

Book Two

# **Rational Religion**

**Religious Basis  
for the  
Renaissance of Liberalism**

A letter to one in 10,000

**By Jon J. Read**

**This is a working draft; feedback is appreciated**

Rational Religion  
Religious Basis for The Renaissance of Liberalism  
A letter to one in 10,000

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book one:  
Truthing: Philosophical Basis for The Renaissance of Liberalism  
A letter to one in 10,000

book two:  
Rational Religion: Religious Basis for The Renaissance of Liberalism  
A letter to one in 10,000

*Dedicated to my parents: Frank Victor Read, whose way was duty; and Barbara Ursula (Hughes) Read, whose way was service; and to my wonderful friend of 45 years, Charles Kallander, without whom many of the insights presented in these two booklets would never have come to mind. Sadly, all three are now deceased.*

*On the subject of good and evil, it was Chuck Kallander's position that: "No choice is wrong unless a better alternative exists, and it usually does." Hence, our mutual commitment to truthfulness as fundamental to achieving the good.*

*My mother would counsel: "You don't find time, you make time." My father, from Proverbs: "Where there is no vision, the people perish."*

## Foreword

The following preface to book one (philosophical basis) is equally relevant to this second book (religious basis). See also the "Segue" at the end of book one.

My purpose in these two short books is to reveal firm philosophical and religious footing for the fair-minded in their struggle with the unfair.

The intention is to re-ignite the American Enlightenment by revealing the long obscured authentic basis of liberalism. *Liberalism*, that is, not in its recent meanings of unprincipled compromise and government largess, but as the fair-minded and ever emerging, rational alternative to authoritarianism.

The goal is to win the culture wars; and in so doing, to propel a worldwide transition from a truths-and-deceit-based civilization to a truthfulness-based civilization.

The following is intended specifically for those young adults who have already committed their lives to the good, but are unsure how best to proceed -- unsure how to avoid the bad that others, and especially governments and religions, have perpetrated over the centuries in apparent pursuit of the good. It is also for seasoned activist thinkers who now realize that political and economic theory provides insufficient basis for creating an alternative to authoritarianism.

After witnessing unnecessary poverty in Latin America in 1956, and after a decade of activism in the 1960s, I know I was not alone in tiring of opposing the bad and wanting to lay hold of authentic philosophical and religious basis for creating the good. Like many other activist thinkers at the end of the sixties, I married, tried to raise a family, and learned, unfortunately, that what was wrong with the world could exist even between those who loved each other most. Few of us have been heard from since.

It is now more than thirty years, many illuminating experiences and many working drafts since, but at last I honestly believe that what is presented here, albeit in brief outline, can serve as a reliable guide to not only saving the world, but of creating a heaven on earth.

## Preface

In a 1782 letter, Thomas Jefferson wrote:

I rejoice that in this blessed country of free inquiry and belief, which has surrendered its conscience to neither kings nor priests, the genuine doctrine of only one God is reviving, and I trust that there is not a young man living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian.

In his last book, "The Age of Reason" written in 1795, Thomas Paine addressed religion with the same intention with which he previously confronted government -- to replace authoritarianism with reason:

Soon after I had published the pamphlet Common Sense in America, I saw the exceeding probability that a revolution in the System of Government would be followed by a revolution in the System of Religion. The adulterous connection of church and state . . . has so effectually prohibited, by pains and penalties, every discussion upon established creeds, and upon first principles of religion, that until the system of government should be changed, those subjects could not be brought fairly and openly before the world: but that whenever this should be done, a revolution in the system of religion would follow. Human inventions and priest-craft would be detected: and man would return to the pure, unmixed, and unadulterated belief of one God, and no more.

In response to centuries of religious wars in Europe, and in the spirit of the scientific revolution then taking place, both Paine and Jefferson hoped to break free of irrational and divisive religious dogma and place religion on a common sense, universal footing.

Their assumed common denominator was deism as then manifesting in Unitarianism. Their mistake, and the mistake of so many others in religious and political philosophy, was to attempt to build on rational truths rather than on the root of rationality itself -- personal commitment to truthfulness.

