

# Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies

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Volume 5  
Number 1 *Spring 2014*

Article 1

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2014

## Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies Volume 5 Number 1

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# Inter mountain west

journal  
of Religious Studies

Volume 5, Number 1 Spring 2014



**The Workingman of Nazareth: Representations of Jesus  
as Laborer in *The Masses* (1911-1917),  
the Politics of Jesus' Profession, and Historical Jesus Debates**  
**MICHAEL CASEY W. WOOLF**

**Symbolism in Asian Statues of the Buddha**  
**CHRISTINA RICHIE**

**On the Development of Spinoza's Account of Human Religion**  
**JAMES SIMKINS**

**Revisiting Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth***  
**DAN GORMAN**



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**Inter  
mountain  
west** journal  
of Religious Studies

ISSN 2155-1723

Volume Five, Number One (Spring 2014)

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Cover art by KATHRYN K. DOLLAHITE

William Morris, *Woodpecker* Tapestry, 1885

“i once a king and chief, now am the tree-barks thief,  
ever twixt trunk and leaf, chasing the prey.”







MICHAEL CASEY W. WOOLF is a Master of Divinity candidate and Ministry Fellow at Harvard Divinity School. A candidate for ordination in the American Baptist Churches USA, Michael graduated from the University of Tennessee - Knoxville in 2011 with a BA in Religious Studies. While he will be completing his MDiv in May of 2014, his academic journey has only just begun, and he will begin doctoral work (ThD) at Harvard Divinity School in the fall.

‡ “THE WORKINGMAN OF NAZARETH”: REPRESENTATIONS OF JESUS AS  
LABORER IN *THE MASSES* (1911-1917), THE POLITICS OF JESUS’ PROFESSION,  
AND HISTORICAL JESUS DEBATES ‡

In Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3, Jesus is identified as a son of a *tekton* and a *tekton* in his own right respectively. While traditionally translated as “carpenter,” there is still significant scholarly debate about how the term should actually be translated. This question has become even more complicated by the discovery of Sepphoris, an urban center located less than four miles from Nazareth. Instead of the humble carpenter consistently portrayed in religious iconography, some scholars have begun to “locate Jesus more in the middle-class than in the lower middle-class...than in the lower class of the period.”<sup>1</sup> Others, like Géza Vêrmes come to another conclusion. According to Vermes, “in Talmudic sayings the Aramaic noun denoting carpenter or craftsman (*naggār*) stands for a ‘scholar’ or a ‘learned man,’” meaning that *tekton* might not even have anything to do with Jesus’ profession.<sup>2</sup> And still others maintain the traditional picture of the workingman of Nazareth, occupying the lowest rungs of the social ladder: “‘artisan’ would be maybe our best translation. But in the pecking order of peasant society, a peasant artisan is lower than a peasant farmer. It...means usually a peasant farmer who had been pushed off the land and has to make his living...by laboring.”<sup>3</sup> With such a wide range of interpretations of *tekton*, where are those searching for the real Jesus to turn?

Of course, this debate is neither new nor without political and theological significance. For whether Jesus is a peasant, low-level artisan, or accomplished builder *matters*. While expressly religious movements like the Social Gospel would naturally turn to Jesus as an emblem of their movement,

<sup>1</sup> Holland Lee Hendrix, “Not a Humble Carpenter,” *Jesus’ Many Faces—Jesus’ Social Class*, PBS.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/socialclass.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Géza Vêrmes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1981), 22.

<sup>3</sup> John Dominic Crossan, “A Peasant Boy in a Peasant Village,” *Jesus’ Many Faces—Jesus’ Social Class*, PBS.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/socialclass.html>.

Jesus’ appeal was not limited to this realm.<sup>4</sup> *The Masses*, a socialist magazine that ran from 1911–1917, also joined the debate over the historical, theological and political meaning of *tekton*. In the magazine, Jesus was conceived of as a poor carpenter or laborer—“the workingman of Nazareth”—in order to serve its broader purpose, the promotion of socialism:

This paper belongs to the proletariat. It is the recording secretary of the Revolution in the making. It is the notebook of working class history...It is NOT meant as a foray of unruly truant children trying to sneak into the rich orchards of literature and art. It is an earnest and living thing, a battle call, a shout of defiance, a blazing torch running madly through the night to set afire the powder magazines of the world.<sup>5</sup>

This paper has two aims. First, it proposes that *The Masses*’ conscious depiction of Jesus as laborer from 1911–1917 in order to marshal support for labor unions and critique the church illustrates the theological and political stakes in how scholars describe Jesus’ profession. Secondly, this paper will consider where *The Masses*’ portrayal of Jesus fits into contemporary historical Jesus scholarship, paying special attention to how *The Masses*’ Jesus challenges the goals of contemporary scholarship and suggests new criteria for evaluating what constitutes “good” historical Jesus scholarship.<sup>6</sup>

### ***The Masses*—Some Context**

In 1911 Piet Vlag, “a bearded Dutchman more interested in cooperatives than in either art or the social revolution,” founded *The Masses*, but the magazine’s real history began in late 1912 when

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<sup>4</sup> See Eugene Debs, “Jesus is the Supreme Leader”: “[Jesus] was born in a stable and cradled in a manger. This fact of itself, about which there is no question, certifies conclusively the proletarian character of Jesus Christ,” who Debs sees as “the world’s supreme revolutionary leader.” See also Guthrie’s “Jesus Christ,” where he sings: “Jesus Christ was a *hardworking* man and brave.”

<sup>5</sup> Arturo Giovanni, “What I Think of the Masses,” *The Masses*, Vol. 8, No. 9 (July 1916). Emphasis his.

<sup>6</sup> One might question whether *The Masses*’ Jesus and contemporary historical Jesus scholarship even belong in the same discussion, arguing that one is a popular culture representation and the other represents objective scholarship. Such worries are warranted, but, as this paper demonstrates at length, it is not that simple. Both representations are drawing on historical sources, positing a narrative of the life of Jesus from those sources, and, as this paper will spend considerable time arguing, projecting their own biases onto that “historical” work. The lines between popular culture and the historical Jesus are nowhere near as stark and clear as scholars would like to believe, since postmodernism has destabilized the meaning and possibility of objectivity. In addition, the work of David Burns can be helpful in outlining the ways that radical representations of Jesus in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century *were* historical. See David Burns, *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12.



Max Eastman became editor.<sup>7</sup> He was notified of his election by a curt telegram message: “You are elected editor of *The Masses*. No pay.”<sup>8</sup> From 1911-1917 *The Masses* published socialist articles, poetry, and art that, according to one contributor, “attack[ed] old systems, old morals, old prejudices...and set up new ones in their place.”<sup>9</sup> Never reaching a circulation of above 25,000, it was nevertheless influential due to its ties with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century New York’s artist community.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps Eastman says it best when he describes *The Masses* as

A revolutionary and not a reform magazine...frank, impertinent, searching for the true causes; a magazine directed against rigidity and dogma wherever it is found: printing what is too naked or true for a money-making press: a magazine whose final policy is to do as it pleases and conciliate nobody, not even its readers.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, such a magazine was bound to run into trouble—in fact that was part of the idea. A socialist press not opposed by authorities is no socialist press at all. In 1913, *The Masses* published a cartoon that depicted the Associated Press as poisoning the news at the source by withholding vital information about a strike (Figure 1) and faced a libel suit. What finally caused the magazine to fail was the its unceasing publication of articles and cartoons opposing World War I.<sup>12</sup> Under the Espionage Act of 1917, the US Post Office refused to deliver *The Masses*, and several members of the editorial board were charged with conspiring to obstruct enlistment. While the editors beat the charges and won an injunction against the Post Office, by that time *The Masses* was finished.<sup>13</sup>

### ***The Masses’ Depictions of Jesus in Context: Some Predecessors***

The following sections analyze several examples of how *The Masses* linked Jesus to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, American class struggle. While the examination is not exhaustive—it does not, for example,

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<sup>7</sup> William L. O’Neill, *Echoes of Revolt: The Masses, 1911-1917* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966), 17.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in O’Neil, *Echoes of Revolt*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Keith M. Booker, *Encyclopedia of Literature and Politics: H-R* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 471.

<sup>11</sup> Max Eastman, “Editorial Notice,” *The Masses*, Vol. 4, No. 10 (July 1913): 2.

<sup>12</sup> See Rebecca Zurier, *Art for the Masses: A Radical Magazine and Its Graphics, 1911-1917* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 58; see also Max Eastman, “War for War’s Sake,” *The Masses*, Vol 5, No. 12 (September 1914): 5.

<sup>13</sup> Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 61.

give significant analysis of the Tannenbaum affair—it does comprise a somewhat representative sample of *The Masses*’ engagement with Jesus as a historical, political, and literary figure.<sup>14</sup> Before delving into these representations, it is important to note that *The Masses*’ work was not anything radically new. In fact, as scholars like Dan McKanan and David Burns have demonstrated in the past several years, the radical Jesus imagined by *The Masses* built on the work of radicals like George Lippard, a Philadelphia novelist and Universalist who, according to McKanan, “fleshed out a vision of Jesus as a class-conscious laborer who proclaimed liberty to the captives and judgment to their oppressors.”<sup>15</sup> Lippard’s Jesus emerged on the scene in his 1847 work *Washington and His Generals* as “the Carpenter of Nazareth resolved to redress the wrongs of the poor.”<sup>16</sup> Lippard’s example prepared the way for others to speak of Jesus as a class-conscious comrade who does battle with the principalities and powers. In fact, McKanan argues, “prior to Lippard, few preachers described Jesus as a workingman,” while the decades leading up to *The Masses* saw a flourishing of radical representations of Jesus that built on Lippard’s ideas.<sup>17</sup>

Lippard’s influence can also be felt with several other radical reformers throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century who built on his conceptualizations of Jesus as a class-conscious carpenter from Galilee.<sup>18</sup> For instance, in 1890, Thomas DeWitt Talmage extolled the virtues of a Christ who works and suffers in the same way as modern workers: “You cannot tell Christ anything new about blistered hands, or aching ankles, or bruised fingers, or stiff joints, or rising in the morning as tired as when you lay down. While yet a boy He knew it all, He felt it all, He suffered it all.”<sup>19</sup> Not only has Christ suffered on the cross for those he loved, he has also shared each and every one of the hardships that

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<sup>14</sup> The Tannenbaum affair refers to an incident in 1914 in which Frank Tannenbaum, an IWW leader, led a group of unemployed workers to St. Alphonsus’ church in New York and occupied it. For an extensive analysis of the Tannenbaum affair and theological/political responses to it, see Burns, *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus*, 98-103.

<sup>15</sup> Dan McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2011), 113.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters*, 113-122.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas DeWitt Talmage, *From Manger to Throne* (Philadelphia, Historical Publishing Company, 1890), 190.

late 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial workers faced.

Likewise, in his 1895 piece “Christ,” Murphy O’hea claims that because Jesus was “a poor humble carpenter...[a] lowly workingman of the bench, the man of hammer and nails,” the “cause of Labor is holy” and “to defend labor is a virtue, [while] to deprive it of lawful rights [is] a sin, and a crime against the mandates of the Creator himself.”<sup>20</sup> As this paper will later show, *The Masses* will repeat this formula of linking Jesus to a profession and using that connection to posit divine support for the modern cause of labor.

While Talmage and O’hea represent two strategic deployments of Jesus the workingman, any discussion of the radical historical Jesus would be incomplete without reference to Bouck White’s *The Call of the Carpenter*. According to David Burns, the book, published in 1911, helped “the radical historical Jesus bec[o]me a major force among socialists again.”<sup>21</sup> Building on those who came before him, “White ignored the objected boundaries erected by academic divines in order to create a didactic piece of radical art that balanced and incorporated all of the diverse elements that had contributed to the creation of the radical historical Jesus.”<sup>22</sup> White’s Jesus was “a workingman that needeth not be ashamed,” who “emerged from his wage-earner period...[with] an unalienable dignity, matured within him by years of acknowledged mastership as a workman.”<sup>23</sup> Molded by his craft, the Carpenter of Nazareth “declared war on the capitalism of his day because capitalism was declaring war on him.”<sup>24</sup> White’s book on Jesus was not only revolutionary; it was also extraordinarily popular. In 1913, Eugene Debs reviewed it highly, calling it “the best book I have read during the last year” and “the greatest book I have read since ‘Les Miserables.’”<sup>25</sup> Debs was not alone in his review, and several other prominent radicals, clergy, laypeople, and theologians also heaped their praise upon White’s work.

<sup>20</sup> Murphy O’hea, “Christ,” *The Railway Times*, 1 November 1895.

<sup>21</sup> Burns, *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus*, 82.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Bouck White, *The Call of the Carpenter* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913), 38.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>25</sup> Eugene Debs, “From Eugene V. Debs,” *Life*, Vol. 61. 1261.



While White’s *The Call of the Carpenter* gives a firm foundation for thinking about *The Masses’* depictions of Jesus, it is also instructive in another way. White used the new findings of biblical criticism to develop a portrayal of Jesus that some of his critics disparaged as lacking rigor and objectivity.<sup>26</sup> Obviously, White disagreed, and David Burns argues that there was some credence to his position since “what passed for authoritative declarations [in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century] were often little more than personal opinions garnished with some scripture.”<sup>27</sup> In essence, White claimed that his work was “going to peer behind that imposing façade to the social life of the times—the myriad of slaves toiling in the silver mines of the Athenians, in the vast brick fields of Rome, in the copper mines of Sinai, in galleys on the Mediterranean.”<sup>28</sup> By reading history from below, he insisted that there was enough material to justify his claims about the radical historical Jesus.<sup>29</sup> At the very least, White had as much material on his side as more traditional scholars. For, as one reviewer of White’s *The Call of the Carpenter* so eloquently put it:

We have no way of actually knowing what Jesus did or said, or even whom he was. The records and sayings that have come down to us have passed through so many distortions and corruptions at the hands of priests and vested interests that there is no scientific method of demonstration or proof that can reveal his reality to us. Out of the fragments and distortions we may put together what seems to us his original image and purpose.<sup>30</sup>

White certainly accomplished that feat, but the problem of his time—there was not enough material for definitive statements about the life of Jesus, and scholars, despite their claims to objectivity, were reading what they liked into Jesus’ story—did not go away. Scholars still find in Jesus what they want to find, but they are rarely explicit about their perspective in the way that White is, a point that this paper analyzes in depth in its final section.

### **Jesus Christ, Union Man: Art Young’s Images and Prose**

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<sup>26</sup> Burns, *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus*, 91.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Burns, *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus*, 87.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Burns, *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus*, 11.

For its special Christmas issue of 1913, *The Masses* printed a bold, provocative cover image (Figure 2). In the piece illustrated by Art Young, one of *The Masses*' more popular and prolific illustrators, Jesus appears on a poster for an event and is described as "the workingman of Nazareth" who "will speak at Brotherhood Hall" on "the rights of labor."<sup>31</sup> The references to Jesus' profession are clear-cut, leaving nothing to the imagination. While he might also be "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" to many of *The Masses*' readers, here Jesus is simply "the workingman of Nazareth," who, realizing his connection to laborers of every age, stands in solidarity with them and their unions. This Jesus is no master-artisan with a host of underlings to command, like Hendrix might have us believe. Nor is he necessarily Verme's wise teacher. He is simply Jesus—the workingman. In the end, this text represents one the most overt examples of *The Masses*' deployment of Jesus' profession to drum up support for labor unions and socialist politics, and also emphasizes the magazine's commitment to focusing on the humanity and fragility of Jesus, as opposed to his more divine representations in churches.

While Christological concerns are important to Art Young's image, Jesus' actions are also worth analyzing. By speaking at brotherhood hall on "the rights of labor" and styling himself "the workingman of Nazareth," Jesus emerges as a worker-leader of sorts. In fact, Young's accompanying article and later works explicitly claim that his Jesus was a "professional agitator," a term which requires some unpacking.<sup>32</sup> Agitator was a term used by both radicals and their opponents alike. For instance, the *New York Call* positively reviewed Bouck White's *Call of the Carpenter* because it painted him as a "true figure" and "agitator."<sup>33</sup> Likewise, early 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalists often labeled labor activists as radical or professional agitators, a term that often carried with it the implication that strikes began as the result of outside, even foreign, interference. For instance, in 1919 a steel mill

<sup>31</sup> Art Young, "He Stirreth Up the People," *The Masses*, Vol. 5 No. 3 (December 1913): Cover Image.

<sup>32</sup> Art Young, *Art Young—His Life and His Times* (New York: Sheridan House, 1939), 294.

<sup>33</sup> Burns, *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus*, 94.

owner took out a full-page ad in *The Pittsburg Chronicle* to decry the “un-American teachings of *radical* strike *agitators*” (See figure 5).<sup>34</sup> The inference is clear: in portraying Jesus as an agitator, Young is looping him in with organized labor and its methods. Young’s Jesus is pro-strike, pro-worker, and pro-union. Jesus Christ the carpenter has become a union man.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to his cover image, Art Young also wrote an article called “One of Those Damned Agitators” to accompany his 1913 image. In it, Young specifically calls Jesus “the Nazareth carpenter” and “the great agitator of Palestine.”<sup>36</sup> We have already seen how the language of agitation casts Jesus in the same mold as labor activists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but Young escalates and makes more explicit his claim with this piece: “It is self-evident that had Jesus Christ, the great agitator of Palestine, been born in the last half of the nineteenth century, he would to-day be one of the many traveling speakers proclaiming the message of industrial democracy.”<sup>37</sup> In his brief article, Young does not trade in obtuse allusions or subtle hints; he is clear and explicit. For Young, it is “self-evident” that Jesus, were he alive today, would be not only a great ally of the cause of industrial labor, but one of its chief proponents and leaders. While he “lectur[ed] in the groves and byways of Palestine” in the first century, today Jesus would proclaim a new gospel—the gospel of labor.<sup>38</sup>

And just like anyone who preaches an authentic gospel, persecution inevitably follows this Jesus. Young posits, “[i]t is also self-evident that the authorities of these towns and cities would

<sup>34</sup> “The Strike Has Failed,” *The Pittsburg Chronicle*, October 6, 1919.

<sup>35</sup> It is also worth mentioning that Art Young’s image was reprinted in August 1921 in his journal *Good Morning*, which was published from 1919-1921. The image is not located in a 1917 issue of *The Masses* as many sources report. This time Jesus appears on a wanted poster, which offers a “reward for information leading” to his capture (Figure 3). The poster goes on to say that he is wanted for “sedition, criminal anarchy, vagrancy and conspiring to overthrow the established government. The result of Young’s second, reprinted poster is a Jesus who is linked inexorably to the cause of labor. He is a laborer himself, couched in the same language (“professional agitator”) and persecuted in the same way (by a legal system that claims legitimacy, but has proven itself to have none). Different socialist newspapers like *The Southern Worker* and *The Daily Worker*, as well as some religious publications reprinted the poster. In fact, it was so popular that it continues to be displayed by leftists even today, often with updated language. For example, Occupy London protesters updated the wanted poster to include references to Bradley Manning and Julian Assange, while casting Barack Obama and Queen Elizabeth II as Christ’s enemies (Figure 4).

<sup>36</sup> Art Young, “One of Those Damned Agitators,” *The Masses*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (December 1913): 3.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



consider him “Dangerous” or “Inciter to Riot,” “Accessory before the fact,” and an “Obstructor of traffic.”<sup>39</sup> Importantly, these are some of the same charges levied against strikers by authorities. For instance, IWW leaders Joseph J. Ettor and Arturo Giovanetti were charged with being an accessory before the fact of the murder of a striker during the 1912 Bread and Roses strike, even though they were miles away from the event and later acquitted.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, the more violent Pullman Strike of 1894 resulted in accusations of “arson, murder, burglary, intimidation, assault, riot, and inciting to riot.”<sup>41</sup> Finally, in language similar to that used by Young, strikers in the Seattle General Strike of 1919 were called “ringleaders of anarchy.”<sup>42</sup> In charging this Jesus who preaches the gospel of “industrial democracy” with the same crimes that IWW strikers and activists were frequently charged with, Young is making an explicit link between Jesus and socialist labor actions.<sup>43</sup> This has the dual effect of sacralizing the IWW’s organized strike and bringing Jesus to the fore in one of the biggest political issues of the day. The IWW strikers receive halos, while Jesus grows an unruly beard. This Jesus preaches the same gospel as organizations like the IWW and, perhaps more importantly, suffers the same consequences as those organizations. He has become one of them, but there is one difference: “a sober second thought would tell them that the working class of this twentieth century *might* not stand for [the Jesus’ arrest and prosecution].”<sup>44</sup>

### Jesus Christ, Union Man: Selected Poems

Finally, having analyzed two of Art Young’s posters and one instance of his prose, we can turn our attention to some of *The Masses*’ poetry. Two poems in *The Masses* explicitly depict Jesus as a common laborer and labor advocate. The first poem, “A Ballad,” by a poet known simply as “Williams,”

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Gerda Lerner, *“The” Female Experience: An American Documentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 421.

<sup>41</sup> Lindsey Almont, *The Pullman Strike: The Story of a Unique Experiment and of a Great Labor Upheaval* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 218.

<sup>42</sup> Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1997), 128.

