics – whether in sacred or profane settings.*

Egregor and Mass Manipulation

A ritual in the normative space of a heterotopia is not merely a communicative symbolic act – it aims at a third thing that transcends it, the creation of a collective field of consciousness. This phenomenon is also known as egregor, from the Greek ἐγρήγορᾰ (egrḗgora), which means 'to awaken'. The creation of an egregore is mostly known in sacred contexts and refers to the desired dynamics and form of a group consciousness, such as that which arises during a shared ritual act. In this sense, Mark Sedgwick deals with the egregore and defines it as follows: *"a group mind, formed by the common intentions and activities of a particular esoteric group."*[25] While this definition emphasizes esotericism, the concept can be extended to profane contexts: if rituals can exist outside religious domains, then so too can egregores. In fact, as I explained in my research on the violence of the sacred, a society of publicity and publication can make egregores more visible than ever before, as the exclusivity of the heterotopias that enable them and the rituals that take place within them is breaking down at an accelerating pace.[26]

Michael Leiris, in *The Sacred in Everyday Life*, helps to further illuminate this transition from the sacred to the profane by asking: *"What, for me, is the sacred? […] What objects, places, or occasions awake in me that mixture of fear and attachment, that ambiguous attitude caused by the approach of something simultaneously attractive and dangerous, prestigious and outcast— that combination of respect, desire, and terror that we take as the psychological sign of the sacred?"*[27] This ambivalent structure of the sacred (affective, symbolic, pre-reflective) lies at the heart of what constitutes an egregor, even outside traditional religious settings.

The ritual of singing the national anthem before a football match, for instance, constitutes a profane ritual capable of generating an egregor: a heightened national consciousness that fosters pride and belonging, yet may also produce antagonistic ingroup-outgroup dynamics, particularly in emotionally charged spectator contexts. Such examples reveal the fundamental ambivalence of egregores, which can discipline and unify through symbolic coherence – or, conversely, unleash affective overflow and collective excess. They operate in the liminal space between corrective

[24]Turner, V. (1969), p.94
[25]Sedgwick, M. (2007), p.28
[26]Dorchain (2012), pp.310-311
[27]Leiris, M. (2017/1938), p.24

cohesion and de-individualising dissolution – always via synchronised perception, repeated enactment, and shared symbolic charge.

In summary: *The egregor is the collective consciousness that emerges from ritualised interaction within heterotopic space – it reflects the emotional cohesion of a group, whether norm-conforming or transgressive, and reveals the affective force behind symbolic mass phenomena.*

Synopia: The Symbolic Overall Form

Heterotopias function as event-spaces for both normative reinforcement and de-individualising dissolution, providing the spatial stage for rituals whose symbolic intensity may culminate in the emergence of egregores—whether in sacred contexts or within the mundane routines of everyday life. The structural formula presented above, *'heterotopia + ritual = egregor'*, culminates in what I term *synopia*. This refers to the symbolic overall form in which space, ritual action and collective effect merge into an orchestrated structure of meaning. Synopia is not merely a place, not merely an event, but the aesthetic coding of effectiveness itself – in a collective medium that is read, felt, but rarely reflected upon.

a) Synopia: Space (heterotopia) + action (ritual) = effect (egregor)
b) Media spaces are structurally organised in a synopical manner (e.g. political show formats, mass events)
c) Synopia is a form of aesthetic control of the present

Synopia constitutes a *synoptic structure*, in which space (*heterotopia*), symbolic action (*ritual*), and collective resonance (*egregor*) converge into a unified semiotic system.

My term *synoptic* emphasises that these components are not isolated phenomena but operate together as a total form – an orchestrated perceptual unit that shapes collective meaning through simultaneity and coherence. In corrective processes, the synoptic structure stabilises normative frameworks through spatial discipline, repeated enactment, and emotionally charged consensus. In contrast, de-individualising processes use the same formula to dissolve identities and detach participants from normative constraints – but still within a synoptically guided aesthetic, making even subversion subject to structural design. In both cases, whether affirming norms or suspending them, the synoptic structure becomes a tool of psychological steering: a silent architecture of mass manipulation operating beneath the threshold of critical awareness.