Their assumed common denominator of one God was, of course, as much a statement of dogma as the Trinity or any other unprovable religious concept. Rather than freeing religion from authoritarianism, deism, as a rigid truth, left religious belief entrenched within the untruthful context of thought. Deism remained susceptible to absolutism and to equally fraudulent relativism.

Two hundred years later and we are still in the same bind. Religious relativism may be rationalized as religious pluralism, but it nevertheless means that as a culture we do not have a common religious belief that makes sense. We may have adequate personal beliefs, but it is in the social sense that we are especially left with a void.

Michael Harrington (author of "The Other America") speaks of this void and its profound political and social ramifications in his 1983 book, "The Politics at God's Funeral: The Spiritual Crisis of Western Civilization."

Harrington discounts recent attempts at filling the void (*italics are mine*):

They are part of what Daniel Bell has called a "retreat to the private world where religions have authority only over their followers and not over any other section of the polity or society." That is the definition of the abyss which lies between religion as the expression of the values of a community, and religion as a matter of private belief. The latter may well be profound and even holy, but it is not *the organizing principle of a civilization*. That is what Judeo-Christianity was for several millennia. That is why it is so sorely missed now.

President George W. Bush's embrace of Jesus as his "favorite philosopher" during the 2000 presidential election may well have been an honestly held personal belief, but after the September 11 attacks, the admonition to "love your enemies" (as Lincoln at least attempted during the Civil War) was apparently assumed by President Bush to be inappropriate as "an organizing principle of a civilization."

Standing at the "abyss," and finding no plausible alternative, the Bush administration embraced the age-old authoritarianism of simple-minded truths, us-guys/them-guys, might-makes-right, they-started-it, ends-justify-the-means, and the demonizing of the adversary -- as in, "the evil ones."

Harrington makes his best effort at clarifying philosophical debris surrounding the void, and he looks as best he can for signs of emerging common sense religious transcendentals. However, he readily admits that:

. . . the question I have poised is so formidable that my answer to it will be inadequate, sketchy, perhaps more unsatisfying to me than to my readers.

He labors on, but with little success. However, in his last chapter and in Appendix P he tentatively, but with some optimism, considers Jürgen Habermas's "communicative rationality."

Habermas's thought is complex, but "communicative rationality" resonates with "truthing" as an ultimate commitment to communicate truthfully with one another in mutual attempts at creating the good.

Harrington also worries that there:

. . . is no easy way forward to new transcendentals, for these, I suggest, must first exist as a commonplace before they can be stated as a dazzling truth.

What could be a more "commonplace" conception than truthfulness? But note the box that Harrington is in as he assumes that the "new transcendentals" must "be stated as a dazzling *truth*." There we see the slip that moves us toward the authoritarian and absolutist/relativist trap of "the Truth of truthfulness" (as discussed in section 9 of book one).

The question here is: Can anything be said with some degree of certainty in the religious realm that escapes this trap, or are we stuck with truthfulness in the instant and nothing more?

Hindus and Sufis manage with little more. They have no dogma, and early Jews even avoided conceiving of God (Yahweh) in a symbolic sense by never saying the name. Gandhi avoided symbolic religion and believed instead that the very presence of truthfulness is the presence of God.

Clearly, truthfulness exists as religious basis, as does untruthfulness as truths held rigidly and delusively. The assumption that newer religions, such as Christianity and Islam, were rational improvements over older religions may be mistaken. Their value to authoritarian governments may have been their superior ability in bamboozling and regimenting the masses. Their strengths may lie less in their actual dogma, than in dogma held rigidly as absolute truth and as the only true way to God and salvation.

The question remains, however, can we begin with commitment to truthfulness as religious basis and develop common sense truths that don't double back and place us yet again in the authoritarian, absolutist/relativist trap? Can we develop common sense truths that by their nature remain contingent on truthfulness?