<sup>43</sup> Young, “One of Those Damned Agitators,” *The Masses*, (December 1913).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

focuses not on Jesus but on Joseph. "Williams" makes the case that Joseph, the "carpenter stiff" and Nazarene, is "the biggest man in creation."<sup>45</sup> What makes Joseph so admirable is that, even though he knows that the child that Mary will deliver is not his, he is committed to raising it: "God knows what he told th' neighbors/ But he knew it warn't no Ghost/...An' after the years had run,/ Folks tho't no more o' th' gossip/ But called 'im the Carpenter's Son."<sup>46</sup> Here, in emphasizing not just Jesus' humanity but his position within society—illegitimate child, born to a poor family in a manger, and, most importantly for this paper, a carpenter's son—"Williams" depicts Jesus as an ally to those at the bottom of the social pyramid. Within the context of *The Masses*, being an ally takes a very specific form—the support of unionization and the strike. In essence, "Williams" poem makes it clear that Jesus is *not* a boss; he is the illegitimate-but-nonetheless-claimed son of Joseph, the "carpenter stiff."<sup>47</sup> He is one of the countless laborers who realizes that, in the words of Ralph Chaplin's "Solidarity Forever," "we can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old. For the union makes us strong."<sup>48</sup>

The second of these poems, "Comrade Jesus" by Sarah Cleghorn, is much more direct in presenting Jesus as a laborer and union man.<sup>49</sup> Cleghorn's poem again depicts Jesus as a professional agitator who is part of "mass-meetings in Palestine."<sup>50</sup> Here Jesus stands up for the rights of the poor and destitute, identifying strongly with those parts of society that the poem's Pharisees and Sadducees detest:

We knew whose side was spoken for  
When Comrade Jesus had the floor.

Where sore they toil and hard they lie,  
Among the great unwashed, dwell I:

<sup>45</sup> "Williams," "A Ballad," *The Masses*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (January 1916): 13.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ralph Chaplin, "Solidarity Forever," *Songs of the Workers To Fan the Flames of Discontent: The Little Red Songbook*, IWW Booklet, 2005, 4-5.

<sup>49</sup> The language of "comrade" can also be seen in John Richard Brown, *Jesus the Joyous Comrade*, (New York: Association Press, 1911).

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Cleghorn, "Comrade Jesus," *The Masses*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (April 1914): 14.

The tramp, the convict I am he;  
Cold-shoulder him, cold-shoulder me.<sup>51</sup>

Cleghorn's depiction of Jesus as a tramp demands some unpacking. Perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively for present day readers, *The Masses'* leaders would have associated the tramp or hobo with unions. For instance, the IWW had hobos and tramps as members. As a result, one can say that Cleghorn is portraying Jesus as a laborer of sorts.<sup>52</sup> At the very least Jesus of Nazareth is eligible for union membership. Also worthy of note is the anti-Semitism in Cleghorn's "Comrade Jesus." Here Cleghorn makes Pharisees gross caricatures of greedy, oppressive capitalists, uniting nearly two thousand years of Christian anti-Judaism with anti-Semitism and socialist politics.

The message from the abovementioned lines is clear—it is not enough to be a laborer; one must be actively fighting for change through *action*, specifically the type of action embodied by the labor movement. Jesus is not only associated with tramps and convicts, but he advocates for them in "mass-meetings." In effect, the poem makes Jesus an ally of that oft-attacked tactic of early 20<sup>th</sup> century labor—the strike. But the poem's message goes further, and in its final lines makes clear that it is not only action that is endorsed but action within the proper community—the Industrial Workers of the World or "Wobblies":

Ah, let no local him refuse  
Comrade Jesus hath paid his dues  
Whatever other be debarred,  
Comrade Jesus has his *red card*.<sup>53</sup>

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (and today), all IWW members possessed a red card where they would mark their payment of dues through a stamp (Figure 6). When they had done so, they were welcome at all local chapters of the IWW. If Art Young made Jesus a union man, Sarah Cleghorn took it one

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> See: Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Frank Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

<sup>53</sup> Sarah Cleghorn, "Comrade Jesus," *The Masses*, (April 1914).

step further. Jesus has been transformed from a meek and mild carpenter to a class-conscious comrade who refused to be broken by capitalist powers. In a somewhat startling image, the cosmic ruler of the universe is a card-carrying member of the Industrial Workers of the World, and perhaps more importantly, all of his dues are paid. For Sarah Cleghorn and *The Masses*, Jesus is a Wobbly.

Whether in prose or art, the four examples discussed above accomplish similar goals. They downplay or fail to mention any divine qualities of Jesus, emphasize his humanity, highlight his lowly origins or status as laborer, and either implicitly or explicitly cast him as a union member or sympathizer. As such, these four examples represent an explicit deployment of Jesus’ status as *tekton* to make a point, arguing that trade unionism and Christianity are neither incompatible nor competing interests; they have the same goals. For if Christ were around today, *The Masses* posits that not only would he be a member of the carpenter’s union, he would be the union’s president. To the titles “prince of peace,” “king of kings and lord of lords,” and “light of the world,” *The Masses* would add one more—“Jesus Christ, *tekton* and union man.”

### **Wait, Where Did That Come From?: Anti-Semitism in Sarah Leghorn’s “Comrade Jesus”**

While the above discussion of Sarah Cleghorn’s “Comrade Jesus” has principally focused on her portrayal of Jesus, an in-depth analysis of her depiction of Jews is also warranted. In “Comrade Jesus,” a strict dichotomy is set up between the Pharisees, with Caiaphas at their head, and Jesus. Since “We knew whose side was spoken for/ When Comrade Jesus had the floor,” readers can also assume what side was spoken for when Jesus’ enemies, the Pharisees, had the floor.<sup>54</sup> For Cleghorn, the Pharisees speak for the rich, hegemonic powers of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine and the capitalists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, the poem goes further. Cleghorn’s Pharisees are petty slanderers who become indignant when Jesus threatens their power. Indeed, Jews do not appear at this “mass-meeting in Palestine” until Jesus condemns the rich, but then they become livid and kill him, masking their love of

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

power with holy talk:

By Dives' door, with thoughtful eye,  
He did tomorrow prophesy:  
"The Kingdom's gate is low and small:  
The rich can scarce wedge through at all."

"A dangerous man," said Caiaphas,  
"An ignorant demagogue alas.  
Friend of low women, it is he  
Slanders the Upright Pharisee."

For law and order, it was plain,  
For holy Church, he must be slain."<sup>55</sup>

But Cleghorn's Jesus refuses to soil his hands by violence, instead choosing to be free from the "childishness" of the Pharisees.<sup>56</sup> In Cleghorn's eyes, the Pharisees are nothing short of childish brutes, like the contemporary capitalists she abhorred. But from where does this portrayal come—is it merely the same sort of Christian anti-Judaism that one finds in patristic sources or Martin Luther, or is it something different? In my estimation, Cleghorn draws on the undeniably long history of Christian anti-Judaism in her "Comrade Jesus" by making use of the trope of self-righteous Pharisees more concerned with law and order than truth, but she also utilizes a particular brand of economic anti-Semitism common in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century socialist thought.

Of course, economic anti-Semitism has been around far longer than Karl Marx, but it finds a particularly intense and cogent manifestation in his *On the Jewish Question*, which uses economic anti-Semitism to argue somewhat counter-intuitively for the political emancipation of Jews in Germany. In *On the Jewish Question*, Marx contends that the essentialized Jew's true God is money, not YHWH: "What is the secular basis of Judaism? Practical need, self-interest. What is the worldly religion of the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.



Jew? Huckstering. What is his worldly God? Money."<sup>57</sup> Marx then follows this statement with the extremely anti-Semitic contention that "the emancipation of the Jews is the emancipation of mankind from Judaism."<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately, Marx's legacy of anti-Semitism would be carried forward in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by leftists who projected the perceived problems of capitalist society onto Jews, a convenient and unfortunately popular target. Although writing specifically about German Marxists, Olaf Kistenmacher puts it best when he explains, "over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, the traditional anti-Jewish stigmatization was transformed from the 'rich Jews' to the modern conspiracy theory, in which 'Jews' not only were regarded as rich and powerful, but also personified the entire capitalist society."<sup>59</sup> When contributors to *The Masses* like Sarah Cleghorn presented Jews as greedy capitalists intent on destroying a virtuous, socialist Jesus, they were not inventing the wheel anew; they were participating in a long legacy of Marxist critique and Christian anti-Judaism.

While *The Masses'* representation of Jesus represents a convergence of Christian anti-Judaism and Marxist anti-Semitism, it also sheds some light on one of the problems of radical historical Jesus scholarship. Often, in an effort to portray Jesus as a radical, scholars construct an image of an oppressive Judaism to use as a foil for Jesus' liberative message. Amy-Jill Levine talks at length about this problem in her book *The Misunderstood Jew*. For Levine, the problem has never been using biblical texts to depict Jesus in a liberative manner, since "the biblical material has always been (and should continue to be) used to promote a more just society."<sup>60</sup> The problem is that this approach can easily descend into anti-Semitic portrayals of "the Jews:"

If Jesus preaches good news to the poor, so the common impression goes, "the Jews" must be

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<sup>57</sup> Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," Ed. Andy Blunden, et al., 2010, 19.

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/On%20The%20Jewish%20Question.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Olaf Kistenmacher, "From 'Judas' to 'Jewish Captial': Antisemitic Forms of Thought in German Communist Party (KPD) in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1933," *Engage Journal*, Issue 2, May 2006.

<sup>60</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: :HarperCollins, 2006), 9.

preaching good news to the rich. If Jesus welcomes sinners, “the Jews” must have pushed them away. If Jesus speaks to or heals women, “the Jews” must have set up a patriarchal society that makes the Taliban look progressive.<sup>61</sup>

And so Levine demonstrates that *The Masses*’ problematic representations of Judaism are not the sole purview of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Marxists—they unfortunately continue to be a major issue in progressive historical Jesus scholarship to this day. Good, liberative intentions can only take one so far. Over a century after *The Masses* first began publishing, the situation has not improved nearly as much as one would like. But the question remains: can one take *The Masses*’ image of a union-Jesus seriously? This is precisely the discussion I would like to turn to in the following pages.

### **But is There a Place for *The Masses*’ Jesus at the Inn?: Historical Jesus Debates**

One thing is certain: *The Masses* is not interested in obscuring its political aims. Due to the magazine’s directness, *The Masses*’ deployment of Jesus’ profession constitutes a unique insight into the political and theological stakes inherent in Jesus’ profession. For whether Jesus is a lowly carpenter, wandering hobo, or skilled artisan *matters*, and this fact does not escape *The Masses*’ contributors. The magazine constructs from Gospel sources a radical, socialist, Wobbly-Jesus precisely because their constituency and their social project demand it. Jesus appears in *The Masses* as a Wobbly because that is the Christological form that the magazine imagines for him. Of course, he was not a member of the Industrial Workers of the World in first century Palestine—that would be impossible. Rather, that is the form he would take in the present moment—the ideal *tekton* is, of course, a union man. A wealthy, skilled artisan is unimaginable in *The Masses*’ consciousness because such a Jesus would naturally ally himself, not with workers struggling to gain respect and rights, but with the bosses.

But how does one handle this explicit projection of *The Masses*’ desires and social location onto Jesus? Is it simply an intriguing historical artifact from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, or does it have something to add to current historical Jesus scholarship? How one chooses to answer this question

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 9

gets to the very heart of the historical Jesus project’s goals. For if one believes that the purpose of historical Jesus scholarship is to objectively portray Jesus without projecting anything onto him, then *The Masses’* Jesus is at best ludicrous, and at worst a grotesque twisting of Jesus’ message for blatantly political aims.

In placing an emphasis on objectivity, one is joined by the likes of Albert Schweitzer, whose biting critique of 19<sup>th</sup> century Jesus scholarship rings true still today: “But it was not only each epoch that found its reflection in Jesus; each individual created Him in accordance with his own character. There is no historical task which so reveals a man’s true self as the writing of a Life of Jesus.”<sup>62</sup> More recently, John Dominic Crossan articulated a similar view, contending “it is impossible to avoid the suspicion that historical Jesus research is a very safe place...to do autobiography and call it biography.”<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, in one of the most bizarre dialogues ever recorded in modern scholarship, Crossan contends “the historical Jesus is speaking to me” and that he, predictably, approves of Crossan’s *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*:

“I’ve read your book, Dominic, and it’s quite good. So now you’re ready to live by my vision and join me in my program?”

“I don’t think I have the courage, Jesus, but I did describe it quite well, didn’t I, and the method was especially good wasn’t it?”

“Thank you, Dominic, for not falsifying the message to suit your own incapacity. That at least is something.”<sup>64</sup>

For Crossan, it is possible to avoid “falsifying the message” of Jesus and to accurately depict the life of a man who lived two thousand years ago without bias, and, even more importantly, any depictions of

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<sup>62</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Mineola, NY: Dover Books, 2005), 4.

<sup>63</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: the Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), xxviii.

<sup>64</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus a Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), XIV.

Jesus that depart from his own are biased.<sup>65</sup> Here, there is no room for *The Masses'* Wobbly-Jesus at the inn.

Thankfully, this is not the only way to conceive of the task of historical Jesus scholarship. From the start, this latest quest for the historical Jesus has posited multiple answers to Jesus question, “who do you say that I am.” For Crossan, “that stunning diversity is an academic *embarrassment*.”<sup>66</sup> But for others, most notably Kwok Pui-lan, the opposite is true; the multiplicity of opinions about Jesus is a great asset, not a liability, and certainly not an embarrassment. For Pui-lan, “there is no original or privileged understanding of Christ...that can be claimed as pure and foundational, not subject to the limitations of culture and history. It is a futile exercise to search for the ‘real’ or historical Jesus.”<sup>67</sup> For all Crossan and the Jesus seminar’s impressive talk, there is no pristine, untouched Jesus to get back to; what we have is interpretation, not fact. Quoting George Soares-Prabhu, a biblical scholar from India, Pui-lan asserts that the multiplicity of Jesus’ representations is only natural, since “every community evolves its own understanding of Jesus responding to its own cry for life.”<sup>68</sup> As a result, she suggests using “can you guess how many different names Jesus has in the world?” as a starting point for thinking about Jesus.<sup>69</sup> Where the Jesus Seminar used colored balls to indicate statements about Jesus they thought were true, Pui-lan advocates a different kind of approach, one that brings “decentered, diasporic, Third world, Jewish, black, gay and lesbian, immigrant, [and] brown-skinned women’s perspectives” into the conversation.<sup>70</sup> For Pui-lan, *The Masses'* Wobbly-Jesus takes its place between Corn Mother and Shakti-Jesus as an authentic depiction, and the quest for a positivistic or “real” historical Jesus is, in effect, done away with.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxviii-xxix: “the plurality is enough to underline the problem...it seems we have as many pictures as we have exegetes.”

<sup>67</sup> Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 182.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>69</sup> Kwok Pui-Lan, “On Color-Coding Jesus: An Interview with Kwok Pui-lan,” in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 187.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 186

If one adopts Pui-lan’s model, as I am advocating, then the quest for the historical Jesus is over. Here Pui-lan and Michael Bird, two scholars who disagree on many accounts, come together; they both agree on the theologization of the quest for the historical Jesus. For, as Michael Bird puts it, “the historical Jesus is not the ‘real’ Jesus. The search is for the reconstruction of Jesus...the picture of Jesus that emerges from the application of historical tools.”<sup>71</sup> If scholars are no longer chasing after a “real” Jesus, then the type of historical Jesus research that seems most appropriate is overtly theological: “historical Jesus study is a form of narrative theology whereby the Jesus story is explored in relation to the Christian belief-mosaic that it generated.”<sup>72</sup> After all, whether scholars explicitly admit it or not, “the history of Jesus emits far-reaching theological significance,” and it seems both unwise and deceptive to ignore how historical Jesus scholarship impacts and is shaped by theology.<sup>73</sup> In essence, I am calling for historical Jesus scholarship to be honest about both the type of theological and social impact it is trying to create, and the ways that it continues to be shaped by scholars’ social location and theological presuppositions. This would require figures like Crossan to drop the pretense of objectivity and embrace that *his* Jesus is a peasant-cynic precisely because this is the Jesus that speaks to his theological and social location and the type of world, both theologically and socially, he is attempting to create. *The Masses’* Jesus represents just the type of scholarship that I am advocating for; it is honest about the type of Jesus it is depicting and *why* it is doing so.

But where does that leave those interested in Jesus the person—are they to simply accept every model for the historical Jesus that gets proposed on the grounds that all are equally valid? Bird puts the perceived problem with pluriformity like this: “texts can be used to sculpt a masterpiece or create a monster, and there is no longer any critical basis to call one a beauty and the other an abomination since such readings are self-authenticating and there is no authorial-textual magistrate to render

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<sup>71</sup> Michel Bird, “The Peril of Modernizing Jesus and the Crisis of Not Contemporizing Christ,” EQ 78.4, (2006): 306.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.



judgment.”<sup>74</sup> To put it bluntly, this objection is overplayed. While embracing multiplicity may leave scholars without the false security of objectivity, I do think that there are two criteria one can use to discern which models for Jesus are at least relatively better than others. The first is historical feasibility—how likely is it that this model represents historical reality? The second is functional significance—what does this model for Jesus *do*? What communities does it impact, and how? More specifically, I draw on Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* when formulating this second criterion. In this work, Fiorenza reformulates Patricia Hill Collins’ framework for analyzing social theory into three epistemological questions that “must be asked” when considering historical Jesus scholarship.<sup>75</sup> One of these questions serves as the second criterion’s driving force: “does this social theory equip people to resist oppression, and is it functional as a tool of social transformation?”<sup>76</sup>

For instance, while it might be low-hanging fruit, one can use these two criteria to reject the Aryan Jesus proposed by Nazi theologians. The Aryan Jesus fails on both counts: it is not historically plausible that Jesus was the descendant of a Viking clan, and, more importantly, the Aryan Jesus is the theological weapon of anti-Semitism in its most overt form—its goal is violence and destruction. But it is more interesting to apply these two criteria to another claim about the historical Jesus that centers on his profession and social class, but comes to a different conclusion than *The Masses*—American prosperity gospel theology. Prosperity gospel theologians claim that Jesus was “constantly in a state of wealth,” and they simultaneously posit what that means for their followers: “God wants his [sic] followers to be rich.”<sup>77</sup> Surely one can say that this model for Jesus is neither historically plausible (Jesus certainly does not seem to be wealthy), nor does it have the social impact that one wishes to see

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2000), 25.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> John Blake, “Passions Over ‘Prosperity Gospel’: Was Jesus Wealthy?” December 25, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/wayoflife/12/25/RichJesus/index.html>

in the world. It merely reinforces capitalist hegemony and subjugates the poor by telling them that Jesus could have never been one of them, since “the rich will never follow the poor.”<sup>78</sup> By contrast, *The Masses*’ Jesus fares well on both counts. The magazine consistently portrays Jesus as a “workingman,” tramp, or carpenter, which is in line with the historical resources at our disposal, and uses Jesus’ profession to “equip people to resist oppression” and transform the world.<sup>79</sup> Where it begins to get in trouble, however, is in recapitulating anti-Semitic images of Pharisees and Sadducees. While on the whole *The Masses* does a good job of making their Jesus a “tool of social transformation,” here they come up short.

In the end, *The Masses*’ use of Jesus’ profession to rally support for their socialist politics is an honest endeavor—*The Masses* is uninterested in claiming objectivity. As such, *The Masses*’ depiction of Jesus as “workingman” and Wobbly demonstrates in a vivid, exciting way the political and theological impact of historical Jesus scholarship. But *The Masses*’ portrayal of Jesus can also serve as both a challenge to contemporary Jesus scholarship and a touchstone for creating new standards for what constitutes “good” historical Jesus scholarship. Drawing on the work of Pui-lan and Bird, I have suggested that there is no “real” Jesus to be found in scholarship. Instead, scholars have only models for Jesus, some of which are better than others. It is my contention that one should take *The Masses*’ portrayal of Jesus as seriously as one might take Dominic Crossan, Luke Timothy Johnson, or Holland Lee Hendrix’s representations of Jesus and his profession. In fact, one *must* do so, for *The Masses*’ Jesus constitutes the epitome of “good” historical Jesus scholarship—it is liberative, honest, and historically grounded. But taking *The Masses*’ Jesus seriously also means turning a critical eye towards it, and while there is much good in *The Masses*’ portrayal of Jesus, in some of the texts there is a convergence of socialist politics, anti-Semitism, radical historical Jesus scholarship, and Christian anti-Judaism. This cannot be swept under the proverbial rug, and, if one applies the criterion of functional

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, 25.

significance to this specific instance, *The Masses* would certainly fail. But, on the whole, *The Masses'* Jesus does not fail that criterion—it uses historically grounded scholarship about Jesus to equip the proletariat to do battle with Mammon. Moreover, as this paper has discussed, one would be hard pressed to find liberative historical Jesus scholarship that is perfect. The point here is that those interested in the historical Jesus should take the liberation of *The Masses'* Jesus, while also critiquing its faults. If we are willing to do so, then we might find that, almost a century later, the Wobbly-Jesus leads us forward.