The Need for Synoptic Orientation

In his groundbreaking work *Propaganda* (1928), Edward Bernays – pioneer of public relations and nephew of Sigmund Freud – argued that modern democracies function through *"the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits*

and opinions of the masses."[28] This process, which he famously termed *the manufacturing of consent*, shifts the foundation of democratic legitimacy from informed civic engagement to strategic perception management. Rather than appealing to reasoned argument, persuasion in this context is achieved through the mobilisation of symbols, the repetition of rituals, and the careful orchestration of emotionally charged imagery. These elements bypass critical reflection and instead target the affective and subconscious layers of collective experience, thereby shaping public opinion through aesthetic and emotional resonance rather than through evidence-based reasoning. While Bernays emphasises that the objective of propaganda is to bypass critical judgement – drawing structural parallels between product advertising and political agitation – Susan Buck-Morss situates this dynamic within the affective and normative logic of contemporary media: *"Mass culture manipulates collective desire by aestheticising the political and ritualising the commodity."*[29]

Within the theoretical framework developed here, heterotopias serve as the spatial and symbolic infrastructure of such influence: they offer the architectural setting in which rituals can unfold that not only reflect collective states of consciousness, but actively generate them. The structural formula *'heterotopia + ritual = egregor'* encapsulates the mechanism by which spatial design and symbolic action generate collective mental states. The *egregor* that arises from this interplay is not merely expressive, it becomes a vehicle of pre-reflective consensus, a shared sentiment that precedes conscious judgment. Yet this consensus bears an epistemic risk. As Zygmunt Bauman observed, liquid modernity is marked by disorientation and a yearning for meaning: *"In a liquid modern life there are no permanent bonds and any that we take up for a time must be tied loosely so that they can be untied again… when circumstances change – as they surely will…"* [30] In such a volatile context, the pull of ritualised spaces becomes difficult to resist precisely because they fulfil a deep psychological and cultural need: the desire for orientation, cohesion, and momentary certainty in a world of constant flux. This affective immediacy, however, tends to obscure critical reflection and creates the illusion of clarity where none exists. Therefore, the foundational ideals of Enlightenment thought must be reconsidered with renewed urgency: from a Kantian perspective, genuine consent is not merely a matter of outward conformity, but an expression of autonomous will shaped through critical reflection and rational deliberation, for *"Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity… [and] the motto of enlightenment is: have the courage to use your own understanding!"*[31] It cannot be orchestrated through aesthetic suggestion or engineered by symbolic spatial regimes that remain opaque to those affected by them. In this light, the egregor — as a collectively generated field of perception and emotion — poses a serious epistemic challenge: it simulates consensus through affective alignment rather than reasoned agreement. Authentic consent, however, presupposes transparency, cognitive accessibility, and the freedom to accept or reject propositions on the basis of reason. When collective will is formed through immersive environments that bypass

[28]Bernays, E. (1928), p. 9
[29]Buck-Morss, S. (1989), p.147
[30]Baumann, Z. (2003), p.2
[31]Kant, I. (1996/1784), p. 11

critical faculties – as is often the case with contemporary heterotopias – the Enlightenment ideal of rational autonomy is not realized, but subverted.

What Foucault could not foresee is the *mobility* of heterotopias and the rituals and egregores associated with them. The aspect of mobility goes beyond the dynamics that, alongside cultural immanence and normativity, is one of the three constitutive aspects of other worlds – today, anyone can carry their own heterotopia in their pocket thanks to media technology. Virtual worlds, which have long since hybridised with what Foucault still called *"real places"*[32] in the physical sense, offer a new possibility as tireless producers of rituals and, consequently, as egregore machines. As Tom Boellstorff observes his anthropological study of virtual culture, *"Virtual worlds do not merely simulate social life; they become laboratories of the social imagination, where new rituals emerge."*[33] The question of whether such rituals are genuinely new or merely structural updates of pre-existing forms is secondary to a more crucial insight: digital spaces increasingly shape consciousness by embedding ritualised symbolic action into everyday life. Within the framework developed here, virtual worlds function as mobile, digitised heterotopias – capable of generating rituals and producing egregores on a global scale, synchronising affect and perception across physical and temporal boundaries.

As this analysis has shown, heterotopias are not neutral containers but normatively encoded architectures of perception. The rituals staged within them do not merely express collective will – they construct it by aligning affect, narrative, and spatial symbolism into an immersive perceptual environment. This convergence gives rise to the *egregor*, a pre-reflective field of shared meaning and emotional resonance, emerging from the interplay of space (*heterotopia*) and symbolic repetition (*ritual*). Depending on their configuration, such heterotopic structures can function in a *corrective* mode, reinforcing normative ideals through spatial discipline and symbolic affirmation, or in a *de-individualising* mode, dissolving identities and loosening social bonds through ecstatic, subversive excess. In both cases, the *synoptic* configuration influences not only what becomes visible, but how it is collectively internalised and consented to – often undermining critical discernment as digital infrastructures intensify and propagate its effects. In an age of media superabundance and performative transparency, the real challenge is no longer to unveil the concealed, but to interpret the oversaturated. The formula *'heterotopia + ritual = egregor'* thus names more than a structural logic – it exposes a cultural mechanism through which mass perception is synchronised, affectively steered, and rendered resistant to critique.

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[32]Foucault, M. (1986/1967), p.24
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