The answer is that we can, and the proof is in the following pages. The results may strike true believers as minimalist to the point of irrelevance; but nevertheless, most major religious questions are addressed and answered in either relative, or in a couple of cases, with absolute certainty.

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*Today our task is to find in existence itself a new foundation for reason. That is the urgent task in the spiritual situation defined by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Pascal and Dostoyevsky.*

Karl Jaspers

*Even if there is no truth man can be truthful, and even if there is no reliable certainty man can be reliable.*

Hannah Arendt

## **Introduction**

The following outline of rational religious basis contains three chapters: "Outermost," "Innermost," and "Existence." Each chapter contains an introduction and five sections.

"Outermost" addresses the questions of possible transcending meaning (herein termed, God), and the possibility of an afterlife. The result is the rational certainty that there either is or is not transcending meaning, and that an afterlife is possible with or without the existence of God. Two additional concepts are developed: that free will is biologically determined, and that free will in practice is synonymous with truthing.

"Innermost" reveals the essential "I" as a choice between the two fundamental contexts of truthfulness and untruthfulness. This choice determines one's integrity, hence one's life, and perhaps one's possible afterlife.

In "Existence" we examine existence itself and consider our place in its apparent three imperatives of an exertion toward being, achieving conscious realization of itself, and transcending its own finite limits.

The result is the uncovering of rational religious imperatives of truthfulness at the outermost context of our being, our innermost essence, and in existence itself. A "Summary," "Conclusion," and "Afterword" follow.

## **Outermost**

Remember wondering at an early age how can this be? How come I'm me, and how is it that all this stuff is happening? Is there a purpose, and if so what is it? Is there a God? Is there an afterlife?

You were pretty young, I'll bet. Still, those questions were your first steps on the religious quest. Chances are they were asked truthfully, but the answers you received were either pat-answer truths, or the truthful admission that it is unlikely anyone knows the answers to these questions with rational certainty.

Let us start then with this firm footing, such as it is, of your original and honest questioning. Let us go back to that point when you really did know that the fact you existed, and that all this stuff was going on, was so highly improbable as to border on the impossible.

In fact, your first honest conclusion might well have been, "It is impossible, but yet it is!" Not a very satisfying statement, and a tad contradictory, but truthful nonetheless.

"It's impossible, but yet it is," is where we will start. Where we end up may be in some way unfairly influenced by where we start, but I do not see a more truthful alternative.

### **1. The Perfect Quandary Exists**

Now, if you happen to believe it is perfectly reasonable that we find ourselves living on a rock flying through the heavens, each of us made of atoms and having conscious self-awareness, then we can part company here because I'm not going to let go of, "It's impossible, but yet it is."

What then becomes important to posit is that this realization of the apparent impossibility of existence legitimately opens the door to just about anything. That even one atom could exist, or even the empty space it occupies, appears so highly improbable that it is no more improbable for there to be some sort of transcending purpose or meaning. To my mind, God existing as an old man sitting on a cloud is no more preposterous than the fact of existence itself.

On the other hand, the door is also opened to the equally improbable possibility that there is no transcending purpose or meaning of any sort whatsoever. Our incredible fact of existence opens the door to two incredible possibilities: God exists; and, God does not exist.

Remember, I am not inferring a personal God, but simply using the term (mostly to save space) to designate something -- anything at all, that might transcend what we take to be existence.

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You no doubt have tried, as have I, to accept on faith that there is a God, but after a year or so gave it up as too absurd in the face of senseless suffering. Just the existence of food chains is enough to give an honest observer pause when maintaining the existence of transcendent meaning, let alone a beneficent deity.

You have probably also tried the opposite leap of faith, that there is no God, just to have that also dissolve in absurdity. For nothing to exist makes sense, but for something to exist suggests that a reasonable totality must exist, which then suggests that there must be more to reality than meets the eye.

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So much for leaps of faith. Let's stick to logic. What we do know with certainty is that there either is, or is not, some sort of transcending meaning. One or the other has to exist. We just don't know which one.