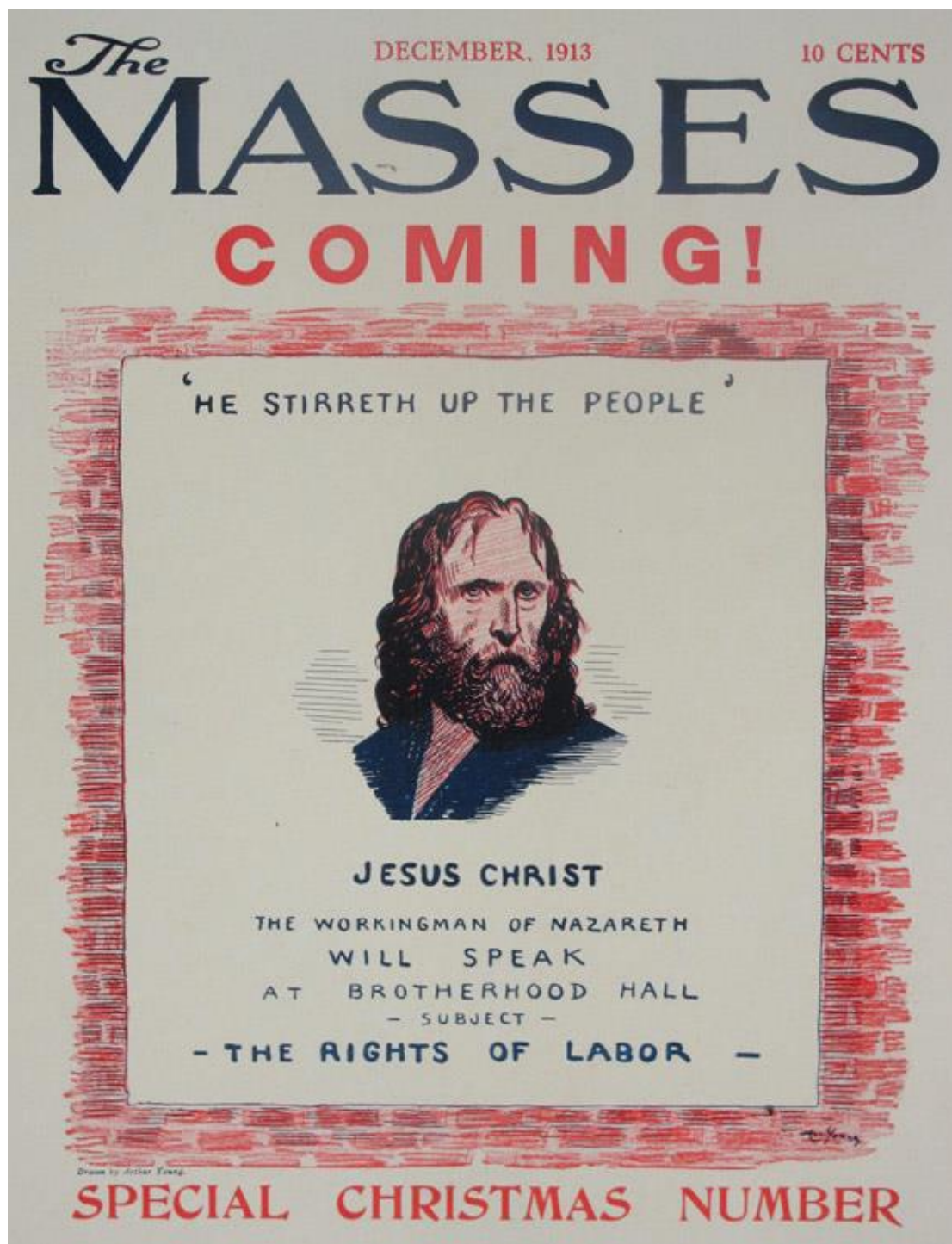
## LIST OF FIGURES



### Poisoned at the Source

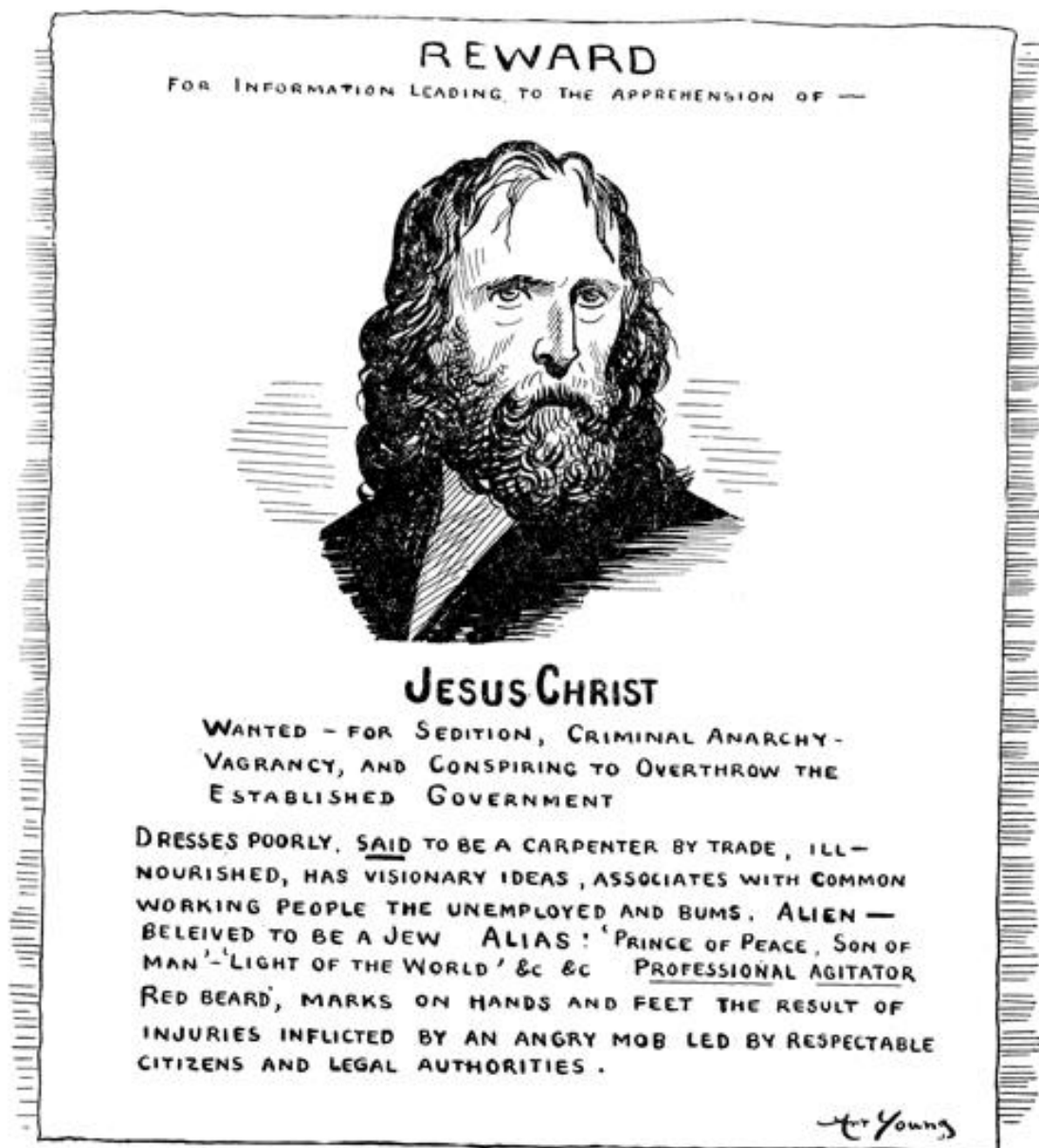
Figure 1<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Art Young, "Poisoned at the Source," *The Masses*, July 1913.

Figure 1<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Art Young, "He Stirreth Up the People." *The Masses*, December 1913, Cover Image.

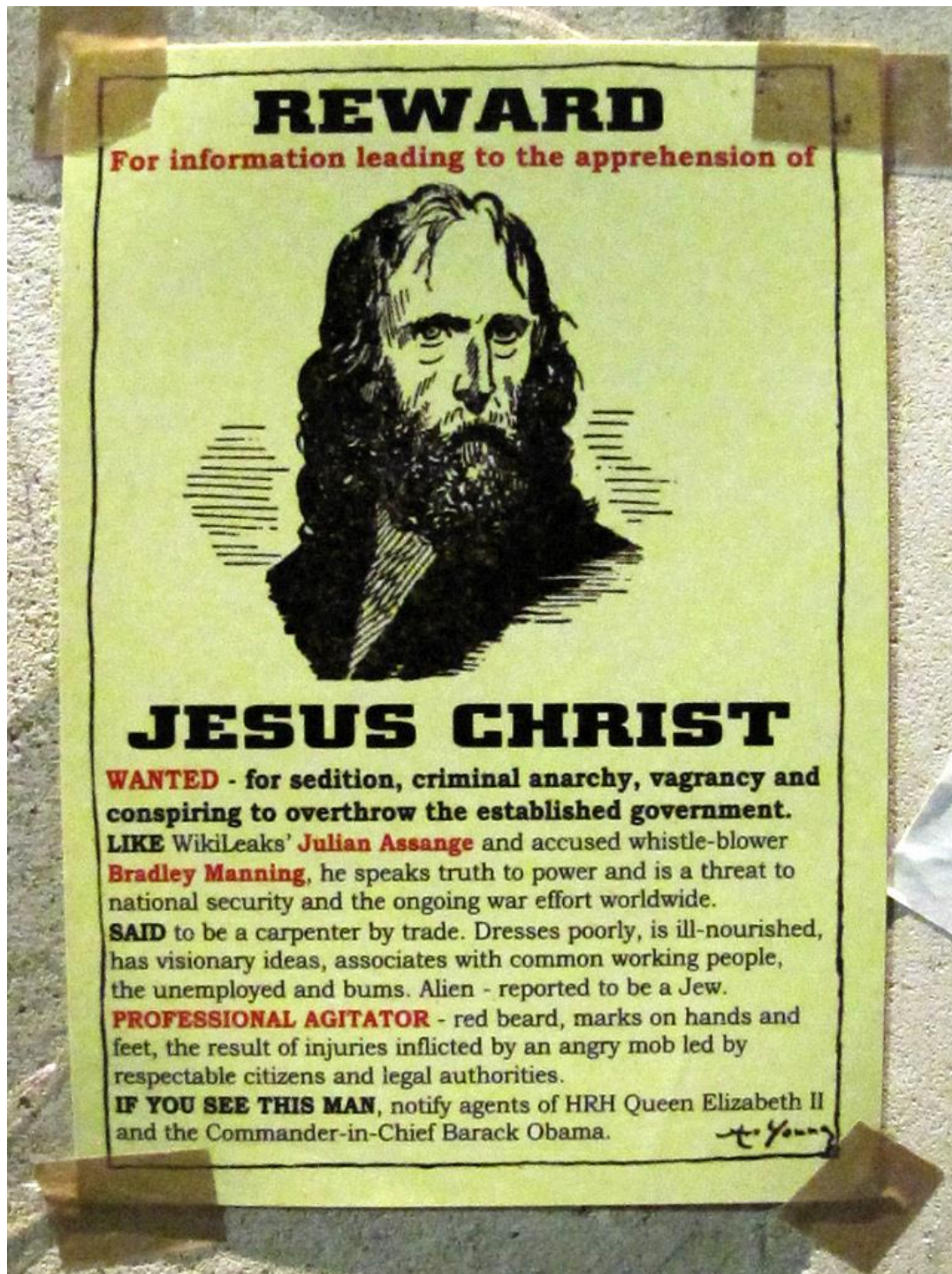




Arrest This Man

Figure 2<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Art Young "Reward for Information Leading to the Apprehension of." *Good Morning*, Vol. 3, No. 10, August 1921.

Figure 3<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Duncan C., "Reward for Information Leading to the Apprehension of Jesus Christ," Dec. 6, 2011. [www.flickr.com/photos/duncan/6468224547/in/photostream/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/duncan/6468224547/in/photostream/)



<sup>5</sup> "The Strike Has Failed." *The Pittsburg Chronicle*, October 6, 1919.

Figure 4<sup>5</sup>



*Dillon Miner* Union No. *189*  
 Member's Name *Walter Kirkpatrick*  
 Book issued for year ending *Dec-31-07*

Ledger *A* Page *209*  
 When admitted *March 13-07*  
 by *J H Glazier* Fin'l Sec'y

JANUARY	FEBRUARY
<i>June 19-07</i> <i>J H Glazier</i>	<i>June 19-07</i> <i>J H Glazier</i>
<i>April 10-07</i> <i>J H Glazier</i>	<i>June 19-07</i> <i>J H Glazier</i>
<i>April 10-07</i> <i>J H Glazier</i>	<i>June 19-07</i> <i>J H Glazier</i>
<i>April 10-07</i> <i>J H Glazier</i>	<i>June 19-07</i> <i>J H Glazier</i>

Assessment No. *April*  
 Assessment No. \_\_\_\_\_

When paid *4/10-07*  
 When paid \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 5<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>"Membership Card of the Mining Department of the IWW," 1907 Image.

<http://www.workerseducation.org/crutch/graphics/const/wfmcardin.jpg>

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## ‡ SYMBOLISM IN ASIAN STATUES OF THE BUDDHA ‡

Art may have either a literal or a symbolic function; it may depict real people and places, or deified persons who are represented symbolically. Iconography—the correlation between representational characteristics and otherworldly concepts—is like a code. When the semiotics of the art is studied, deeper meaning can be excavated. Mircea Eliade notes with insight, “The iconography of the Buddha...has been transported from his human condition”<sup>1</sup> and into his spiritual hypostasis.

In Asian statues of the Buddha, each part of the statue is highly symbolic and contains physical articulations of religious ideals. In the creation of such statues, the artist is cognizant of the deeply metaphorical nuances she has created. These sculptures are done with the intention that devotees will enhance their understanding of enlightenment through the viewing and internalizing the meaning of the Buddha.

In surveying the diverse statues of the Buddha from across Asia, certain repetitious themes appear, such as the ways in which the head and parts of the head, the hands in their *mudras*, the legs of the Buddha—be it seated or standing—and the accouterments that surround the Enlightened One are created to serve a heuristic function for the devotee. Since iconography is a universal language, the artistic depictions of statues of the Buddha translate across nation and dialect. The great consistency allows meaning to be centralized to the unchangeable location of the statue itself, instead of contextualized to the country of origin or display. Once these aspects of Buddhist art are understood, additional insight into the account of Siddhartha and the way of the Buddha can be more readily assimilated into Buddhist practice.

### Envisioning the Absolute: the Head and Face

The head of the Enlightened One contains many aspects that are symbolic of the nature and actions of the Buddha. In such statues, although the head contains ordinary human aspects such as the

<sup>1</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 61, 63.

hair, eyes, and ears, the deeper meaning bursts forth from statues to reveal the narrative of Siddhartha Gautama as superficial perceptions give way to a rich spiritual tradition. Within the artistic medium of the statue, the hair, *bindu*, and ears all function on a realistic and a stylistic-representational level.

Beginning visually at the pinnacle of a Buddha statue, one will observe the hair. Although this natural part of the body is unassuming, the hair in statues of the Buddha reveals the stage of the quest for enlightenment: long hair is related to the imperial man Siddhartha, and short hair corresponds to the renunciation of wealth and decadence. But there are varieties within these two hairstyles as well. The *urna* and the curls of the Buddha also have meaning in iconography.

The story of the princely Siddhartha begins in the palace, with a young man sheltered from the tribulations of the world. As a standard aesthetic, long hair, or *ushnisha*, would be the style the adolescent prince would have worn fastened on top of his head. This topknot, which is etymologically related to the word “turban,” recalls the embryonic stages of Buddha’s quest for enlightenment whereby he was still trapped in a royal and unenlightened lifestyle [see Figure 1].<sup>2</sup> The hair that was a part of the Buddha for the duration of his life was characteristic of decadence and a painless existence. Yet the long princely hair is not the only way one might recognize the stately Buddha.

Perhaps foreshadowing the imminent enlightenment, the *urna*—one single curl—on the forehead is used in conjunction with the hair atop the head to add the aspect of super-intelligence.<sup>3</sup> The *urna* represents wisdom to the devotee and confirms that the Four Noble Truths and the Eight Fold Path could only be realized by one who exudes a supernatural wisdom. With the *maha-abhiniskramana*, or great departure from his father’s palace, the *ushnisha* and *urna* disappear, just as decadence is left behind and asceticism calls to the young prince.

Enthralled by the ascetic life and dismayed by the suffering of the world beyond his regal gates, Siddhartha flees from the security of the palace and determines to follow a life of deprivation in

<sup>2</sup> Albert C. Moore, *Iconography of Religions: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997), 150.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

aspirations of achieving *moksha* or liberation from *samsara*. The first step in this new direction was to chop off his handsome, long locks of hair.<sup>4</sup> The shearing of this symbol of power was a drastic divorce from a life of delicacy to an existence of difficult deprivation and meditation.

Legend states that after the Buddha decided to lop off his mane with a sword, the hair curled tightly around his head at two fingers breadth in length; it stayed that way permanently, along with his equal length beard. It is said he never had to trim his hair or beard again.<sup>5</sup> Although most statues of the Buddha do not picture him with a beard, the short, curly hair is readily identifiable [see Figure 2] and the peppercorn hairstyle is always indicative of the Buddha after his departure. Whereas the long hair on top of the Buddha's head depicts the moments prior to his sojourn into enlightenment, his short hair represents his foray into asceticism. In addition to hair, features of the faces of the Buddha in Asian statues also uncover symbolism.

As the story of the quest for enlightenment unfurls, devotees learn that neither the life of luxury nor the mendicant lifestyle would engender enlightenment. Rather, the Middle Way was the true path to Nirvana. The meditation that was necessary for this realization manifest in the statues of the Buddha through accessories of the Buddha's face. The *bindu* on his forehead and his elongated ears both have distinct roles in the representational qualities of the Buddha.

A teardrop shaped bump in the middle of the forehead is one of the most recognizable features of Buddhist statues [see Figures 2 and 4]. The *bindu* is placed where the third eye is, in the center of the forehead, symmetrically above the actual eyes. When the *bindu* is positioned on the Buddha, it demonstrates the Absolute being imagined by the dot or as a vanishing point. The meditative visualizing of the Absolute—which maintains and sustains the material world—cannot actually be depicted because it is beyond time and space. The Absolute must only be contemplated and its invisibility considered. To add a *bindu* to the face of the Buddha is to imply intense deliberation on the

<sup>4</sup> Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (Washington D.C.: Bollinger Foundation, 1946), 161.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

unfathomable.<sup>6</sup> This utilization of a small artistic addition to sculptures of the Buddha compounds the symbolism in a drastic way by adding spiritual depth.

Another striking formation of sculptures of the Buddha is the unnaturally long and droopy ears [see Figure 1]. The ears, which were stretched, represent the nobility of the Buddha before he avowed to find the passageway to enlightenment. Gautama's princely circumstance were conducive to affluence; with this wealth came jewels, which, when worn in the ears as earrings, stretched the lobes of the ears out and down because of their weight.<sup>7</sup> The utterly physical, yet enormously symbolic ears on the Buddha statues—recognizable by their protracted, hanging lobes—reveals a deeply human truth: people may reinvent themselves into compassionate beings, yet they remain tied to their past. Even as the path to Nirvana is undertaken, some small visage of the former life may remain but does not have to define Being.

Depicting the Buddha with protracted earlobes signifies the hopes of transformation. The Buddha was a prince with great prosperity who lived a life of opulence, without enlightenment. Once he had forsaken his former life, including the accessories he would have been accustomed to in and on his body, and began meditating unto enlightenment, his corporeal existence still bore the marks of a life lived in darkness—the ears that had been stretched by the jewels.

Contained within the sculpted head of the Buddha are many indications of the ontological morphology of one man who achieved the highest state. Through the various stages of his hair and the additions to his face and ears, a disciple could take solace in an objective achieved and conjecture an appropriate approach to following the Buddha. In the same way, the arms, hands, and fingers of the Buddhist statues are important for elucidation of the Buddha's life and taught principles. Signs of the body and arms are semiotic: when a certain motion is made, a corresponding emotion or idea is evoked.

### **Gestures of Compassion: the Hands**

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>7</sup> Moore, *Iconography of Religions*, 150.

Because the Buddha remained on earth as a Bodhisattva, he is limited to a human body. Yet because of his enlightened status, he is also beyond mere human posing. In Asian statues of the Buddha, the hands signify a higher spiritual meaning. Among the various ways to depict the hands of the Buddha, the use of *mudras* contextualizes the Buddha and his teachings. “The enormously formalized and cultivated language of gesture, in which the worshipper might read not only the special powers and attributes of the god, but also the particular ecstatic mood that the deity personified” is the role of *mudras* in statues of the Buddha.<sup>8</sup> These *mudras* are a development of the meditative Buddha in his quest for enlightenment and the responsibility that came with his amassed insight. While there are variations on the hand *mudras*, six basic types dominate artistic depictions of the Buddha.

The *Dhyana-mudra* depicts concentration in yogic meditation, where the hands are positioned palms up, with one hand inside the other, so the fingers overlap and the thumbs are just touching. The hands are resting on the lap. This arrangement signifies not only the way the Siddhartha was situated when he was meditating for many days, it is also a position still used by yogis and those meditating. The thumbs circulate energy as a closed system and the practitioner is able to focus on non-attachment with their hands in a resting pose.

Once this meditation has achieved enlightenment, the *Bhuumisparsha-mudra* is used, with the right hand hanging over the right knee, touching the ground [see Figures 1 and 2]. The hand touches the ground in attestation of the attainment of Nirvana. After the long meditation, Gautama beckoned the earth as a witness to his awesome achievement by touching the firmament with his hand (*Bhuumisparsha-mudra*) from the position of meditation he was seated in.<sup>9</sup> When this gesture is recreated in iconography, it confirms the accomplishment of the Buddha and possibility for those seeking the release of *samsara*.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1967), 197.

<sup>9</sup> Moore, *Iconography of Religions*, 150-151.

Upon achieving enlightenment, the Buddha may then teach the *Dharma*, or eternal law. The *Dharmachakra-mudra* shows the Buddha turning the wheel of the *Dharma*. His fingers imitate a circle and his forefinger and thumb connect in an enclosure on both hands. These two wheels touch at the intersection of all four nails on the four fingers emulating the infinite line that has no beginning and no end: the circle. The hands are raised to chest height, with one hand pointing up while the other, with palm up, is parallel to the ground. In this manner, it appears as if a wheel is turning, giving the illusion of continuity. The noble teacher shares his insight with his followers and beckons them to come and learn; this gesture has come to stand for the first preaching at Sarnath.<sup>10</sup>

After the laws are taught, the Buddha stands and invites devotees to learn the Four Noble Truths. A very important gesture for the intellectualization of Buddha's quest is the *Vitarka-mudra*, which has usually the left hand palm towards the audience and fingers pointing skyward, while the other palm is facing the audience, but the fingers are pointing down [see Figure 3]. This *mudra* is symbolic of explaining and expressing *Dharma*. The left hand facing up is a symbol of peace—an open palm that bears no ill intent. The right hand facing down is a motion of bestowal—the *Dharma* can be given to those who seek it. In an almost mirror image positioning, the *Abhaya-mudra*, the right hand is held with the palm towards the audience and the fingers towards the sky while the fingers on the left hand point towards the ground [see Figure 4]. To followers of Buddha, this *mudra* equates to protection, reassurance, and serenity. It is the most common of all the gestures in iconography of the Buddha.<sup>11</sup>

From here, the statues of the Buddha may be placed with both hands emphasizing blessing or both hands emphasizing endowment. If the former is the object of the artist's desires, than both hands will be fashioned facing up, palms towards the audience [see Figure 5]. Other religions, such as Christianity, also depict saints or other religious figures in the same gesture of benediction. When the

<sup>10</sup> Rowland, *Art and Architecture*, 93.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

intent is of the latter sort and giving is the main emphasis, the *Vara-mudra* will be shown with both hands facing downward and the palms towards the followers.<sup>12</sup> This position is representative of compassionate allowance of favors and fulfillment of vows.

All six of the most commonly observed *mudras* have their own connotations. The range of meanings in Buddhist statues would be seriously diminished if even one *mudra* were not utilized. Although the function of the *mudra* originated in the Hindu tradition and they are apparent in pan-Asian features of Buddhist art, the symbolism of the meditative (*Dhyana*) and teaching (*Dharmachakra*) *mudras* are distinctly Buddhist, demonstrating to the onlooker of the statue an essential aspect of the instructions of the Buddha.<sup>13</sup>

### **Meditation: the Body, Legs, and Feet**

Moving visually from the head to the hands, the devotee, now inspired by such concepts as the Absolute and divine compassion, seeks to understand the orator Buddha. Both the seated and the standing Buddha represent correlative aspects of the mission of the One who remained on earth so others may achieve enlightenment. The seated Gautama is deep in contemplation; thus he has either begun to meditate, or has just achieved enlightenment. The actual phase of his meditation must be determined by other indications of the statues, such as *mudras*. Once enlightenment has been achieved, the Buddha arises and travels to preach the Four Noble Truths to fellow human creatures, indicating a sojourn of kindness. Both the sitting and the standing Buddha have much to disclose to the iconodule.

In the most common statues of the Buddha, he is seen in a seated position—perhaps because seeking enlightenment through meditation was the fulcrum for the Buddhist tradition, and the achievement of Nirvana was attained while seated. When the Buddha is placed in the meditative lotus position, his legs are crossed and both soles of his feet are upturned and revealed. The contemplative posture is an ancient yogic position [see Figures 1 and 2], symbolic of the perfectly trained body and

<sup>12</sup> Moore, *Iconography of Religions*, 150-151.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



breath which enables the contortion of oneself into an uncommon position. In the lotus pose, the back is straight, but not rigid, and the legs are closely locked. The knees and buttocks form a tight triangular base that is much sturdier than if one crossed their legs in the Western fashion. In the lotus position, the body has three contact points; in the Western position, only the buttocks and locked ankles are in contact with the ground. Thus the ancient lotus pose has both physiological and religious components.

Contemplation is the conduit through which the Buddha achieved Nirvana, and it is the position that is still used for meditation. The Buddha, as an example to all, is shown meditating as a guide for the followers. It is interesting to note that although the yogic meditation position is highly symbolic of the achievement of enlightenment, sometimes the statue was carved in this manner for the sake of convenience. For example, in Ceylon statues of the Buddha in the lotus position from the early Singhalese period were often depicted sitting because the granulites did not allow for much fine detailing or spaces that would support a standing Buddha.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the seated Buddha's significance is not diminished, for it is this position that the Buddha preaches his first sermon.

One will notice that although the legs are piled atop each other, the feet are visible and turned up towards the sky. This too, has meaning. In these vestiges, much can be deduced about the circumstances of the Buddha by looking at the artist's rendition of his feet. The Buddha's feet, both by statue or by a hollow depression in the ground, are important to the Buddhist tradition. In statues where the Buddha is seated in the lotus position, though the feet are exposed, they are not a means of shame even though feet are vehicles of the body and suffer much wear. Indeed, the feet of the Buddha are holy—once he untangles his body and places his feet on the ground, Siddhartha is prepared to begin his preaching.

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<sup>14</sup> Rowland, *Art and Architecture*, 219.

Traveling through countries and liberating the people from hindering notions of attachment caused Buddhism to flourish. In fact, most nations that revere the Enlightened One make claim to the impression of the Buddha's feet, either by a depression or imprint in stone or by aggrandized sculptures of his feet.<sup>15</sup> These markings are kept in shrines and placed next to relics. The synecdoche of the feet and impression that the Buddha has walked and preached in a certain spot is as much a reminder of the goal of enlightenment as an actual statue. In one other depiction of note, when Gautama is standing the bottoms of his feet are concealed [see Figure 4], yet in one slight variation there is the walking Buddha, where one foot is raised from the ground, implying motion.<sup>16</sup> Both the standing and walking Buddha are symbolic to the observer and conjure strong feelings of regard to the devotee.

Chronologically, as the Buddha moves from the long period of seated meditation to the realization of Nirvana, he then takes his place as a Bodhisattva who aids others in the journey to enlightenment. This is done through teaching, traveling, and preaching. It is no surprise, then, that there are many perpendicular statues of the Buddha. Beyond this functional use of immortalizing the migratory Buddha is the deeper reading of lifestyle that may be gleaned from the statues.

One of the most striking differences of the standing Buddha is that the figure and shape of his body are revealed because he is elongated rather than seated. In statues, the form of the Enlightened One is always made with fluidity and is identifiable by "the smoothly round attenuation of body and limbs and in the way that the drapery entirely reveals the form beneath."<sup>17</sup> The drapery, of course, is simple the robe he would have been wearing on his passage to illumination. In typical ascetic style, the right shoulder is often exposed, showing Buddha's commitment to realize enlightenment through forgoing worldly gratification. The minimal raiment that the standing Buddha displays is

<sup>15</sup> Moore, *Iconography of Religions*, 144.

<sup>16</sup> Simone Gaulier, Robert Jera-Bezard, and Monique Maillard, *Buddhism in Afghanistan and Central Asia*, 2 vol. *Iconography of Religions* XIII, 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Rowland, *Art and Architecture*, 143.

representational of a simple life without the encumbrance of fashion to dictate social status or the need of protection from the elements—the fierce sun, bitter snow, or whipping wind. Also, as clothing may conceal flaws of the body, the well-trained Buddha has nothing to hide as he has been subjugating his body to his will.

When the Buddha is standing, his torso—the center of his body—is often revealed. If the robe only covers his lower extremities, the chest and waist are revealed and the itinerant is depicted as lean and athletic. The wiry frame would be typical of one who, giving up comforts like excess food, found himself delicately formed and lithe. Often the body will be shown tilted from the hips, implying action.<sup>18</sup> The energetic motion of the Buddha with the torso moving on the axis of the hips may depict the motion of preaching—also a lively activity.

The position of the body—seated or standing—along with the feet of the Buddha have great representational meaning, especially when viewed in conjunction with the head, face, and hands of Siddhartha. Yet symbolism in Asian statues of the Buddha is not limited to his physical body. Other creatures, flora, and ornamentation accompany the Buddha. These also reveal important stories and lessons from the life of Gautama.

### **The Perfect Buddha Mind: Accouterments**

The Buddha taken as a whole is sublime, yet the particular aspects of the Buddhist statues such as head, arms, and legs are likewise illustrative to the iconographer. Garnishes surrounding the Buddha—like the flora, fauna, and accessories incorporated into sculptures of the Buddha such as the snake, lotus, halo, and Bodhi tree—are widely recognizable and highly figurative in Buddhist statues. These additions to Buddhist statues reveal a further dimension to the story of the prince Siddhartha, his journey to enlightenment, and the path to Nirvana. Without the addition of the aforementioned

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 157.

accoutrements to the statues of the Buddha, the story of Gautama would not be as full and the symbolism not as rich.

Otherworldly apparitions may appear in various forms, but when serpents are depicted in Buddhist art they represent the life-force completing the cycle of life, i.e. birth, death, and rebirth. A snake sheds its skin in a type of death, yet remains the same snake. When they slither out of their old body, they emerge reborn, a new being, yet with a vestige of the old. When the serpent image is harmonized with the Buddha, the snake emerges as the protector, guardian, and defender as well as the being of renovation. The crux of Buddhism lies in the enlightenment. Had the Buddha not attained this perfection, there would be no Buddhism; had supernatural forces not been watching over Gautama, the path to illumination may never have been found.

Legend tells that prior to the Buddha's enlightenment, he went through a series of meditations, each a week long and under a different tree. While under the third tree, he came upon the abode of the serpent king Muchalinda [see Figure 6]. The benevolent snake-ruler perceived that once Gautama had entered a state of blissful ecstasy, a squall approached and the Enlightened One was in peril. In response, the protective serpent king coiled himself around the Buddha seven times. Upon the cessation of the storm, Muchalinda unwound himself and became a youth.<sup>19</sup> Had it not been for the refuge of the snake, the Enlightened One may have been injured or fallen ill; therefore Muchalinda became immortalized in Buddhist art as a protector. In addition to the snake, the tree appears as an aspect of the natural world which has emerged in Asian statues of the Buddha. Like the snake, the tree is more than what it appears to be.

Of all the accessories the Buddha is depicted with, perhaps the Bodhi tree is the most significant. The Bodhi tree has a special place in the corpus of Buddhist imagery, as it is the location where the Buddha was sitting upon achieving his enlightenment, and it represents both his mental

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<sup>19</sup> Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols*, 67.

state and his enlightened mind.<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that the ordinary tree would have no mystical representation alone, but when placed within the context of Buddhist art, it becomes an indicator of the divine place in which the Buddha had his moment that spawned enlightenment.

Yet the mere appearance of the Bodhi tree is not suggestive of the Buddha in a post-enlightened state if the other symbolic aspects of the statues do not also point to the attainment of Nirvana. That is, the *mudras* are the definitive declaration on the station to the path of enlightenment of the Buddha—either before, during, or following his illumination. Whereas a Bodhi tree with a long haired Buddha in the meditative posture denotes the quest for illumination, the tree with the Buddha beckoning the earth as witness conveys the moment of enlightenment, and the Bodhi with the Buddha in the preaching gesture (*Vitarka-mudra*) assures the viewers that the Dharma is elucidated. The tree therefore is secondary in terms of symbolism to the construction of the person of the Buddha.

Various aspects of nature are important to Buddhism, and the depictions of trees as well as flowers reinforce the connection to nature, *ahimsa* [non-violence], and the story of the Buddha. The *Padma*, or lotus flowers, are one of the more familiar aspects of Buddhist sculptures depicting Gautama [see Figures 1 and 2]. The lotus, which is tied to the Hindu pantheon of iconography, is deeply meaningful as

the Enlightened One [is] proclaimed Vishnu's ninth incarnation. His throne is with its lotus base or backdrop or canopy parallels the Preserver's iconography, as do the likeness of the Bodhisattva *Avalokiteshvara* – *Padmapani*, the "All Observing Lord with the Lotus in his hand."<sup>21</sup>

Additional insights into the water flower's symbolism are dependent on how the lotus is sculpted or viewed. The lotus represents a complete manifestation; the true essence of all. At the center of the flower is the nucleus of the universe. From an aerial view, the lotus is a circle which looks like the *mandala*. The construction of a temporary sand *mandala* is, of course, a ritual practiced by monks and

<sup>20</sup> Donald Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha: The Ritual of Image in Consecration in Thailand* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 37.

<sup>21</sup> Eliade, *Symbolism*, 79.

devotees to engage in the exercise of non-attachment. This too has meaning, yet the *padma* takes on additional symbolism when examined from its botanical function.

Expanding elegantly, the lotus is a picturesque flower that has emerged from murky fluid. This corresponds to the victory of the Buddha achieving enlightenment despite the world of attachment and suffering. When the Buddha is seated upon a lotus, it is his throne; and like an incarnation of the god Vishnu, only a magnificent representation will suffice.<sup>22</sup> The splendid lotus has meanings as varied as its petals. Sometimes embossed to enhance their majesty, they reveal what is hidden; but often these excavated mysteries are difficult to understand.<sup>23</sup> Yet the One seated upon the lotus throne has comprehended such inexplicable concepts such as eternity or the universe.

The *padma* reaches to the center of the intellectual nature of Buddhism. A cerebral affiliation with the pure mind of the Buddha is key. Siddhartha Gautama was not a man stagnant in belief. From his time in the palace he sought the truth, and after leaving his comfort he turned to asceticism. This lifestyle of the monk was steeped in meditation and concentration. Only the vast dedication of introspection could manifest in the attainment of Nirvana.

The illumination of enlightenment as a spiritual event cannot be created literally, so often the images of the Buddha are accompanied by a light or halo surrounding the head [see Figure 2]. The halo is mystical and powerful, and the beam can also be called the Buddha light. It is emblematic of the awesome wisdom that is so pervasive; it radiates from above Siddhartha's mind and into his surroundings. The attainment of such enlightenment cannot be contained in his psyche alone, but bursts forth into the world. The spectrum of artistic interpretations of this beam has been as abstract as a ray of light, or as concrete as flames. The symbol of spiritual knowledge can be intensified when it surrounds the body as well as the head.<sup>24</sup> These themes appear in other religious art; holy flames

<sup>22</sup> Curt Maury, *Four Origins of Indian Art* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), 120.

<sup>23</sup> Moore, *Iconography of Religions*, 144.

<sup>24</sup> Tetsujiro Inouye, *History of Buddhist Art in Japan* (Tokyo: The International Buddhist Society, 1940), 13.

indicative of super knowledge would later surround the prophet Mohamed in Islam. And like the intention of Islamic iconographers, when the ray light is present upon Buddha an aspect of beatification is added to the image of the figure.

The artist's translation of the rich traditions of the Buddha into sculptures and statues are as diverse as the artists themselves. Yet comprehension of the symbolism is contingent on the perception and intellectual dexterity of the devotee. To one who can read the statue that has been written [the literal meaning of "iconography"], great depth and detail is gleaned. To those who merely see a piece of art, only superficial conclusions can be made. Iconography, therefore, is not just a practice for the artistic elite, but a ritual of devotees in all stages of spiritual journeying. It is "not only the conception of the figure in terms of mass and simplified planes, but the manner in which the forms appear to emerge from the plain background of the rock" that make an inanimate object become worthy of devotion and study.<sup>25</sup>

At first glance, the image of the Buddha may seem one-dimensional: just a man seated and possibly adorned or accompanied by some other symbol like a flower or tree. But in fact the many permutations of the Buddha, from his head, hands, legs, feet, and additional ornaments, are very specific in significance and are not fashioned haphazardly. Studying the representations of hairstyle or hand *mudras* speak to both the literate and the illiterate. The separate understanding of each characteristic of the Buddha exponentially enhances the understanding that comes from deciphering the symbolism of Buddhist sculptures. The attraction of Buddhist statues is the mystery that can be uncovered with insight into the culture and stories of Buddhism. Influential scholar Mircea Eliade explains:

In Buddhism the various hypostases of the Buddha have its own special color, gesture and symbol. And not only that, but in each ritual...the symbols are varied. As a result, iconography

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<sup>25</sup> Moore, *Iconography of Religions*, 149.



knows an infinite number of nuances, each indicating a certain step, a state well established on the spiritual ladder of ascent.<sup>26</sup>

The significance of the Buddha statue for the perfect Buddha mind is singular: that there is one essence, or *sattva*, which is the Buddhahood or enlightenment. To gaze upon a statue of Buddha, observe the representational details of the head, arms, and legs is to look at that essence, understand the cycle of *samsara*, and diligently pursue Nirvana.

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Rowland, *The Art and Architecture*, 251.

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Figure 1<sup>27</sup>

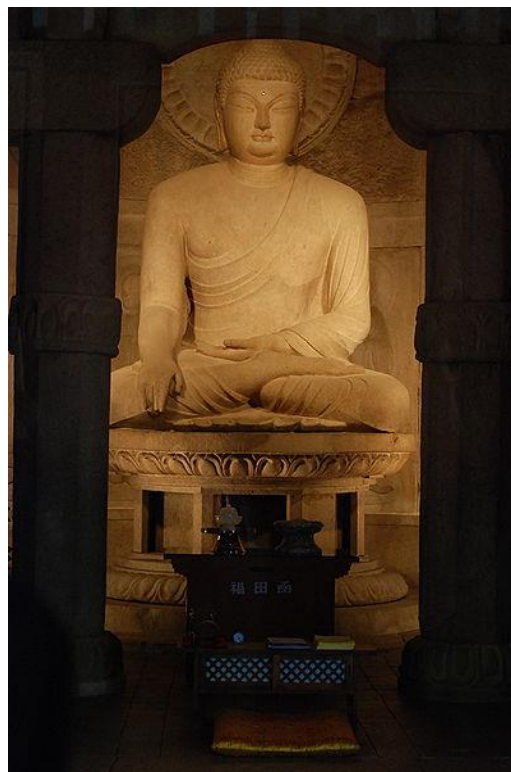


Figure 2<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> [www.publicdomainpictures.net/view-image.php?image=11892&picture=buddha-in-sky](http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/view-image.php?image=11892&picture=buddha-in-sky)

<sup>28</sup> [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Korea-Gyeongju-Seokguram-Buddha\\_statue-04.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Korea-Gyeongju-Seokguram-Buddha_statue-04.jpg)



Figure 3<sup>29</sup>



Figure 4<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> [www.freedigitalphotos.net/images/search.php?search=buddha&cat=&page=2&gid\\_search](http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/images/search.php?search=buddha&cat=&page=2&gid_search)

<sup>30</sup> [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Korea-Yeongcheon-Sudosa-Standing\\_Buddha\\_statue-01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Korea-Yeongcheon-Sudosa-Standing_Buddha_statue-01.jpg)



Figure 5<sup>31</sup>



Figure 6<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> [www.freedigitalphotos.net/images/search.php?search=buddha&cat=&page=2&gid\\_search](http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/images/search.php?search=buddha&cat=&page=2&gid_search)

<sup>32</sup> [picasaweb.google.com/lh/view?q=buddha%20snake&psc=G&filter=1#5347903499908071266](http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/view?q=buddha%20snake&psc=G&filter=1#5347903499908071266)

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## ‡ ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPINOZA'S ACCOUNT OF HUMAN RELIGION ‡

In his philosophical and political writings, Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) develops an account of human religion, which represents a unique theoretical orientation in the early modern period.<sup>1</sup> This position is implicit in many of Spinoza's philosophical arguments in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, the *Short Treatise*, and *Ethics*.<sup>2</sup> However, it is most carefully developed in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (hereafter TTP).<sup>3</sup> What makes Spinoza's position unique is the fact that he rejects a traditional conception of religion on naturalistic grounds, while refusing to dismiss all religion as an entirely anthropological phenomenon. This might, at first, seem like an illegitimate attempt to avoid the full implications of a naturalistic world view; however, Spinoza has sophisticated arguments, from within his philosophical perspective, which defend both aspects of his view. In this manner, Spinoza's work reveals the possibility of a theoretical orientation that was unimaginable to many of his contemporaries.

As a preliminary matter, it is important to become clear on what is meant by Spinoza's naturalism. In contemporary philosophy, the term "naturalism" is generally used to refer to a range of positions which hold that philosophical theories must respect the view of the world revealed by the natural sciences and use the discoveries of the natural sciences as a guide. In religious studies, naturalism is generally used to characterize positions that explain religious beliefs and practices entirely within the domain of the natural and social sciences. Each of these positions share significant

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of Spinoza's name is a matter of some debate in the secondary literature on Spinoza's Jewish identity. Authors emphasizing the Jewish aspects of Spinoza's philosophy tend to prefer the Hebrew Baruch over the Latin Benedict. Here, I respect Spinoza's own decision to utilize the Latin form of his name in his philosophical publications. For further discussion of this topic, see the introduction to Ze'ev Levi, *Baruch or Benedict: On Some Jewish Aspects of Spinoza's Philosophy* (New York: P. Lang, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> All references to Spinoza's philosophical works utilize the translations in Edwin Curley, trans., *The Collected Works of Spinoza: Volume I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). Citations follow the standard Gebhardt pagination.

<sup>3</sup> All references to Spinoza's TTP utilize the translation in Samuel Shirley, trans., *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989). Citations refer to the pagination in the Shirley text.

affinities with Spinoza's view, but the form of naturalism found in Spinoza's philosophical system is more closely tied to rationalism.

Spinoza's naturalism is, perhaps, best grasped by considering the argument Spinoza provides for the impossibility of miracles in chapter six of the TTP. Spinoza begins by supposing, for the sake of argument, that miracles occur. He points out that a miracle, by definition, "must necessarily interrupt Nature's order which otherwise we would conceive as fixed and immutable by God's decrees."<sup>4</sup> He then argues that this opposition to God's establishment of natural order would "cast doubt on everything, and would lead to atheism."<sup>5</sup> This argument reveals the fact that Spinoza views the impossibility of miracles, and, by implication, naturalism as a logical consequence of the existence of God. Spinoza's conception of God is based entirely on rational investigation and is devoid of theistic elements. Thus, Spinoza's belief in God, properly understood, is nothing more than a belief in a natural world governed by fixed and immutable laws derived from reason.

Spinoza's view of nature leads him to dismiss the vast majority of religious beliefs and practices as purely anthropological phenomena, while preserving a core of essential religious belief which he defends through reason. Among the beliefs and practices which Spinoza dismisses is belief in the occurrence of miracles, the authority of scriptural revelation, and the existence of a personal deity as well as the practice of rituals in general. For Spinoza, these aspects of human religion cannot be grounded in rational argumentation, so their origins must explained through anthropological principles. However, in chapter fourteen of the TTP, Spinoza presents a number of fundamental principles of faith, which he defends as objectively valid. Among these are a belief in God's existence, various basic features of God's nature, and basic ethical principles.<sup>6</sup> His defense of these principles in

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<sup>4</sup> Shirley, *Tractatus*, 129.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>6</sup> Shirley, *Tradatus*, 224. Spinoza's fundamental principles of faith include a number of aspects which might, at first, seem to be theistic in nature. For instance, Spinoza holds that God is just and merciful and includes belief in immortality. However, Spinoza's account of such features in *Ethics* reveals that he often transforms theological vocabulary in a manner that removes its theistic elements, while



*Ethics* reveals that, for him, they follow as logical consequences of God's nature. A contemporary naturalist might argue that belief in the existence of God is inconsistent with naturalism. However, since the existence of God, which Spinoza believed could be established by reason, is logically prior to naturalism in the sense that Spinoza understood it, this does not reveal any inconsistency in Spinoza's view. Thus, both Spinoza's rejection of traditional religion and his defense of purified religious belief follow from his commitment to reason.