Professional philosophers may want to dismiss this certainty as a meaningless tautology. However, to realize fully that only one of two conditions must pertain is to be fairly well informed in comparison to many other fields. We may be in a perfect quandary as to which eventuality exists, but we need have no doubt whatsoever that one or the other does exist with absolute certainty.

What do you do if there is a 50% chance of rain? You take precautions for both eventualities. In effect, this is how I suspect most of us address the question of God or no God. We live between two parameters: God existing, and God

not existing. We may tend more toward the former when the engines conk out at 30,000 feet, and more toward the latter when doing our taxes, but for the most part, I suspect most people, albeit perhaps largely unconsciously, live their lives in accordance with these two ultimate parameters.

If that is what we have been doing, even if not fully mindful of it, then we might as well accept, what for a better term, Charles Kallander and I for 20 years called, the "Perfect Quandary."

You may expect one eventuality rather than the other, but you have no rational basis for doing so. There exists no conclusive proof one way or the other.

We are stuck then with our first rational religious certainty: God either does or does not exist.

What is ordained or prohibited by each parameter I will leave to you. For myself the God-parameter extols the larger or higher good, and the no-God-parameter suggests personal or immediate pleasure. Being happily married and raising wonderful children conforms to both parameters. Being an ax murderer, or fasting unto death for a good cause, probably does not.

This is not the same as "moderation in all things." My writing these booklets is immoderate in the extreme, yet the effort conforms emphatically to the imperatives of both my God-parameter and my me-parameter.

Far from obviating our primary basis of commitment to truthfulness, the truth of the Perfect Quandary saddles us with the need to think truthfully when simultaneously implementing the constraints and imperatives of both parameters. Our impetus to think truthfully is increased, as is our clarity and certainty concerning the outermost context of reality.

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You may wonder if the Perfect Quandary is perhaps too perfect, and that its very impenetrability might be proof of a divine setup to create free will. In my experience the same absurdity and doubt that crept in before when attempting to hold to one or the other alternative as an act of faith simply creeps in again. The "too perfect" idea's main value, at least for me, is that it helps sustain the God parameter, but it does not bolster it to the point of displacing or relegating the no-God parameter.

Pascal's Wager (that we have more to gain and nothing to lose by believing in God) is at best a rational argument for faith. Since it ultimately relies on faith,

and since, as we just concluded, faith is perennially susceptible to doubt, Pascal's Wager fails as rational religious basis.

Agnosticism is the belief that nothing can be known concerning the existence or non-existence of God. Again, this is a belief, and a negative one at that. By relying on belief, it too offers less certain religious basis than does the fact of the Perfect Quandary.

Faith may be the firmest footing available for the untruthful, but only as a result of their having abandoned truthfulness and thus being left with literally no alternatives but deception and delusory belief in truths.

Rational belief in the *possibility* of God within the Perfect Quandary is more certain than irrational faith in the actual existence of God. The faithful can lose their faith, but the truthful person never gets off the hook of the Perfect Quandary. It provides no wiggle room. It is constant. It is not a matter of faith, but of reason. Its two parameters, however indistinct their imperatives, are truthfully inescapable.

## **2. An afterlife is possible, God or no God**

If God is possible, an afterlife is possible; but what if there is fantastic transcendent meaning, but we are not a part of it? From our perspective, if our lives end at death, isn't that the same as no God? And also, what if there is no God, but an afterlife exists anyway?

In the Gospel of Thomas, which is a part of the Gnostic Gospels unearthed in Egypt in 1945, it reads:

His disciples questioned him and said to him, "Do you want us to fast? How shall we pray? Shall we give alms? What diet shall we observe?"

Jesus said, "Do not tell lies and do not do what you hate, for all is manifest in heaven."

If you have had a close call where your "whole life flashed before your eyes," then the idea that "all is manifest in heaven" can start you wondering if maybe you just had a glimpse of your afterlife. That is to say, every second of your life just as you lived it existing as one composite unit for all eternity. Call it "Life Everlasting."