The manner in which Spinoza's theoretical orientation has been introduced might make it tempting to imagine Spinoza as having reached his ideas through pure philosophical reflection in isolation from the intellectual climate of his times. After all, Spinoza clearly rejects the position of traditional theologians; yet he clearly also rejects the skeptical attitude of figures like Isaac La Peyrère whose primary goal was to cast doubt on traditional religious authority.<sup>7</sup> In fact, in his philosophical writings, Spinoza often treats the skeptic as a stubborn fool who is barely worth consideration by a serious thinker. Yet, adopting the attitude that Spinoza's ideas developed in an intellectual vacuum would be a mistake. Not only would it wrongly ignore the substantial intellectual debt Spinoza owes to many of his predecessors, but it would also obscure the very source of Spinoza's originality.

Instead, I will argue that Spinoza is able to reach a unique position on religion by synthesizing a number of seemingly disparate perspectives into a coherent and systematic view. In this manner, I hope to show that it is Spinoza's unusual historical position on the crossroads between a number of heterogeneous intellectual traditions in conjunction with his own remarkable drive to combine these perspectives into a coherent philosophical framework that led to his original contribution. This paper will provide a narrative account of the development of Spinoza's view of religion while considering the known biographical details of his life. Thus, it will attempt to roughly follow the chronological

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preserving a sense in which such terms can be used properly. It is in this light that Spinoza fundamental principles of faith should be interpreted.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 239.

order in which Spinoza was exposed to important ideas about religion beginning with the Jewish philosophy of Moses Maimonides, proceeding to the political philosophy of Nicollò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, and ending with a discussion of the political climate of the Dutch republic.

### **Rational Religion in Maimonides**

Moses Maimonides (1138-1204) was an Egyptian rabbi and is widely regarded as the most significant medieval Jewish philosopher. Spinoza likely first became acquainted with Maimonides' philosophy through his elementary education in the Talmud Torah school of the Amsterdam Jewish community and probably went on to study him more extensively while attending Rabbi Mortera's Keter Torah adult study group in the early 1650s.<sup>8</sup> This also must have been the period in which doubts about Judaism were first emerging for the young Spinoza. According to his early biographer Jean Maximilien Lucas, the young Spinoza frequently posed questions to his teachers, which they found difficult to solve.<sup>9</sup> One can imagine that he was frequently referred by these teachers to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, the natural starting point for a philosophically inclined Jewish thinker. Given his increasing tension with the Jewish community ending with expulsion in 1656, Spinoza must not have been fully satisfied with the answers he found there.

Maimonides is one of the few authors to whom Spinoza refers explicitly in his writings. These references are almost entirely critical and mostly concern Maimonides' approach to scriptural passages which conflict with philosophical reasoning. Yet, in many other passages, ideas clearly found in Maimonides are presented by Spinoza as his own without any mention of their origin. Furthermore, the fact that Maimonides had a decisive impact on the development of a number of aspects of Spinoza's philosophy is well-established in the secondary literature on the topic.<sup>10</sup> In addition to cases in which Spinoza more or less directly adopts a Maimonidean position, his philosophy is also enriched

<sup>8</sup> Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 90-3.

<sup>9</sup> Abraham Wolf, trans., *The Oldest Biography of Spinoza* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1970), 42.

<sup>10</sup> See Warren Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19 no.2 (1981): 151-172.

by critical reflection on Maimonides. In particular, critical reflection on Maimonides' treatment of religious beliefs led Spinoza to the view that some beliefs form an essential rational core, while others cannot be rationally justified.

One of the overarching concerns of Maimonidean philosophy is showing that the revealed truth of Mosaic Law is perfectly consistent with conclusions reached rationally through philosophical reflection. In Maimonides' case, this meant showing that Hebrew scripture is consistent with Aristotelian philosophy. In the Aristotelian view, God is the unmoved mover who remains outside of nature. According to this view, "the world derives from the overflow of God...and He has cause to overflow to it everything that is produced in time."<sup>11</sup> God is not aware of the particular beings which result from the overflow of his eternal act of self-contemplation nor is he capable of undergoing any change.<sup>12</sup> While Spinoza's own view of God differs in important respects from Aristotle's, the differences need not concern us here as each view is entirely abstract, rational, and impersonal.

This conception of God presents a number of problems to a devout Jewish rabbi such as Maimonides. He is committed, at least outwardly, to maintaining that scriptural teachings are perfectly true. He cannot simply reject scripture when it contradicts philosophical reasoning. Instead, Maimonides strives to offer non-literal interpretations of difficult passages. For instance, consider his treatment of the following passage from Genesis: "And Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look at God."<sup>13</sup> Maimonides cannot accept that Moses was afraid to literally look upon God because this would imply that Moses, the greatest prophet (and therefore the greatest philosopher for Maimonides), thought God was an embodied entity who "can be apprehended by the eyes."<sup>14</sup> Instead, Maimonides interprets this passage as utilizing a figure of speech in which looking upon God serves as a metaphor for acquiring true knowledge. Moses, with his prophetic insight into God, was not literally afraid to

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<sup>11</sup> Shlomo Pines, trans., *Guide of the Perplexed* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1963), 279.

<sup>12</sup> Howard Kreisel, "Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 75 no.2 (1984): 108.

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 3:6, Revised Standard Version.

<sup>14</sup> Pines, 29.

look upon God; rather, his true fear was of making “categoric affirmations in favor of the first opinion to occur to him” and erring in judgment.<sup>15</sup>

Insofar as this view of the relationship of reason and revelation is utilized as an approach to the interpretation of scripture, Spinoza rejects the Maimonidean position. Spinoza directly attacks and ridicules this view in a clear expression of intellectual frustration:

Maimonides and some others take the view that this and all other instances of the apparition of an angel...occurred in dreams, on the ground that nobody could see an angel with his eyes open. But this is mere rubbish. They are concerned only to extort from Scripture some Aristotelian nonsense and some fabrications of their own; and this I regard as the height of absurdity.<sup>16</sup>

There is only one other place in the Spinozistic corpus where Spinoza makes a similarly harsh attack directed at a single figure. In that passage in *Ethics*, Spinoza derides Descartes' dualistic philosophy of mind, which he clearly views as absurd.<sup>17</sup> In both cases, Spinoza's frustration has the same basis. In Spinoza's view, each thinker has failed to rigorously pursue the clear implications of a position because he sought to preserve some traditional belief. In the passage above, Spinoza describes Maimonides' response to cases in which scripture contradicts his Aristotelian convictions. Instead of accepting what, to Spinoza, is the obvious conclusion that scripture does not accurately teach scientific truth about the world, Maimonides seeks to escape this conclusion by adopting a hermeneutical position that allows him to resolve the apparent conflict without calling scripture into question. From Spinoza's perspective, Maimonides came within reach of the important realization that scripture is merely a fallible human creation, but he turned away from this view because of his unwillingness to challenge religious orthodoxy. As a philosopher whose work clearly testifies to his own high standards of intellectual honesty in the face of distasteful conclusions, it makes sense that Spinoza would reserve the highest contempt for those who failed to follow through with their own ideas.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Shirley, *Tractatus*, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Curley, *Ethics*, II/28/17.

Yet, as the case of Descartes clearly shows, Spinoza did not simply ignore the views of figures whom he believed had failed to follow through with their own ideas. Rather, he sought to push their ideas to the very logical conclusions, which they had failed to accept. In Maimonides' case, Spinoza's objection is easy to see. If a religious claim conflicts with a rationally supported argument, then one should simply accept that the religious claim is mistaken. However, Spinoza is unable to stop at this point. By rejecting scripture as a source of objective truth about the world, Spinoza risked being seen as rejecting religion entirely. In order to avoid such a charge of atheism, Spinoza needed a way to distinguish between those beliefs which he wished to maintain and those beliefs which he wished to reject. In addition, if Spinoza wanted his views to have any chance at all of gaining support, he needed to provide some account of religious beliefs which did not simply dismiss them as entirely worthless. In each case, Spinoza's solution has its origins in Maimonidean philosophy.

The solution to the problem of distinguishing between true religious beliefs and those which should be rejected is already implicit in the recognition of Maimonides' failure to pursue the logical conclusion of his view. In many cases, Maimonides had no problem assenting to religious claims. For instance, the claim that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal easily falls within the Aristotelian view. In other cases, there is significant tension in the Maimonidean outlook. In these cases, it is often clear to the critical reader that the demands of Aristotelian philosophy conflict with some important principle of Jewish faith in a manner that cannot be resolved by giving a figurative interpretation. In these cases, it is often difficult to determine Maimonides' true stance. This has led some commentators to argue the Maimonides is presenting an orthodox view on the surface while truly holding a thoroughly Aristotelian view, a fact which he partially conceals.<sup>18</sup>

Maimonides treatment of miracles provides an excellent example of such tension in his philosophy. Belief in miracles, particularly in those miracles by which God delivered the people of

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<sup>18</sup> Leo Strauss, "Introduction," in *Guide of the Perplexed* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1963), xvii-xxiv.

Israel from slavery in Egypt, is an important element of the Jewish faith. Furthermore, belief in miracles was widely accepted in the medieval period. Thus, it should not be surprising that Maimonides accepts the possibility of at least some miracles in the *Guide*. This includes miracles which Aristotle holds are impossible, such as changes in substance when God transforms water into blood in Exodus.<sup>19</sup> Yet, in a sign of his own awareness of the tension of his position, Maimonides attempts, wherever possible, to give miracles other explanations.<sup>20</sup> This raises the question of whether or not Maimonides actually believed that miracles are possible or whether he was simply offering this view in order to maintain an appearance of orthodoxy.<sup>21</sup>

Fortunately, the issues surrounding the intentions of Maimonides can be avoided in this analysis. What is important is that as a critical reader of Maimonides' *Guide*, Spinoza would have been well-equipped to detect the tension in Maimonides' position and consider the possibility that Maimonides may have held less orthodox views than he outwardly claimed. This tension gave Spinoza a clear basis for differentiating between those beliefs he wished to preserve and those he wished to reject. Spinoza sets out this basis in chapter 13 of the TTP in which he argues that the aim of scripture "was not to impart knowledge" except in the case of basic principles which "are very few, and of a very simple nature."<sup>22</sup> He makes it clear that those principles which are found to be essential will be fully supported within the domain of philosophical reasoning and will be shared by all true religions. It is this division Spinoza has in mind when he writes in a letter to Henry Oldenburg, "the chief distinction I make between religion and superstition is that the latter is founded on ignorance, the former on wisdom."<sup>23</sup> In this way, Spinoza's view of religion fits one possible interpretation of

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<sup>19</sup> Pines, *Guide*, 345.

<sup>20</sup> Kreisel, "Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," 111.

<sup>21</sup> This point is raised by Steve Nadler in *A Book Forged in Hell* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 92.

<sup>22</sup> Shirley, *Tractatus*, 215.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Shirley, trans., *The Letters* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 333.

Maimonides in which he is truly a full-fledged Aristotelian but does not explicitly deny miracles so as to avoid weakening the faith of the masses.

Spinoza's second problem was that he needed to provide some sort of positive role for the religious beliefs which he rejects in order to avoid appearing to attack religion. Maimonides provides Spinoza with just such an account. In his philosophical system, Maimonides distinguishes between those beliefs which are true and those which promote an orderly society.<sup>24</sup> A good example of the latter case can be found in Maimonides' approach to ceremony in book III of the *Guide*. Maimonides holds that "the law as a whole aims at two things: the welfare of the soul and the welfare of the body."<sup>25</sup> When faced with an apparently arbitrary law, Maimonides will seek to show its social utility. For instance, regarding laws concerning ritual purity, Maimonides argues that they are designed by God to restrain sexual desire, which would otherwise degrade society.<sup>26</sup>

Spinoza adopts the Maimonidean account of ceremonial observances and non-essential scriptural beliefs as existing because they are necessary for an orderly society. Spinoza argues that "Scripture commands no other kind of knowledge other than what is necessary to obey God according to [the commandment of loving one's neighbor], and without which men are likely to be self-willed."<sup>27</sup> Thus, the belief and practices of scripture can be treated as useful lies, which have a good social effect on the masses, but need not be believed by the philosopher. However, since Spinoza denies Maimonides' explanation that these practices have their origins in the benevolent intentions of God, he must provide some other account explaining their origins. For such an account, Spinoza turns to the account of religion in the work of Nicollò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes.

### **The Origins of Religion in Machiavelli and Hobbes**

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>25</sup> Pines, *Guide*, 510.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 533.

<sup>27</sup> Shirley, *Tractatus*, 215.

Spinoza most likely first became acquainted with the work of Machiavelli and Hobbes when he was a student of Fransiscus van Enden, who wrote two political works around the same period.<sup>28</sup> The accounts of religion that influenced Spinoza are found in Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* and Hobbes' *Leviathan*. There is direct evidence that Spinoza read Machiavelli as a copy of his complete works was found in Spinoza's library.<sup>29</sup> In the case of Hobbes, the *Leviathan* was not found in his library though Hobbes' *De Cive* was among the books in his collection. However, Spinoza was almost certainly familiar with the Dutch translation of his friend Abraham van Berckel, which had a significant impact on the intellectual scene in the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup>

Whether Machiavelli or Hobbes was the primary influence on Spinoza's anthropological account of human religion is a question that cannot be conclusively answered. Hobbes clearly plays a key role in the development of Spinoza's political views in the TTP. Steven Nadler identifies Hobbes' *Leviathan* as the principle source of Spinoza's anthropological account of religion and does not consider Machiavelli.<sup>31</sup> However, Spinoza was already well under way in his work on the TTP in 1665 as is indicated by his correspondence with Henry Oldenburg, whereas the *Leviathan* did not appear in any language that Spinoza could read until the Dutch translation in 1667.<sup>32</sup> While Hobbes political views could have been gleaned from *De Cive*, which was written in Latin, his anthropological account of religion does not appear there. It is possible that Spinoza was able to access Berckel's translation prior to its publication date; however, it seems unlikely that Spinoza could have read the *Leviathan* during the period in which his views on religion were first forming in the early 1660s, but he would have read it by the publication of the TTP in 1670.

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<sup>28</sup> Nadler, *Spinoza*, 104.

<sup>29</sup> Jakob Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinoza's* (Leipzig: Verlag Von Veit & Comp., 1899), 161.

<sup>30</sup> Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 195.

<sup>31</sup> Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, 55-6.

<sup>32</sup> Shirley, *The Letters*, 185.



The fact that Spinoza could have read Machiavelli as soon as he began studying with van Enden lends credence to the view that *Discourses* was the primary source for Spinoza's anthropological account. However, it is uncertain whether or not Spinoza would have come into contact with the particular passages that express this position. Since both Machiavelli and Hobbes express similar views, there is no way to settle this matter by investigating the texts. For instance, both Machiavelli and Hobbes restricted their consideration to pagan religions in order to avoid providing a controversial account of Christianity.<sup>33</sup> In the absence of conclusive evidence either way, I will proceed on the plausible assumption that Spinoza was familiar with both texts and that each contributed to his account of human religion.

Spinoza and Hobbes both identify human ignorance of natural causes combined with the resulting uncertainty and fear this produces as the primary cause of the origin of most religious beliefs. Spinoza describes the masses as "the wretched victims of alternating hopes and fears, the result [of which] is that, for the most part, their credulity knows no bounds."<sup>34</sup> This clearly echoes Hobbes own view by which mankind lives in perpetual fear.<sup>35</sup> The problem, in each case, is that events occur in nature whose natural cause cannot be immediately known. The result, according to Spinoza, is that "if they struck with wonder at some unusual phenomenon, they believe this to be a portent signifying anger of the god or of a supreme deity."<sup>36</sup> This argument also appears in the *Leviathan*, in which Hobbes argues that "when [man] cannot assure himself of the true causes of things (for the cause of good and evil fortune for the most part are invisible), he supposes causes of them."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 197.

<sup>34</sup> Shirley, *Tractatus*, 49.

<sup>35</sup> Ian Shapiro, ed., *Leviathan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 67.

<sup>36</sup> Shirley, *Tractatus*, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Shapiro, *Leviathan*, 66-7.

The next step in the process occurs when certain individuals either consciously or unconsciously begin channeling the superstition of the masses for their own benefit. Machiavelli provides such an account of Roman religion:

...every religion has the foundation of its life on some principle order of its own. The life of the Gentile religion was founded on the responses of the oracles and on the sect of the diviners and augurs. All their other ceremonies, sacrifices, and rites depended on them; for they easily believed that the god who could predict your future good or your future ill for you could also grant it to you. From these arose temple, from these the sacrifices, from these the supplications and every other ceremony to venerate them.<sup>38</sup>

Such ceremonies and rituals become more and more developed until they reach the point of becoming a fully institutionalized religion. Spinoza uses the Ottoman Turks as an example:

To counter this unfortunate tendency [of the masses being victims of alternating prejudices], immense efforts have been made to invest religion, true or false, with such pomp and ceremony that it can sustain any shock any constantly evoke the deepest reverence in all its worshippers.<sup>39</sup>

In this manner, the social utility of religion becomes part of the anthropological account of its origins. What begins as the weakness of mankind to superstitions is transformed into a formal set of beliefs, institutions, and ceremonies to benefit the interest of the elites in ruling an orderly and obedient populace.<sup>40</sup>

Spinoza and Hobbes also use their narrative account of the development of superstitious religious beliefs and ceremonies to explain the diversity of religious customs. As Spinoza puts it in the TTP, "superstition, like all other influences of hallucination and frenzy, is bound to assume very unstable and varied forms."<sup>41</sup> Hobbes makes the same argument in more elaborate form when he writes, "by reason of the different Fancies, Judgments, and Passion of several men, have grown up into

<sup>38</sup> Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, trans., *Discourses on Livy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 37.

<sup>39</sup> Shirley, *Tractatus*, 51.

<sup>40</sup> Maimonides also provides an account of sacrifices that explains religious ritual in terms of providing a substitute for the superstitious practices of the masses in chapter 46 of part III of the *Guide*. However, Maimonides' account is not naturalistic in the sense that he attributes the origins of these rituals to God rather than to clever rulers. Nonetheless, Spinoza may also have been influenced by Maimonides on this point.

<sup>41</sup> Shirley, *Tractatus*, 50.

ceremonies so different, that those which are used by one man, are for the most part ridiculous to another.”<sup>42</sup> In this manner, the anthropological account of the origins of human religion not only explains the causal origin of irrational beliefs, but has the additional benefit of solving the otherwise vexing problem of the existence of diverse religious traditions.

### **Skepticism, Toleration, and the New Sciences in the Netherlands**

Spinoza’s account of human religion clearly owes much of its substance to reflection on the work of philosophical writings of Maimonides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes. However, these figures were not interested in developing the radical implications of their own accounts of religion. Therefore, while Spinoza certainly drew much of his philosophical analysis from these sources, it is unlikely that they provided the impetus behind the radical direction in which he took their views. Instead, there is reason to believe that the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch intellectual climate was the primary external factor influencing Spinoza to take a radical direction. Spinoza would have had his first significant exposure to these ideas when he began working as a merchant, which could have occurred no later than his father’s death in 1649.<sup>43</sup> The influence of these ideas would have increased after his excommunication in 1656 and would continue for the remaining twenty-one years of his life.

Skepticism about religion emerged, in its modern form, in the tumultuous period following the Protestant Reformation. Before this time, those individuals who held broadly skeptical views about religion either kept their ideas to themselves or were suppressed by religious authorities to the extent that their ideas failed to achieve significant influence outside of their immediate circles. Two important changes occurred in the early modern period. First, major philosophical works expressing skeptical themes became more widely disseminated with the rise of the printing press and the proliferation of religious writing spawned by the Reformation. Second, skeptical ideas began to circulate more widely

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<sup>42</sup> Shapiro, *Leviathan*, 67.

<sup>43</sup> Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 80.

in private intellectual circles and through personal contacts.<sup>44</sup> Undoubtedly, the contents of these private communications were often more radical than the published work that appeared in the period.

Amsterdam was a center of radical ideas, and it was home to a flourishing industry centered on printing radical texts. Spinoza's friend Jan Rieuwertszoon ran such a publishing business and owned a bookstore that served as a meeting place for individuals with radical ideas.<sup>45</sup> Since Spinoza clearly frequented such circles, there can be little doubt that he was exposed to such positions. Among the views discussed would have been the ideas of classical figures such as Epicurus as well as modern skeptics such as Montaigne and Charron. Yet one must question what impact these ideas had on Spinoza's position since there is no clear evidence of their influence in his philosophy.

One response to skeptical arguments about religion is to use them to attack established authority. Such an approach can be seen in the writings of Uriel Acosta, who committed suicide when Spinoza was nine years old and lived in the same Jewish community in which Spinoza was raised. In his *Example of a Human Life*, Acosta offers a harsh attack on the religious establishment of rabbinic Judaism, which he blames for various personal misfortunes and for reducing its adherents to slavery.<sup>46</sup> Another response to skeptical arguments about religion is to incorporate them into a broader skeptical view concerning knowledge in general. This approach can be seen in the writing of Montaigne who used Pyrrhonian skepticism to argue that religion had no rational basis.<sup>47</sup> Spinoza would have been acquainted to each of these skeptical outlooks through his contact with the intellectual scene in Amsterdam.