If a receding observer in space can, in theory, see your life just as you lived it (albeit backwards) then who is to say what is possible and what isn't at this stage of our scientific understanding. After all, I don't think we asked to be here, so who is to say we get out of it when we die, God or no God?

For all I know I may have bought a ticket at an amusement park 1000 years from now where you get, "The ride of your life -- an actual life experience in a past era!" Actually, I doubt I'm here on a "ride" and I suspect my life flashing before my eyes is a survival reflex; but in reference to, "It's impossible, but yet it is," and having experienced my life flash before my eyes, I have to conclude that an afterlife must be considered a possibility (however improbable) independent of the existence of God.

In light of the possibility of Life Everlasting, it behooves us to smell the flowers and savor every second as though it might last for all eternity; and, of course, as though it might not.

Life Everlasting also cautions against suicide as a moral response to what some take to be the apparent alternatives of an uncaring God, or a Godless universe. The possibility that one's life might continue as an entity outside time puts new meaning into the phrase, "I've got to live with myself."

It cautions in favor of a life devoted to what one would want to live with forever, whether linkage to other such composite lives, or to an all-encompassing consciousness, exists or not. "They'll be sorry when I'm gone," loses much of its punch considering one might not be "gone," especially if a second phase of the afterlife is a linking of all consciousness.

If your response is, "I don't believe it," then remember, this is not about belief. It's about facts, logic and possibilities grounded in our starting point of, "It's impossible, but yet it is." It is about what we can know with certainty regardless of how minimal this may be.

### **3. The good life conforms to three outermost parameters**

The Perfect Quandary holds, but in light of the possibility of Life Everlasting we have to go from two to three parameters. We now have to think our way to best options between three ultimate possibilities: oblivion, God with an appropriate afterlife, and something on the order of Life Everlasting.

It was once thought unscientific to consider possibilities for which no proof was available. This ended with quantum physics. Today, some very weird possibilities are taken seriously by scientists. It is no less a breach of rationality to consider possibilities at the outer bounds of the religious realm and to be governed accordingly.

Can the same logic argue a 50/50 possibility for leprechauns? No. If they exist, they exist on earth and can be found. What we are dealing with at the outermost limits of reality are possibilities that, at least at the moment, transcend what can be known.

Obviously, the resultant required thinking to conform to the imperatives and constraints of the Three Parameters can only be successful if done truthfully. Therefore, our three ultimate, rational, religious parameters mandate truthfulness as a first and continuing, essential religious act.

Rational faith becomes firmness in the three possibilities. Irrational faith becomes delusional certainty in just one of them.

Thinking in terms of parameters is hardly a system of pat answers. In fact, it is very much the opposite. On the other hand, irrational faith, which displaces a basis in truthfulness, is the delusion that we can know with certainty and in the absence of proof which of the three eventualities is true.

That our formulation of three ultimate parameters doesn't leave you singing hallelujahs and praying on street corners is not the point. That you don't like it is not the point. That it does not fill your "spiritual needs" is not the point.

The point here is that it is rock solid. It compels truthfulness in bouncing possible actions off all three parameters. We have no rational excuse for accepting one eventuality over the others. When committed to truthfulness we are stuck using our best judgment in making decisions according to the Three Parameters.

It doesn't matter what odds we might place on one over the other at any particular moment, rationality and prudence demand we posit the three possibilities at the outer context of our thought as an ultimate guide to living the good life.

The phrase, "The good life," is used to mean a life of indulgence, and also one of serving the higher good. Here, it is used to mean both together, but not to the extent that one contradicts the other. On the contrary, truthful choices made within the constraints and imperatives of all three parameters virtually guarantee

the fullest, most unconflicted, most enjoyable, and most meaningful life possible. At least, that has been my experience.

#### **4. Free will is biologically determined**

I thought I got the following story from Conrad Lorenz's 1966, "On Aggression," but I can't seem to find it there. Anyway, students and their professor return from dinner later than expected and set about feeding the many fish in the scores of university aquariums. At nightfall, it is the instinct for the papa fish of one species to gather his offspring in his mouth and deposit them under the female at the bottom of the tank.