What is significant about these approaches is that Spinoza goes to great lengths to reject each of them. Spinoza's own view rejects undermining established political authority, and he is careful to

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<sup>44</sup> Wooton, David. "New Histories of Atheism" in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, ed. Michael Hunter and David Wooton (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), 44.

<sup>45</sup> Travis Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism of the Bible* (New York, T & T Clark, 2006), 175.

<sup>46</sup> See Helen Lederer, trans., *An Example of a Human Life* (typescript, HUC, 1958).

<sup>47</sup> Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 48.

emphasize that point in the TTP. Spinoza's rejection of skepticism concerning knowledge is even more striking. Not only is Spinoza's own epistemology markedly anti-skeptical, but he treats the skeptical figure as either ridiculous or insincere. Thus, it is unlikely that Spinoza held in high regard those who expressed these kinds of skepticism about religion. This would also suggest that such ideas did not have a strong influence on his philosophical views.

However, despite the fact that Spinoza did not share or even respect the broadly skeptical views that he would have been exposed to in Amsterdam, there is good reason to believe that these ideas did play a role in his philosophical development. Despite the flaws Spinoza must have seen in the views of figures like Acosta and Montaigne, he must have agreed with them that the claims of religious authorities should not be accepted without question. Thus, it is likely that the radical environment of Amsterdam encouraged Spinoza to draw more radical conclusions from the work of figures such as Hobbes and Machiavelli, whose philosophical depth he would have respected. In addition, skeptical views would have made Spinoza sensitive to the vulnerability of religious claims to rational argumentation. A natural response to this would be to seek some criterion for distinguishing between religious claims that are rationally defensible and those that are not.

The skeptical outlook of the 17<sup>th</sup> century may explain why Spinoza chose to reject the objective validity of the majority of religious beliefs in favor of providing naturalistic accounts of them; however, it fails to explain why Spinoza sought to preserve a core of religious beliefs in his system. Given the incendiary nature of much of Spinoza's work, it can hardly be that he included this aspect to appease religious authorities. Instead, this move was motivated, in part, by Spinoza's own experience of interacting with various liberal Christians in Amsterdam. In particular, I will focus on the influence of the Collegiant circles, which Spinoza was known to frequent.

The Collegiants were groups of liberal Christians who met to pray and discuss theology in various Dutch cities, including Amsterdam. The membership of such informal organizations was

constituted primarily by Mennonites, Remonstrants, and Socinians.<sup>48</sup> While these views share certain affinities, they are not without differences on important theological points. At times, this led to controversy within Collegiant circles.<sup>49</sup> Yet, for the most part the Collegiants must have been fairly tolerant in their approach to religious differences as evidenced by the fact that they accepted Spinoza, a non-Christian, into their midst.

This relative peace was achievable because of a view among the Collegiants that only a few simple truths were absolutely essential to Christianity. This view likely arose as a natural response to the problem of maintaining peace among holders of diverse views within the Collegiant community. Central to this position was the view that the primary focus of Jesus' teachings was to love fellow humans and that the Christian faith is not dogmatic in nature.<sup>50</sup> This view is expressed, in much the same form, by Spinoza when he presents his own view of the essential elements of religion in the TTP.<sup>51</sup> Thus, it seems highly probable that Spinoza's decision to defend a purified core of religion had its origins in the view of the Collegiant community of which he was a member. Yet, it is important to remember that many of the Collegiants, unlike Spinoza, accepted spiritualism as a legitimate source of religious belief. Thus, while Spinoza's decision to defend a core of religious beliefs may have originated with his exposure to liberal Christians, he does not entirely share their reasons for defending such an approach, which he reached through reflection on Maimonides.

A final influence on Spinoza from the Dutch intellectual scene would have been the adherents of the new sciences. There are a number of different routes by which Spinoza was influenced by the beginnings of the scientific revolution and the mathematical view of the world that it advocated. Descartes, who was a key influence on Spinoza's philosophical work, was a major advocate of this new way of thinking. Spinoza shows interest in this kind of thinking in his arguments concerning physics

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<sup>48</sup> Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism of the Bible*, 162-3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>50</sup> Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 139.

<sup>51</sup> Shirley, *Tractatus*, 215.

and astronomy in his *Descartes' Principles*. In addition, Spinoza maintained a correspondence with the English chemist Robert Boyle in which he actively discussed various experiments. Finally, Spinoza supported himself as a lens grinder and is known to have had knowledge in optics from his correspondence with Gottfried Leibniz.

In addition to the influences described above, Spinoza probably read the work of Joseph Delmedigo early in his education. Delmedigo was a Jewish advocate of the new sciences and a student of Galileo Galilei.<sup>52</sup> His book on the new sciences, *Sefer Elim*, was published by Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel of the Amsterdam community, and Spinoza was probably exposed to it at a relatively early age.<sup>53</sup> This text likely added weight to Spinoza's view of nature as a rational system of fixed mathematical laws. However, the conception of nature as governed by rational laws is already found in the philosophy of Maimonides; therefore, it is likely that Delmedigo's work merely reinforced and was not the origin of Spinoza's naturalism. However, the powerful intellectual drive of advocates of the new sciences towards a naturalistic view of the world likely had some influence on Spinoza.

The intellectual origins of Spinoza's account of religion in the diverse intellectual traditions which influenced his development should now be apparent. The substantive analysis of his position is largely drawn from philosophical influences. His decision to divide religious beliefs into a rationally defensible core and a larger set of beliefs to be justified through their social utility has its origins in critical reflection on Maimonides. The anthropological account of the origin of religions he provides in the preface to the TTP can be seen as a more radical version of the accounts provided by Machiavelli and Hobbes. However, while the analysis came from these philosophical sources, the drive to draw radical implications requires a different explanation. Some of it must be explained in terms of Spinoza's inner drive to push theories to their logical conclusion and his willingness to accept

<sup>52</sup> David Rudderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discover in Early Modern Europe* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 124.

<sup>53</sup> Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 138.

distasteful consequences. Yet, much of the impetus likely came from the radical intellectual climate of Amsterdam at the time. Spinoza's unusual place in the crossroads of each of these influences as well as his drive to systematize his views led to the account of human religion that he provides in the TTP.

Now that the development of Spinoza's account has been explained, one might wonder what Spinoza made of his own position. One clear implication of Spinoza's account is that so long as one preserves the essential philosophical core of true religion, any number of inessential religious beliefs could be embraced to serve as moral guidance. Spinoza embraced this implication as is clear from his response to a letter accusing him of providing no way to distinguish between the false prophet Mohammed and the true prophets of the Judeo-Christian tradition:

As for the Turks and the Gentiles, if they worship God by the exercise of justice and by love of their neighbor, I believe they possess the spirit of Christ and are saved, whatever conviction they may hold in their ignorance regarding Mahomet and the oracles.<sup>54</sup>

This passage anticipates the ecumenical views of many contemporary authors in the debate on the problem of religious diversity. For instance, John Hick advocates for a philosophical conception of religion that can both give a realistic interpretation of certain core elements of religion and render diverse faiths compatible.<sup>55</sup> This view was, in some respect, anticipated by Moses Mendelssohn in *Jerusalem* in which he advocates a rationalistic view of religion and a broadly ecumenicalist attitude that may have been influenced by Spinoza.<sup>56</sup>

Yet Spinoza differs in important respects from contemporary ecumenicalists. First of all, Spinoza is largely unconcerned about whether or not religious people will accept his account of their religion. While he preserves a core of religious beliefs which can be defended objectively, he dismisses the vast majority of beliefs as mere prejudices. Very few faithful adherents of any major religion could ever accept Spinoza's dramatic revision of the content of religion. In this manner, Spinoza shares the

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<sup>54</sup> Shirley, *The Letters*, 241.

<sup>55</sup> See John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion, Second Edition* (New Have: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>56</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, trans. Alan Arkush (New England University Press, 1983), 99-100.



approach of the contemporary irrealist in his approach to religious belief.<sup>57</sup> Like the contemporary irrealist, Spinoza defends the majority of religious beliefs on the ground that they lead to good ethical behavior. Thus, Spinoza's account anticipates a number of contemporary positions on religious diversity while not fitting neatly into any single popular account in the philosophical literature.

The fact that Spinoza seems to fall in between all the major positions in both the early modern and contemporary debates concerning the correct account of religion might lead one to suspect that his view is, in some manner, inconsistent. Such an objection would begin by pointing out that Spinoza gives two entirely different accounts of religious belief. He defends a small set of core beliefs as objectively valid, yet he dismisses the vast majority of beliefs and gives an anthropological account. If Spinoza could not provide principled reasons from within his philosophical system for this differential treatment, then one could rightly object that his position is inconsistent.

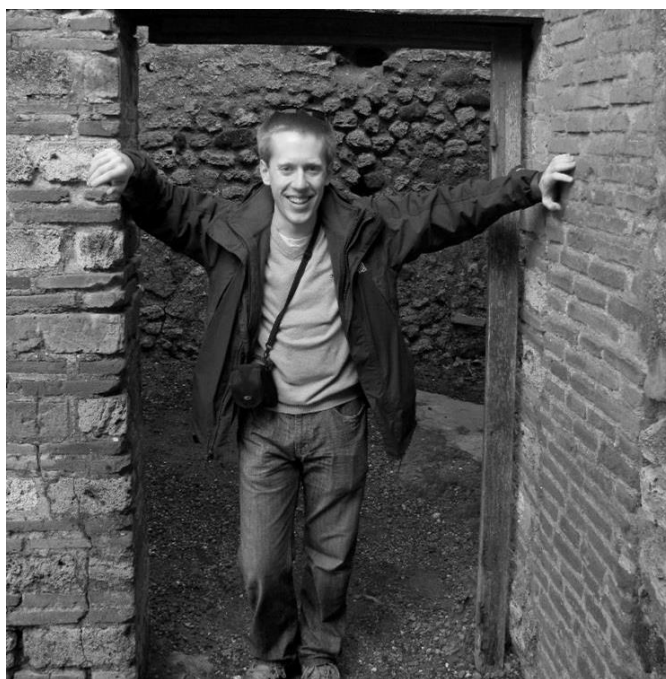
On further investigation, this worry proves to be unfounded. In each case, Spinoza's treatment of religious beliefs is grounded in his commitment to reason. Certain core beliefs can be defended because they follow logically from basic definitions and axioms which are known through the natural light of reason. All other beliefs, by virtue of the fact that they cannot be so derived, are necessarily invalid insofar as they are taken to represent objective truths about the world. However, they must be given some explanation, by virtue of the fact that everything in nature behaves according to fixed laws. Instead, their origin is explained in terms of various psychological features of human beings. In this manner, Spinoza's dual treatment of religious belief turns out to be deeply motivated by his philosophical system.

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<sup>57</sup> For an account of the contemporary debate on the philosophical problem of religious diversity including a discussion of irrealism, see Nathan Hilberg, *Religious Truth and Religious Diversity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

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## ‡ REVISITING JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S *THE POWER OF MYTH* ‡<sup>1</sup>

First published in 1988, *The Power of Myth* is the companion to Bill Moyers' acclaimed television profile of Joseph Campbell.<sup>2</sup> *Power* is comprised of eight transcribed conversations between Moyers, a theologian-turned-journalist,<sup>3</sup> and Campbell, a comparative mythologist. Campbell, a meticulous prose writer, initially resisted the idea of transcribing the spoken interviews, but Moyers' choice of editor, Betty Sue Flowers, whom Moyers described as "herself interested in this realm of the spirit and in mythology,"<sup>4</sup> persuaded Campbell to authorize the project and help Flowers in editing the volume.<sup>5</sup> In her introduction to *The Power of Myth*, Flowers stresses the "rich abundance of material" captured in the interviews, and she speaks of Campbell with reverence, describing him as "[answering] Moyers' penetrating questions with self-revealing honesty, based on a lifetime of living with myth."<sup>6</sup> Flowers' introduction, combined with Bill Moyers' description of Flowers as a spiritually minded person, suggests that *The Power of Myth* was assembled not so much as an academic text, but rather to give Campbell and his mystical ideas the most flattering showcase possible.

Although myth remains the primary focus of the book, the interviews delve heavily into philosophy and religion. Campbell outlines his concept of the *monomyth*<sup>7</sup>—a fundamental hero's

<sup>1</sup> First, I must thank my extremely erudite friend, Wendy Eisenberg, for advising me to read *The Power of Myth* in the summer of 2012, thereby introducing me to Joseph Campbell. Second, thanks go to Will Chavez and Amit Jhaveri, my teaching assistants for Theories of Religion at the University of Rochester, whose feedback greatly aided my research and writing during the fall of 2012. Third, I thank all of the Theories students (but especially Hannah Ward, Heena Ali, Christina Palis, Josh Haley, Cassidy Welter, and Charles Aquilina), whose seminar discussions helped me to wrap my head around this material. Lastly, I thank Professor Douglas Brooks, who told me, after hearing this paper's thesis, to "go after it."

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> "Moyers, Bill—U.S. Broadcast Journalist," The Museum of Broadcast Communications, accessed December 4, 2012, <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/M/htmlM/moyesbill/moyesbill.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> "Herself interested in this realm of the spirit and in mythology" is taken from Stephen and Robin Larsen's interview with Bill Moyers (January 1990), which is quoted at length in Stephen and Robin Larsen, *A Fire in the Mind: The Life of Joseph Campbell* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 551.

<sup>5</sup> Larsen, *A Fire in the Mind* 551.

<sup>6</sup> Betty Sue Flowers, Editor's Note to Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988), xi.

<sup>7</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 37-38.

journey underlying all of the world's stories<sup>8</sup>—and presents myth as a way to provide a moral education.<sup>9</sup> The professor also articulates his personal philosophy, “Follow your bliss,”<sup>10</sup> praises authenticity and romantic love,<sup>11</sup> and expresses his disappointment in a world that he believes to be losing its mythological basis.<sup>12</sup>

Twenty-five years later, both the book and the series DVD remain in print,<sup>13</sup> indicating that Campbell's ideas continue to resonate with the general public. Campbell's ideas have gained some traction in academia, too. Notably, Thomas C. Foster's widely read textbook, *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, devotes an entire chapter to Campbell's theory that all stories are the same story.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, my high school English teachers taught the monomyth theory as if it was the only way to interpret mythology. Given the popularity of Campbell's ideas and the approaching twenty-fifth anniversary of *Power*, the text merits a new critical reading. In this paper, I will consider the relevance of *The Power of Myth* to the secular study of religion. By “secular study of religion,” I mean the academic approach that eschews theology, focuses only on the empirical, observable aspects of religious practice, and does not consider one religious tradition to be inherently superior to another.

Joseph Campbell was, first and foremost, a teacher, not a field researcher. In *The Power of Myth*, which reads like an introductory survey of comparative mythology and religion, Joseph Campbell borrows from the work of many other religious scholars. However, it is difficult to recognize

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 163.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-205.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 82, 84, 131.

<sup>13</sup> “Joseph Campbell on Power of Myth with Bill Moyers,” Amazon, accessed December 4, 2012, [http://www.amazon.com/Joseph-Campbell-Power-Myth-Moyers/dp/B003SXHZEA/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1354646550&sr=8-1&keywords=joseph+campbell+and+the+power+of+myth](http://www.amazon.com/Joseph-Campbell-Power-Myth-Moyers/dp/B003SXHZEA/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1354646550&sr=8-1&keywords=joseph+campbell+and+the+power+of+myth); “The Power of Myth [Paperback],” Amazon, accessed December 4, 2012, [http://www.amazon.com/The-Power-Myth-Joseph-Campbell/dp/0385418868/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1354646642&sr=8-1&keywords=the+power+of+myth](http://www.amazon.com/The-Power-Myth-Joseph-Campbell/dp/0385418868/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1354646642&sr=8-1&keywords=the+power+of+myth).

<sup>14</sup> Thomas C. Foster, *How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 185-192.

Campbell's sources, due to the book's conversational structure and lack of a bibliography. Identifying the scholars from whom Campbell draws is therefore the first step in analyzing *The Power of Myth*. Campbell's sources can be divided into three primary groups—the qualitative studies of religion, the empirical (or fully social-scientific) studies of religion, and the studies that blend the two approaches. Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade are the most significant qualitative intellectuals who inform Campbell's discourse. The research of these men reflects a bygone era, when theology, not religious studies, dominated academia, and belief in God was a *native category* (i.e., considered objective and “a foundational taxonomic concept” of society).<sup>15</sup> According to Otto, religion encompasses non-rational, or *numinous*, elements.<sup>16</sup> In the presence of the *numen*, humans experience the *mysterium tremendum*, feeling of holy dread and awe, and then recognize God's *tremenda majestas*.<sup>17</sup> Campbell appropriates Otto's terminology, describing myth as “a *mysterium...tremendum et fascinans*.”<sup>18</sup> A discussion of cathedrals, which draw the individual's attention to the sacred or numen, greatly resembles Otto's reflections on sacred space and art.<sup>19</sup>

Just as Otto assumes there is a numen, Eliade asserts that there is a genuine *sacred*, which manifests itself in physical objects.<sup>20</sup> Humans build their lives around sacred religious sites (particularly the *axis mundi*, the world's holy center) and convey divine truth through rituals.<sup>21</sup> Eliade contends that secularism is weakening symbolism and ritual, preventing men from reaching their full spiritual potential.<sup>22</sup> More so than Rudolf Otto, Eliade has a pronounced effect on Campbell's thinking.

<sup>15</sup> William Scott Green, “Something Strange, Yet Nothing New: Religion in the Secular Curriculum,” *Association of American Colleges, Liberal Education* 73 no. 5 (1987), 4. [Note: The page numbers listed in these endnotes differ from the page numbers in my bibliography, for the PDF of the article that I received was reformatted for eight pages.]

<sup>16</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 1-7.

<sup>17</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 12-24.

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 38. The phrase appears again on page 65.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 15; Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 65-71.

<sup>20</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 1987), 8-16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-42, 184-195.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-213.

In what reads like a direct quote from Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*, Campbell states that, "The center of the world is the *axis mundi*, the central point, the pole around which all revolves."<sup>23</sup> Other Eliade-style passages reveal Campbell's thoughts on ritual,<sup>24</sup> which, in his view, links "the individual to a larger morphological structure"<sup>25</sup> and encourages humans to "live spiritually."<sup>26</sup> Eliade's portrayal of weakened ritual in the modern day resurfaces in Campbell's claim that "the rituals that once conveyed inner reality are now merely form."<sup>27</sup> Finally, Campbell's description of a non-rational transcendent energy to which men respond is analogous to Eliade's sacred, as well as Otto's numen.<sup>28</sup>

The second camp from which Campbell draws, blending the older belief in religion's innate qualities with social science's emphasis on concrete data, includes William James, Peter Berger, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. These men are empiricists and open to new innovations in social science, but they still believe that some sort of greater sacred is out there.<sup>29</sup> William James represents a midway point between the 19<sup>th</sup> century's theological, qualitative study of religion and the 20<sup>th</sup> century's secular, empirical study of religion. According to James, the sacred inspires strong emotion in individuals: "There must be something solemn, serious, and tender about any attitude which we denominate religious."<sup>30</sup> By using emotional rhetoric to characterize religion, James (like Otto and Eliade before him) implies that religion has given qualities. Throughout *The Power of Myth*, it is apparent that Campbell shares James' faith in religion's qualities.<sup>31</sup> Although James has his solemn sacred, however, he is also a psychologist who cites a seemingly endless number of case histories to

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<sup>23</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 89.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-87.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>29</sup> In REL 293W, Theories of Religion, at the University of Rochester, Douglas Brooks has described this faith in a sacred or *numen* as "There is a *there* there."

<sup>30</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 38.

<sup>31</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 207.

describe different religious experiences.<sup>32</sup> Professor Campbell uses a similar technique in framing his argument, citing a tremendous number of world myths to support his qualitative theory of universal stories and themes.

Campbell's vision, wherein all myths are considered equal to each other, also resembles the conclusion of James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In the final pages of that book, James argues that many gods (not only the Christian god) could be considered real, for all world religions provide divine solutions to earthly problems.<sup>33</sup> This assertion is surprisingly progressive for a man writing in an overwhelmingly Christian era. For this reason, James points toward the religious pluralism of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Campbell did most of his teaching and writing. Indeed, Campbell eschews any viewpoint that privileges the Judeo-Christian tradition, arguing that the Hebrews and their spiritual successors stifled many traditional myths, including myths favoring women.<sup>34</sup> Both James and Campbell clearly believe that one must look around the world, and not just in enclaves of European-American Christians, for spiritual truth.

Writing several decades after James, Berger contends that religion creates plausibility structures, or *sacred canopies*—structured belief systems that place a meaningful order (*nomos*) onto the world.<sup>35</sup> This concept of religiously constructed order resurfaces in *The Power of Myth*, when Bill Moyers asks if myth “harmonize[s] our lives with reality,” and Campbell says yes.<sup>36</sup> Campbell also shares Berger's distaste for secularization. According to Berger, secularization destabilizes mankind's longstanding plausibility structures, inspiring “severe anomy and existential anxiety.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Campbell cites secularization as a cause of civil disorder.<sup>38</sup> To these men, a desacralized,

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<sup>32</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 123-126. Contains two excellent examples of the psychologist's firsthand accounts.

<sup>33</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 507-526.

<sup>34</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 100-101, 171-173.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 16-28.

<sup>36</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 125.

<sup>38</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 8-9.



demythologized world is not a positive development.<sup>39</sup> One key difference between Berger and Campbell, though, is that Berger partly blames religious pluralism for the destabilization of sacred canopies,<sup>40</sup> whereas Campbell takes James' side in favor of pluralism. As such, Campbell and James are arguably more optimistic than Berger.

W.C. Smith's blend of the qualitative and empirical approaches shows a certain degree of optimism, as well. Smith believes that scholars should abandon the abstract term *religion*, which lacks a clear definition.<sup>41</sup> Instead, scholars should study the *cumulative tradition* (i.e., the history and material culture of religious individuals) and, more importantly, personal *faith*.<sup>42</sup> According to Smith, a greater appreciation of the faith of different religious groups "might contribute to...constructing a brotherhood on Earth deserving the loyalty of all our groups."<sup>43</sup> In other words, an appreciation of religion's qualitative aspects can foster the interfaith movement. Just as Smith argues that multiple religions can access faith, Campbell argues that divinity exists in all men, and it is the responsibility of individuals to recognize the divinity in their peers.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, both Smith and Campbell critique the Judeo-Christian tradition: Campbell feels that the Hebrews displaced the place of women in religious mythology,<sup>45</sup> while Smith believes that Christians are too often insensitive to the faith found within other religious traditions.<sup>46</sup>

Wayne Proudfoot and Jonathan Z. Smith, the postmodern empirical scholars who began writing during Campbell's later years, do not take faith into account, nor do they discuss a sacred-

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<sup>39</sup> Berger's ideas bear some resemblance to those of Eliade, but Berger is a sociologist, and so his favorable feelings toward religion are camouflaged by the technical jargon of sociology.

<sup>40</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 127-153.

<sup>41</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 51-60, 141-153.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-192.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>44</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 213-214.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-183.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 193-202.

numen, which is, in truth, an unverifiable, subjective concept.<sup>47</sup> Instead, Proudfoot and J.Z. Smith focus solely on what W.C. Smith called the *cumulative tradition*—religion's observable phenomena (i.e., empirical evidence). When articulating his secular, social-scientific approach to religion, J.Z. Smith invokes the “map is not territory” argument: The academy creates religion, and so scholars of religion must take care to ask good questions, lest they produce inaccurate or biased models (maps) of religion.<sup>48</sup> For Western scholars, an accurate map is one that does not treat Westerners as the makers of history and Easterners as the objects of history.<sup>49</sup> As previously outlined, Joseph Campbell draws heavily from the qualitative and the half-qualitative, half-empirical schools of thought, but his critique of the Judeo-Christian tradition and championing of international mythic structures greatly resembles Smith's call for non-Western-centric studies of religion. In this slight way, Campbell shows some agreement with postmodernism.

In *Religious Experience*, a discussion of methodological problems in the study of religion, Proudfoot stresses the careful collection and interpretation of data. Secular scholars must avoid descriptive reduction, “the failure to identify an emotion, practice, or experience under the description by which the subject identifies it.”<sup>50</sup> Descriptive reduction prevents scholars from recognizing the nuances of religious phenomena. Meanwhile, scholars should engage in explanatory reduction, “offering an explanation of experience in terms that are not those of the subject and that might not meet with his approval.”<sup>51</sup> Explanatory reduction therefore seeks accurate solutions underlying the details of religious experiences. In *Map Is Not Territory*, J.Z. Smith offers an excellent justification for explanatory reduction: “There can only be a relatively limited number of systems or archetypes [i.e., explanations], though there may be an infinite number of manifestations [i.e., descriptions of

<sup>47</sup> The reader can probably surmise my own approach to the study of religion. I fully subscribe to the secular school of thought, of which Proudfoot, J.Z. Smith, and Émile Durkheim are leading members.

<sup>48</sup> J.Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 289-309.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 294-298.

<sup>50</sup> Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 196.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

religious phenomena].”<sup>52</sup> Campbell’s concept of the monomyth—the fundamental paradigm of the hero’s journey underlying many diverse myths—is an example of correctly executed explanatory reduction.<sup>53</sup> In spite of this fact, which might again suggest some sympathy with the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century empirical approach and postmodernism, Campbell engages in considerable descriptive reduction, a problem that I will explore later in this article.

Aside from the material he borrows from other writers, Campbell also throws his personal philosophical views into this theoretical mix. To a great extent, these ideas lack a direct correlation to the theories of religion outlined so far in the present work. Separately from his combination of theories, Campbell proposes his own religious plausibility structures, as he tries to establish universal principles found in mythology. Professor Campbell stresses the importance of personal experience and finding bliss.<sup>54</sup> He lauds the goddess traditions, describing women as representative of creation.<sup>55</sup> Humans must accept the hero’s journey, which includes suffering and venturing into new places.<sup>56</sup> One part of the hero’s journey is learning to love, which involves learning to be courageous.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, individuals must find sublime peace, a feeling of wonder that cannot be conveyed fully in words.<sup>58</sup>

Having mapped the extensive theoretical origins of Campbell’s discourse, let us briefly summarize *The Power of Myth*’s key implications. Campbell believes that there is a sacred or numen, which he describes as an abstract energy. Humans respond to this energy by creating myths, which give meaning to human life. The monomyth structure appears in the stories of most societies, indicating that there are universal principles and that religion possesses given qualities. The Judeo-Christian tradition superseded many traditional myths and rituals; secularization weakened mankind’s

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<sup>52</sup> Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 259. The bracketed words are my own addition, for the purpose of clarification.

<sup>53</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 37-38.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-183.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-163.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 230-231.

mythological knowledge further, inspiring civil chaos. However, individuals can rediscover myth and follow the ancient principles, namely the need to follow one's bliss, pursue romantic love, honor women, and recognize the divinity in other people. Seeing the divinity in all humans can aid the ecumenical and interfaith movements, while a rediscovery of myth can restore a layer of spiritual meaning that modern secular society lacks.

Joseph Campbell's interpretation of myth and religion—a theoretical *mélange*—makes for intellectually engaging literature. Since Campbell draws from several modes of academic religious inquiry, he clearly strives for intellectual synthesis. He wants to propose new interpretations of religious myth, harmonizing two centuries of religious theory in the process. Professor Campbell's goal is laudable, but his argument is characterized by seven pronounced tensions. As Campbell shifts between scholarly camps, which are all jumbled together in his monomythic vision, these tensions become increasingly apparent and difficult to reconcile. My analysis of these tensions (or “incongruities,” to borrow J.Z. Smith's terminology)<sup>59</sup> is somewhat anecdotal, but I feel that this structure is appropriate, given the anecdotal format of *The Power of Myth*.

(1) Campbell tends to speak of myth as if it is an eternal, self-evident construct, produced by the transcendent unity and elemental energy of which he frequently speaks.<sup>60</sup> As critic Robert S. Ellwood notes, “For [Campbell], a myth seem[s] to be a rather disembodied, timeless story of eternal human significance.”<sup>61</sup> Elsewhere in *Power*, however, Campbell asserts that myth harmonizes the world with stories.<sup>62</sup> This claim is a concession that man constructs myth. By describing myth as almost a product of nature, yet also describing it as an empirical creation of mankind, Campbell contradicts himself. This contradiction speaks to the irreconcilable gap between the theological belief in religion's

<sup>59</sup> See J.Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 61-65.

<sup>60</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 183, 208-209.

<sup>61</sup> Robert S. Ellwood, “Why Are Mythologists Political Reactionaries? An Investigation of C.G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell,” in *Religion and the Social Order: What Kinds of Lessons Does History Teach?*, ed. Jacob Neusner, 199-225 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 215.

<sup>62</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 4.

qualities and the secular belief in religion's lack of qualities. These antithetical ideas cannot effectively be synthesized.

(2) In the course of the interviews with Moyers, Campbell praises knowing one's intellectual limits.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, Professor Campbell proposes forward his own system of spiritual beliefs. He speaks as though he has discovered an absolute, universal set of principles underlying all of the world's religious traditions. In other words, Campbell speaks like a prophet revealing the secrets of the cosmos, or a hermeneute manipulating the canon of religious stories to convey a certain point.<sup>64</sup> If he is a prophet, then Campbell is suffering from some degree of intellectual arrogance. If he is a hermeneute, then Campbell is being selective with his data. His plausibility structure of bliss and heroism is therefore not a universal truth, but rather one man's subjective interpretation of mythology.

(3) Campbell says that he does not oppose modern technology, which is a by-product of secularization and historical progress.<sup>65</sup> With that said, Campbell repeatedly expresses reservations about computer technology, even going so far as to call his first computer "an Old Testament god with a lot of rules and no mercy."<sup>66</sup> The supremacy of the human mind over technology becomes a recurring motif throughout *The Power of Myth*. Notably, when Campbell analyzes the *Star Wars* trilogy in terms of comparative mythology, he stresses the positive triumph of the intuition-trusting Luke Skywalker over the mechanistic Darth Vader.<sup>67</sup> Of course, the symbolism in *Star Wars* is not subtle at all, but Campbell the hermeneute chooses to stress this symbolic victory of humans over technology. As such, Campbell shows something of a reactionary streak toward the modern world, which he believes to be stripping humanity of its mythological foundations. Indeed, as Ellwood relates,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>64</sup> Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 44-52.

<sup>65</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 131.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 144.

"Campbell...prided himself on not really being part of the modern world. He never watched television and had no interest in popular culture."<sup>68</sup>

(4) Campbell's philosophical beliefs, emphasizing the pursuit of bliss and love, are heavily oriented toward individual experience. Although Campbell does discuss some examples of group rituals, which teach men to "live spiritually,"<sup>69</sup> the majority of his thought is oriented towards individuals. According to Ellwood, Campbell considered himself a classical conservative; moreover, Ellwood contends that, "[Campbell's] mythic model is clearly the free enterprise 'rugged individualist' of a romanticized American past."<sup>70</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper (and, frankly, Ellwood's short review) to assess thoroughly a link between American conservatism and Campbell's individualist sacred canopy. Still, there is definitely a "self-made man" tinge to Campbell's rhetoric. The role of the individual in uncovering myth's power is therefore one of Campbell's native categories.

(5) As explained earlier, Campbell's theory of the monomyth successfully meets J.Z. Smith and Proudfoot's criteria for explanatory reduction. However, Campbell has a tendency to engage in descriptive reduction, which Proudfoot discourages, since descriptive reduction ignores the differences between individuals' religious experiences. When discussing myth, Campbell jumps abruptly around the world, arguing that all myths are the same.<sup>71</sup> In his most glaring instance of descriptive reduction, when discussing Jesus and the Buddha, Campbell states that "[y]ou can match those two savior figures right down the line, even to the roles and characters of their immediate disciples or apostles."<sup>72</sup> In other words, Campbell regards the details of both a Hindu and Christian myth as interchangeable. It is clear, then, that Campbell usually skims over the details of different religious contexts.

<sup>68</sup> Ellwood, "Why Are Mythologists Political Reactionaries?," 220. The one clear exception to Campbell's disinterest in pop culture is his fascination with the *Star Wars* trilogy.

<sup>69</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 182.

<sup>70</sup> Ellwood, "Why Are Mythologists Political Reactionaries?," 220-221.

<sup>71</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 115.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 136.

I say “usually” skims over because Campbell later contradicts himself in regard to the descriptive reduction. A few pages after his initial reduction of the Jesus and Buddha narratives, Campbell alters his position: “The messages of the great teachers—Moses, the Buddha, Christ, Mohammed—*differ greatly*.<sup>73</sup> But their visionary journeys are much the same.”<sup>74</sup> In this case, the reduced explanation of the journey—the monomyth—remains the same, but Campbell now accounts for unique details (i.e., the different messages) in each narrative. Are the details—the descriptions—of the Jesus and Buddha narratives exactly the same, or are they very different? Campbell never resolves this tension between descriptive reductionism and descriptive expansionism. This tension is problematic, suggesting that Campbell uses or does not use descriptive reduction on a case-by-case basis. Overall, the arbitrariness and potential for bias within Campbell’s analysis of religious data detract from the intellectual credibility of *The Power of Myth*.

(6) Like James, Otto, Eliade, W.C. Smith, and Berger, Professor Campbell believes that myth (and, by extension, religion) possesses genuine qualities. This view aligns not with pure social science, but rather with theology. Campbell’s belief in a qualitative interpretation of religion is therefore an intellectual holdover from a less secular era. Considering that Campbell was in his eighties when he participated in this interview series, perhaps Campbell’s fondness for older modes of thinking is understandable. Still, Campbell’s support for certain qualities of myth robs his argument of some of the empirical rigor one would expect from a late-1980s religion study.

(7) Campbell plucks ideas selectively from the secular-empirical tradition, the theistic-qualitative tradition, and the half-qualitative, half-empirical tradition. As such, to which faction of the study of religion does Campbell truly belong? Is Campbell a theist or non-theist? On the one hand, Campbell denies any belief in a personal god,<sup>75</sup> stating unequivocally that Jesus’ ascension into Heaven

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<sup>73</sup> Italics are my own addition.

<sup>74</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 141.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

is a scientific impossibility.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, Campbell speaks enthusiastically about genuine mysteries in the world, a divinity in all people, and a mysterious energy to which people respond through religious myth. There is some form of spirituality behind his discourse. Campbell is therefore trying to be empirical *and* qualitative, secular *and* religious, progressive *and* reactionary, all at once. He belongs neither to the purely empirical nor the purely qualitative school of religion. Rather, he is in line with W.C. Smith, William James, and Peter Berger, those thinkers who attempted (somewhat unsuccessfully) to meld the new techniques of secular scholarship and social science with classical theistic arguments. Indeed, in addition to his comparative discussion of world mythology, Campbell wants to establish new plausibility structures of his own (bliss, love, etc.). He wants his readers to develop theological (or, as he might put it, mythological) beliefs, so he cannot be regarded as a secular intellectual.

If the continuing sales of *The Power of Myth* are any indication, the general public has no problem with Campbell's non-secular claims. However, the secular scholar of religion cannot accept this book into the pantheon of classic social science monographs. Under his façade of academic rigor and pithy quotes, Campbell preaches a subjective theology. For this reason, *The Power of Myth* should not be categorized with truly secular books like J.Z. Smith's *Map Is Not Territory* and Émile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

In his ruminations on world mythology and religion, Campbell combines the qualitative and empirical traditions with a healthy dose of his own personal philosophy. Surprisingly, he weaves these competing theories and personal anecdotes into a remarkably coherent discourse. Campbell is eloquent and passionate, and Bill Moyers contributes genuinely interesting questions, lending a strong Socratic aspect to the interviews. The text includes some intriguing claims about mythology, and Campbell's plea to follow one's bliss and find love is rather moving. Still, Campbell's argument contains

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 56.



irreconcilable tensions and far too much reductionism. *The Power of Myth* does not belong in the same category as thoroughly secular, empirical studies of religion. Rather, the text is a work of popular philosophy—the last lecture of Joseph Campbell, who died not long after the interviews were conducted.<sup>77</sup>

Nonetheless, *The Power of Myth* may remain of some interest to secular academics. The book is akin to one of J.Z. Smith's incongruous maps, which are "incapable of overcoming disjunction," yet are capable of "[playing] between the incongruities and [providing] an occasion for thought."<sup>78</sup> Campbell may use outdated intellectual models, and his argument cannot withstand the contemporary secular scrutiny demanded by J.Z. Smith and Wayne Proudfoot, but he does make readers think deeply about the comparative study of mythology and religion. Readers must recognize the limits of Campbell's map, though, when they set out on their journey.

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<sup>77</sup> Bill Moyers, Introduction to *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988), xiii-xix.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 309.

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## ‡ BOOK REVIEWS ‡

ALLISON SCHOTTENSTEIN, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-AUSTIN

*Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*

BRADLEY KIME, UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

*God and the Atlantic: America, Europe, and the Religious Divide*

CHRIS VERBRACKEN, BETHEL SEMINARY

*The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity*

KELSEY SAMUELSON, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

*Finding Mecca in America: How Islam is Becoming an American Religion*

MATTATHIAS WESTWOOD, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

*No Sympathy for the Devil: Christian Pop Music and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*

MICHAEL COHEN, UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

*Debating Christian Theism*

MICHAEL OTTESON, KANSAS UNIVERSITY

*Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy*

Bogdan, Henrik and Martin P. Starr, eds. *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 432 pp. ISBN-10: 0199863091

One of the most famous occultists of the twentieth century was Aleister Crowley. He was known as the wickedest man in the world (p.35), primarily because of his outright rejection of Christianity and his total embrace of magick, particularly of the sexual variety. This “magick” was not traditional stage performance, but a ritual magic that utilized the energy of the universe to enable a person to reach his or her “True Will,” (p.340). or ultimate destiny, without the interference of social dictates. With his creation of the spiritual system Thelema, Crowley changed the face of Western esotericism. Henrik Bogdan and Martin P. Starr provide a new, complex perspective on Crowley in their anthology, *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, which features for the first time an in-depth critical analysis of the controversial figure (p.3). The collection, which is divided into fifteen essays, features larger topics such as Crowley’s intellectual interests, his spiritual involvement in Eastern and Western traditions, his inspirations, and the impact he had on new religions. Bogdan and Starr’s goal is to show that “he was an influential twentieth-century religious synthesist. His esotericism was not a reversion to a medieval worldview; instead, in its questing for a vision of the self, it was a harbinger of modernity” (ibid). Crowley sought to bring occultism into the new century.

This anthology features a wide range of prestigious academics whose areas of expertise include Western esotericism, spirituality, paganism, and the study of both old and new religious movements, all of which adds new depth to our understanding of Crowley’s occultist legacy. Several themes emerge from the anthology. It becomes clear that Freud’s concepts of the id, ego, and superego were a basis for Crowley’s ideas, enabling him to be at the forefront of the modernization of magick. He was a spiritual explorer who embraced both Eastern and Western esoteric traditions. For example, he incorporated the Eastern practices of yoga and tantra into magical orders such as Ordo Templi Orientis (p.10), and, though Thelema was overtly anti-Christian, he was also influenced by Western

apocalyptic and millenarian ideas rooted in Christianity. In addition, he may have been influenced by little-known sources such as the Kurdish religion Yezidism.

The anthology's contributors elaborate on Crowley's relationships with other groups (e.g. the Free Masons) and individuals (e.g. A. E. Waite). These relationships reveal Crowley's desire both to maintain his respectability within English society and to be involved in magick (p.272). However, Crowley was unable to balance the two as effectively as Waite. The anthology also explores Crowley's relationships with deceased people; for example, he was fascinated by leaders like Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Crowley saw many "extrinsic" similarities between Smith and himself: both founded new religions, felt persecuted for their new religious ideas, and received their texts mystically (ibid). Lastly, Crowley became an influential figure for new religions of the twentieth century such as Wicca, Scientology, and Satanism. Interspersed among these central themes are narratives of Crowley's experiences, which provide the reader with a glimpse into the thought process of this mysterious figure. Each of the authors tries to present Crowley in a manner that reveals more dimensions of his practice of magick and moves beyond the image of Crowley as a wicked man to a more nuanced portrait of a modernist who tried to reinvent religion for a new age.

The book is significant not only for its portrayal of Crowley himself but also for its exploration of his legacy. Crowley not only inspired many countercultural figures but also generated innovative concepts that provided a structure for spiritual systems outside of a monotheistic context. Hugh B. Urban's chapter on L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology is particularly striking: one would not imagine that so modern a movement as Scientology would have taken a cue from Crowley's writing. This anthology offers powerful confirmation that religious traditions do not develop in a static vacuum but rather are constantly influencing and being influenced by other faiths and beliefs. Without Crowley's Thelema, religions such as Wicca would not have had any foundation.

On the whole, the book's scholarship is excellent. The articles make use of primary archival sources from the Warburg Institute and the University of Texas Harry Ransom Center. The authors could have made greater use of other archives, such as those at the Pennsylvania State University and University of Virginia libraries, but archival material relevant to Crowley at these other libraries is admittedly less comprehensive.

Readers should bear in mind that this anthology is geared toward scholars who have a working understanding of Western esotericism. The lay reader may wonder how the authors define Western esotericism. A footnote at the end of the introduction implies that there are multiple definitions (p.13). Esotericism may be identified with what Crowley calls "occultism," but his description of occultism as the "demonic 'other'" only indicates that it is "dark" in relation to Christianity. Since the anthology does not discuss Crowley's biography extensively, before reading this anthology readers would benefit from an introductory biography such as Richard Kaczynski's *Perdurabo: The Life of Aleister Crowley*.

Though Aleister Crowley's aura of mystery does not dissipate after reading this anthology, the reader will certainly gain a greater appreciation of the development of Western esotericism in the twentieth century.

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Howard, Thomas Albert. *God and the Atlantic: America, Europe, and the Religious Divide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 272 pp. ISBN 9780199565511

In 2004, German essayist Peter Schneider weighed in on the growing “trans-Atlantic religious divide.” Among other colorful indicators, he cited “a majority of respondents” in the United States who “told pollsters that they believed in angels, while in Europe the issue was apparently considered so preposterous that no one even asked the question.”<sup>1</sup> Magnified by U.S. foreign policy, the disparity between European and American religiosity, with its attendant divisions on political and social questions, has increasingly agitated cultural commentators in recent years. But agitated European discourse on American religiosity has deeper historical roots.

Enter Thomas Albert Howard, Stephen Phillips Chair of History and Director of the Center for Faith and Inquiry at Gordon College. Howard sets as his task the recovery of a “substrate of prior cultural and religious factors” that haunts our perceptions of contemporary “trans-Atlantic realities” and informs, however invisibly, contemporary anti-Americanism in Europe (p.4). Howard recovers valuable nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commentators on American religion from Tocqueville’s shadow, organizing them broadly into two camps: a host of America’s cultured despisers in Europe and an immigrant and an émigré (Philip Schaff and Jacques Maritain), both turned apologists, in America.

Criticisms of the American religious scene came from the right and the left—a Traditionalist and a Secularist critique. Within the former, Howard identifies three particular streams of thought. To British Anglicans (including Frances Trollope, Charles Dickens, and Matthew Arnold), voluntarism produced social chaos, sectarianism led to theological indifference, and “the democratization of American Christianity” fostered rampant supernaturalism. For Continental Romantics, like Schlegel, Schopenhauer, and Heine, “worldly practicality” was the “true religion” of Americans, and

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Schneider, “Across A Great Divide,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2004.

“money...their only almighty God” (p.53). The succeeding generation of German scholars saw America’s *Geistlosigkeit* (spiritlessness) typified by the likes of Billy Sunday, while Heidegger bemoaned the culturally catastrophic amalgamation of American democracy and Christianity. Finally, Catholic ultramontanes viewed American religion as a reflection of the French Revolution, the revolutions of 1848-49, and Protestant private judgment—cumulatively the Church’s very antithesis. Interestingly, for all of the above Mormonism epitomized the disastrous results of American religion—the end product of democratized and uneducated religious impulse or a Catholic parody posing as panacea for Protestant divisiveness.

Perhaps more enduringly influential have been the Secularist critics. Their various camps have shared a developmental view of historical progress that precluded the persistence of primitive religion. Purveyors included early French social scholars, from Condorcet to Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte, as well as “the influential trajectory of thought from Hegel to Marx” and its myriad offshoots. A third group was the republican anti-clericals who “felt that realizing the Revolution’s full potential entailed a relentless assault on ecclesiastical influence” (p.87). Fleeing to the U.S. after the failed 1848 revolutions, they were horrified by the enduring influence of disestablished religion in America. Howard argues that each of these camps helped turn the “secularization thesis” into a “monopolizing master narrative about modernity.” Drawing from Charles Taylor, Howard sees the “secularization thesis” as a “social imaginary”—an unexamined background assumption, neither pure theory nor pure experience—with enduring power to construct social realities as a self-fulfilling prophecy (p.88).

Howard’s foray into the secularization and modernity debate perhaps helps explain his selective focus on Schaff and Maritain. Prophets of secularization from Condorcet to Heidegger, perplexed by America’s divergence from their meta-narrative of modernization, spoke ill of American religiosity while largely eschewing empirical observation. Schaff and Maritain both spent decades in America and Europe and became convinced that American religion “too often had been subjected to



misapprehension and caricature” by European intellectuals (p.138). In Howard’s reading, their pure experience thus belied the “social imaginary” of the “secularization thesis.” Chapters four and five provide brilliant syntheses of Schaff and Maritain, their views on American religion in relation to their broader intellectual trajectories, and their vocal defenses of American religion and culture at home and abroad.

Howard’s concluding concern is to broaden myopic analyses of contemporary Trans-Atlantic divergences. Current policy differences do not explain themselves. Rather, long-standing elite discourse on American religion has “left a sizable mark on the formative presuppositions” of Europeans in the modern era (p.200). Howard’s impressive command of such a large sweep of intellectual history convincingly demonstrates that history’s continuing and pervasive presence in contemporary dialogue.

But make no mistake; this is an intellectual history of *elite* discourse, which begs at least two further inquiries beyond the scope of Howard’s volume. First, to what extent were elite portrayals of American religion reactions to popular European philo-Americanism? Tantalizing glimpses of popular perspectives often surface in Howard’s narrative, as when Tory intellectuals offered the effects of American voluntarism as evidence of the unreasonableness of dissenters’ demands for disestablishment in England, or when later figures like Rilke decried the increasing Americanization of European culture. What would a narrative of European perceptions of American religion look like if voice were given to the masses? Second, how might the elite discourse narrated here illuminate the making of religion itself? Out of functional necessity, Howard adopts an admittedly problematic and fluid definition of religion as, at times, “efforts to relate to the divine,” and, more often, “evangelical Protestantism” (pp.9-10). But Religious Studies scholars with their own set of inquiries might find useful vistas here for exploring the layers of discourse that have defined, rather than merely denigrated, religion in the modern West.

Howard's work is vastly informative, persuasively argued, carefully organized, beautifully written, and increasingly relevant. It is intellectual history at its best and opens up as many pressing and perceptive questions as it helps to answer.

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Faxneld, Per, and Jesper A. Petersen, eds. *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013. 289 pp. ISBN 9780190779246.

In *The Devil's Party*, Per Faxneld and Jesper Petersen compile essays from twelve of the top scholars in the field of Satanism. The goal of the book is not to exhaustively cover the topic, nor is it to persuade the reading audience that Satanism is good or evil. Rather Faxneld and Petersen choose to present an unbiased, academic overview of Satanism as a religion, and in that manner they are entirely successful.

The fact is that the word Satanism is, itself, enough to invoke a range of emotions in the average person. Some people are strangely drawn to the idea, while others are blatantly repelled by it. These feelings are the result of an intricate combination of one's theology, worldview, education, and many other factors. Faxneld and Petersen suggest that these emotions "need to be put to the side. Satanism, like all other religions, can and should be studied in a detached manner" (p.3).

The first point on the authors' agenda is to distinguish between Satanism as a "social and cultural phenomenon" and a "religious and philosophical one" (p.4). In many ways, Satanism in popular culture is an entirely different entity than that of the religion adhered to by many today and throughout history. Faxneld and Petersen make clear that their intentions are to present an overview of Satanism as religion, while filtering out the perceptions that popular culture has imbedded in the minds of many.

Following a brief overview and outline, the book is separated into four distinct sections, each containing three essays by different scholars. Faxneld and Petersen chose to take a very methodological approach in compiling the book, as these sections are arranged in both a chronological and thematic fashion (p.4), which helps the book to flow smoothly. Together these sections present a very impressive and holistic overview of the religion of Satanism, but each could stand on its own as a thoroughly interesting read as well.

The first section, titled “The Question of History: Precursors and Currents,” covers the earliest roots of recorded Satanism. Tracing such a belief system, which to this day does not have a consensus definition, is a difficult task. As Faxneld admits, “who is and is not a Satanist is of course a matter of definition and time specific conceptualizations of terms” (p.19). Nevertheless, these essays trace the religion back to early Swedish literature and history, and then discuss its evolution in the nineteenth century, which Faxneld sees as “a turning point in the history of modern religious Satanism” (11). Finally, Faxneld’s own contribution to the book introduces Polish author Stanislaw Przybyszewski, whom Faxneld claims to be a pioneer of modern Satanism, in that he “formulated what is likely the first attempt ever to construct a more or less systematic Satanism” (74).

The second section, “The Black Pope and the Church of Satan,” presents a trio of essays covering Anton LaVey, who founded the Church of Satan in the 1960s and is by far “the most iconic figure in the satanic milieu” today (p.79). These essays allow the reader a glimpse into the mind of a very unique man by attempting to address the various ideologies he developed. In the first chapter, Amina O. Lap offers an analysis of LaVey’s early writings. Eugene Gallaher then takes a closer look at the most notable of those works, *The Satanic Bible*, easily “the most popular and recognized book on Satanism today” (p.12). Gallaher offers some interesting and surprising insight into LaVey’s masterpiece. Finally, Asbjorn Dyrendal takes a look at some of LaVey’s later writings from the 1990s, examining the role that conspiracy theories played in his ideology.

The book then moves on to “The Legacy of Dr. LaVey: The Satanic Milieu Today.” The particular focus of this section is how the practice of Satanism in today’s contemporary society differs from the Satanism of the past. The prevalent factor in the development of modern Satanism is the invention of the Internet and the continual advance in technology (p.141). These developments have added a whole new dimension to the study of this faith, which is now more readily available and less mysterious to people everywhere.

Finally, the book closes with a section entitled “Post-Satanism, Left-Handed Paths, and Beyond: Visiting the Margins.” The focus here is on discussing groups that “display a fairly prominent use of satanic symbolism” but “do not self-designate as Satanists” (p.205). Kennet Granholm proposes the terms “left-hand path” (p.212) and “Post-Satanism” (p.214) to designate such groups.

Ultimately, Faxneld and Petersen have done an admirable job of collecting centuries of information on the topic of Satanism and presenting it in an organized manner. However, a conclusion from the editors would have been beneficial in summarizing the combined value of the four sections, but overall this book is an important and innovative work in that it is one of the first to really approach the study of Satanism from a purely academic and unbiased perspective.

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Bilici, Mucahit. *Finding Mecca in America: How Islam is Becoming an American Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. 257 pp. ISBN 9780226049571.

In his inaugural book, Mucahit Bilici, assistant professor of sociology at John Jay College, City University of New York, strives to answer this question: “How is the...nearness of the perceived intruder transformed into the...familiarity of a fellow inhabitant?” (p.10). Utilizing his specialties in cultural sociology and social theory, Bilici analyzes the transformation of Islam and Muslims from foreigners to countrymen in the American cultural landscape. His approach scrutinizes, personalizes, and humorizes this transition through vehicles both theoretical and practical, exploring everything from civilian rights to comedy as he tells the story of the “cultural settlement of Islam” (p.63).

Bilici’s argument revolves around the transition through the eyes of Muslims (p.63). The first half of his book, labeled “Cultural Settlement,” deals with “the orientations, translations, and cultural fine-tuning that take place at the interface of Muslim life and American forms” (p.30). Here, Bilici highlights the logistical changes necessitated by Islam’s spread to America. He first argues that disparate Muslim communities continuously aim for unification, a goal embodied in the reorientation of qibla lines in American mosques, in accordance with technical, rather than “organic” conceptions of space (p.61). He then details the adaptation of English as a Muslim language, as Islam adopted English translations of Arabic words and English accommodated the new Arabic terminology. Finally, Bilici shows America’s transformation from a “land of chaos” to a “land of Islam” as immigrant Muslims adopted America as a permanent homeland, not just a land for a temporary missionizing effort. This organization allows Bilici to show a process of cultural adaptation: unification of the foreign group, mutual change on the part of both cultures, and final acceptance of a new homeland.

Bilici builds on this framework to develop the second part of his book, which covers individual citizenship and the growth of Muslim immigrants into their new civil and popular identities. He discusses Muslims’ new roles as bearers of American rights, members of interfaith communities, and

creators of a new manifestation of ethnic comedy. In these chapters, Bilici makes Muslim assimilation more personal and changes its definition from loss of cultural identity to loss of “stranger” status (p.190). He argues that new generations of American-born Muslims are assisting in a shift toward unity of both cultures as Muslims become more “American.”

Throughout this book, Bilici explores the tensions of cultural acceptance. He probes the battle between a distinct Muslim identity and followers’ eagerness to alter their separatist image amongst 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans. He shows a strain between generations and nationalities, some of which favor exclusion, and others which seek inclusion. He illuminates the difficulty of creating a new homeland for a religion which is intrinsically tied by culture and practice to its geographic origins. Thus, Bilici frames the difficulty of assimilation not in getting “in” with American society, but rather in Muslim communities’ and individuals’ struggles to overcome their conflicting goals and desires. This depth of insight not only brings such turmoils to light, but works through them conceptually, elucidating concepts and doctrines which deftly bridge the gaps between various groups.

Bilici’s strengths lie in sociological analysis. He frequently cites social theory giants, like Georg Simmel and Martin Heidigger, and turns to thorough discussions of concepts such as language and home. Though the vocabulary is heavy for the uninitiated, his analysis strengthens his arguments on how a new Muslim identity develops. He is creative in his use of evidence, which is particularly apparent in the chapter on ethnic comedy which provides a much-appreciated lightness but also a fascinating insight into American-Muslim popular culture. Bilici is adept at handling these unique perspectives, revolving the entire ethnography around the shift in culture through the eyes of Muslims, which alone sets this book apart from other scholarship. However, Bilici struggles to define what “American” identity truly is while still painting the nation as a connected whole from which others are excluded. Additionally, he occasionally fails to extend the discussion beyond immigrant

perspectives by including an ever-growing population of American-born Muslims. Regardless of these small oversights, his argument and approach remain strong.

*Finding Mecca in America* provides a relevant look at cultural change and immigrant nations. The principles which Bilici lays out in this book, from the steps of broad cultural acceptance to individual assumption of new roles and identities, extend beyond the borders of Islam to all those labeled “other” in an American mindset. He guides them toward realization of home as a way of orienting the self to grow into a place or culture. Bilici states that “s human being’s nature [home] is his culture, which he creates as he moves along,” and demonstrates that through such creation, one can find home in a new and extended self (p.216). By so doing, Bilici earns an important place in the discussion of American Islam, social theory, and personal identity.

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Stowe, David W. *No Sympathy for the Devil: Christian Pop Music and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. 304 pp. ISBN 9780807834589.

*No Sympathy for the Devil* is a fine book on a crucial juncture in the history of religion and music, worth studying for anyone interested in either subject.

Stowe's thesis is that Christian rock originated when the countercultural strains of the 1960s were combined, by a few committed evangelicals, with apocalypse-focused, biblically literal Christian doctrine that claimed the reality of spiritual gifts, such as tongues and prophecy, and viewed the world as a battleground between God and Satan. Thus, the sound and the feeling of the hippy movement, complete with communal living experiments and giant music festivals, fostered a new brand of evangelicalism that resonated with many young Christians, helping make evangelical Christianity a major social and political force through the 70s and 80s.

Stowe presents his case primarily in the form of anecdotes from the lives of musicians, preachers, organizers, politicians, new converts, and lapsed Christians, showing their spiritual experiences, attempts to define their faith and art, struggles against temptation, and the role that new Christian music played in it all. His descriptions bring the Jesus Movement to life. He also ably (and at times dizzyingly) analyzes the songs, from rhythms to lyrics, and the movies and musicals that brought Jesus onto center stage.

To provide context for the rise Christian rock, Stowe addresses not only evangelical performers, but also fellow travelers including Billy Preston and Aretha Franklin, who, while never part of the Christian rock scene, were deeply influenced by their religious upbringings. He also draws in counterpoints, from Santana to Cat Stevens and Marvin Gaye, reminding readers that there were many spiritual options for musicians outside of Christianity.

Unfortunately, Stowe's focus on personal experiences, while providing a human perspective of the motivations of those making Jesus music, provides little detail about how a mass of listeners

across the nation responded to the music, or how it came to be assimilated into evangelical churches across the country despite opposition from those evangelicals who viewed all rock as “worldly.” This leaves a hole in Stowe’s argument about the cultural impact of Christian rock. He tells us much about those who lived in the movement, went to Explo ‘72 or Godstock, or made the music that was played there. This gives us insight into how rockers were born again, but little about regular listeners who stayed at home and listened to the records while attending regular suburban churches with none of the “hipness” or “showiness” of the California hippy or show-business churches Stowe describes.

The book’s other main weakness is that it is a story all about sound—and the sound of the music, vital to understanding its impact, is poorly expressed on the printed page, even with Stowe’s skilled descriptions. As I read, I found myself repeatedly wishing that the book came with an accompanying CD with a representative selection of key tracks, or at least an appendix with chapter by chapter listing of all referenced songs. Difficult as that may be given the nebulous and difficult nature of copyright and distribution management in modern America, it would certainly have added a great deal of force to Stowe’s otherwise compelling arguments.

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Moreland, J. P., Chad Meister, and Khaldoun A. Sweis, eds. *Debating Christian Theism*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2013. 574 pp. ISBN 9780199755448

In *Debating Christian Theism*, editors J.P. Moreland, Chad Meister and Khaldoun A. Sweis have put together a work that is both relevant to our times and intellectually compelling. The anthology contains two major sections. The first is composed of philosophical debates about the plausibility of theism in general, such as the fine-tuning argument, the problem of evil, and issues with omniscience. The second deals with specifically Christian issues, such as the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the Trinity. Both of these major sections are subdivided in order to present two opposing views on topical controversial issues, which are usually authored by an atheistic/agnostic philosopher on the one side and a theistic philosopher on the other.

In the first section of the work, titled “Debates About God’s Existence,” introduces the philosophical issues regarding the possibility of the existence of the classically defined God. While some of these debates, such as the discussion of omniscience, may require some prior metaphysical training, they are for the most part fairly accessible, getting straight to the point and only using the most cogent examples. Some of the essays in this section give new perspectives on old arguments, such as William Lane Craig’s “The Kalam Argument,” which concisely lays out one of the oldest arguments for God, arguing that the universe cannot have existed infinitely in the past and must have had a beginning. In addition to familiar arguments, there are also some fairly original ideas presented in the first section, such as Kevin Corcoran’s “Humans are Material Persons Only.” In it, Corcoran goes against mainstream Christian philosophy by embracing materialism over mind body dualism. While this position might be rare amongst Christian philosophers, Corcoran makes a strong case for the Christian materialist.

Joseph Bulbulia’s essay in the first section of the book, titled “Bayes and the Evolution of Religious Belief,” stands out as a particularly intriguing argument. In it, he asserts that, when

applicable, Baye's rule of statistical probability should be applied to the debate on the existence of God. If we can assign rough probabilities to the hypothesis that God does or does not exist, then we can adjust this belief accordingly when presented with evidence that either supports or undermines this position. Bulbulia uses the evidence that our belief in a god or gods would exist even if God did not exist because of evolutionary pressures. If the theist uses the conviction of God as evidence for his hypothesis, his belief should be adjusted accordingly. Bulbulia does not assert that his argument completely undermines the possibility of a God, merely that it should influence how a decision maker might adjust his views in light of the evidence. This method provides a good framework for discussing the multitude of issues in the debate over the existence of God.

The second section of *Debating Christian Theism*, titled "Debates About Specific Christian Beliefs," delves into arguments concerning the plausibility of some essential concepts of Christianity and the historicity of certain biblical events. Just as in the first section, the last group of essays contains both new looks at classical arguments and some more recent developments in the debate on Christianity. Katherin A. Rodgers, for example, develops an interesting argument for the Incarnation based on Anselm's work concerning the subject, in which she likens the Incarnation to a person playing a video game. Paul F. Knitter, on the other hand, develops a relatively new position in the debate over religion that Christianity is but one of many correct paths in life in his chapter called "There Are Many Ways to God." While these chapters may come from a wide historical range, they are woven together to address the multitude of issues surrounding Christian theism.

Although the text is overall well done, some small issues exist. Depth is often sacrificed for brevity, but this does not take away from the work as a whole as these essays are more of an introduction to the debates than an exhaustive treatment of them, and the authors still manage to make their arguments effectively. The issue of free will, which seems to be an important topic regarding the existence of God, is absent from the work, save for a brief mention in Julian Baggini's

“Science is at Odds with Christianity” (p.315). Finally, in some of the last few debates regarding specifically Christian issues, such as the historicity of the resurrection, both sides are represented by writers from a Christian perspective. Even though there is a benefit to this author choice, in that it shows the reader that Christians may have conflicting ideas on very crucial topics, it seems as though the perspective of a historically skeptical atheist/agnostic would strengthen the debate.

Despite these minor issues, *Debating Christian Theism* remains a comprehensive body of work. Unlike many other works that deal with the philosophical issues of religion, it covers an enormous range of topics and presents the views of both theists and non-theists alike. Moreover, the range is enhanced by the use of both classic and modern viewpoints, which captures the breadth of the debate throughout history. Even though debates on these issues can often become heated, the authors remain respectful to their opponents and the editors have compiled their work in a fair manner. The short, yet informative, articles will give new students a strong entry into the broad range of current scholarship on religious issues and seasoned scholars will find some new insights in some very old debates.

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Gschwandtner, Christina. *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. 352 pp. ISBN 9780823242740

Post-Modern or Continental Philosophy often has the reputation of being esoteric and impenetrable. Many prominent thinkers within the movement at times employ dense, difficult prose that scares away many readers. Christina Gschwandtner's *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* attempts to provide an introduction to religious thought and/or apologetics within Continental Philosophy that covers many important Post-Modern philosophers in an accessible manner.

The book starts by examining religious elements in the works of Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida. While she concedes that these philosophers are not apologetic in nature (and are often hostile to traditional theology), Gschwandtner covers how these thinkers employ religious imagery and themes at various points in their work. She explains how Husserl and Heidegger introduced the phenomenological approach to philosophy, which called for a return to basic perceptions and appearances, and hermeneutics, which advocated moving from a basic starting point to understand the world. Heidegger also moved away from what he called "onto-theology" (traditional metaphysics and proofs for the existence of God), which he felt reduced God to a conceptual supreme being. She next covers how Levinas examined the infinite and irreducible nature of individuals who demand total service and obedience with their unfathomable appearance. Gschwandtner shows how Derrida explores the implications of this phenomenology of the Other ("the face of the Other") for the possibility of gift-giving, hospitality, and religious experience, particularly through the lens of Abraham and Isaac. Indeed, she notes that Derrida seems to think that the infinite and thus unquenchable call of the Other drains traditional religion and theology of all meaning because they try to put limits on someone (God) who is not limited.

In the second part of her book, Gschwandtner explores how the French philosophers Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, Jean-Louis Chretien, Jean-Yves Lacoste, and Emmanuel Falque have used elements from Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida to study religion and the divine. While many of these thinkers do not make traditional arguments for the existence of God, she asserts that they all in one form or another deal with questions of transcendence and meaning with the help of phenomenology (particularly in regards to the Other), hermeneutics, or both. Furthermore, she notes that the relationship often goes the other way, in that these philosophers employ religious texts or themes (particularly Christian and Catholic) to inform their phenomenological and/or hermeneutical studies. Indeed, according to her account, these thinkers find themselves in and operate out of a particular tradition. Instead of offering logical proofs or scientific evidence for the existence of God, she argues that they legitimize religious belief and experience by demonstrating a sort of internal cohesion and depth within certain religious traditions (which she believes is in line with early patristic apologetics).

The final portion of Gschwandtner's book covers three English-speaking thinkers (Merold Westphal, John Caputo, and Richard Kearney) that have co-opted elements of the French continental tradition in various ways. She reads Caputo as a disciple of Derrida who has done much to introduce him to the English-speaking world, while Westphal and Kearney attempt to incorporate many of the insights from Continental Philosophy without completely undermining all traditional religious or Christian beliefs.

Gschwandtner's study covers an impressive variety of thinkers and manages to explain the religious elements (or at least the religious implications) of their work in a clear and concise manner. Her chapter on Levinas is especially good in this regard. Levinas' phenomenology of the Other is critical for later Continental Philosophy, but his prose is often difficult. Gschwandtner manages to provide a lucid description of this challenging philosophical concept. While secondary sources cannot

replace primary ones, this book would be ideal as an introduction or accompaniment for undergraduates hoping to study certain religious strains within Continental Philosophy. Furthermore, because each chapter focuses on a particular philosopher, students could read sections independent of the rest of the book if they wanted to study one or more of the thinkers Gschwandter examines.

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