Aghast, one of the students realizes he has just dropped food directly in front of the hungry papa fish while its mouth is full of babies. The students watch motionless, fearing the worst, while the fish likewise remains motionless appearing to be thinking, but in actuality being immobilized by the conflicting instincts of eating, and doing right by the kids.

Eventually, and amid shouts and applause from the students, the fish spits out the babies, eats the food, regathers the babies and deposits them under the mother.

What this suggests is that our rational capacity is the evolutionary result of eons of previous brains attempting to mediate conflicting instincts. In other words, free will (the ability to consciously choose between good and bad options) is biologically determined. It would seem that existence has created what amounts to a free will chamber inside our skulls where instinct, perceptions, symbols, memory, habit and whatever can engage to discover best options.

In addition, the survival value of thinking things through as completely as possible has probably led to a tendency to hold open the process by giving credence even to factors that at first might seem to deserve less influence than others. There would be a value, when the instincts were of unequal moment, to tentatively treat them as equal so as to create an equilibrium and hence extend the time for various options to float to mind. In other words there may be an additional instinctual inclination toward an internal decision-by-consensus mode that makes more sense and results in better survival options than simple majority rule.

By holding off from snap judgments, discovery of all factors is more likely; but also, a form of creativity can take place by allowing the factors to arrange themselves into increasingly better options.

Certainly, science in its rigorous processes cannot ignore inconvenient but minor facts. Scientists doggedly hold open the door until the model stands without contradiction to any known factor. Likewise, artists and scientists (and certainly landscape architects) speak less of having created a solution than of having discovered it.

Where else does one discover these things but in one's free will chamber? How else does one expand this chamber together with others but with civility? What else is the process of willful expansion but truthing?

By the way, the Zen Buddhists' quip, "When hungry eat, when tired sleep," intended to dissuade novices from begging for truths, if taken literally would not have served our fish as well as his rudimentary attempt at thinking truthfully.

## **5. Truthing is the outermost imperative**

Apparently, we have the choice of using our free will capacity truthfully or untruthfully. Since random-acting sub-atomic particles and the lives of teenagers have dispelled the notion that everything in the universe is determined according to cause and effect, we can assume that we have a free will choice to expand our free will capacity or not.

Rigid belief in truths short-circuits our free will. Drugs, fasting and fatigue can expand consciousness, but can also distort and shrink it.

Intellectual and emotional commitment to truthing expands our biologically determined free will to discover best options. Fair-minded solutions are a natural and likely result of fully deploying our free will capacity together with others.

The students were civil and compassionate in remaining motionless. They were as one with the fish in hoping he could truth his way through the problem. They didn't want to be stupid and jam the fish and force it into a pat answer, knee-jerk reflex.

They wanted thought to take place, or lacking the ability to actually think, for the conflicting instincts to somehow find an uncompromised resolution -- an option that made it through whatever ultimate parameters the fish with its minuscule

brain had to work between. Parameters on the order perhaps, of "the larger good" and "immediate gratification."

When urging peace talks, we suggest both sides "sit down together." We don't want them becoming impatient. We want all factors to be understood. We want all options discovered and analyzed. We want their free will chambers to expand and to represent all that is relevant to the situation so that unanimity can result organically -- almost inevitably.

The Perfect Quandary and Life Everlasting significantly reinforce this natural, truthful, evolving process of getting the whole picture in mind. You don't have to decide which of the three parameters is most likely. That could shortcut the process and lead to pat-answer folly. Taken as an outermost context of being, our three ultimate parameters constitute a personal religious imperative to grasp what is going on. They compel, as a religious act, the expansion of our free will chambers to all that is even remotely relevant. They compel participation in the liberal dialectic.

When someone asks for "more time to think it through," or to "look at it from all angles," the three ultimate angles they can look at it from within an outermost, rational-religious context are the Three Parameters of God, oblivion, and Life-Everlasting.

What has improved here for honest thinkers is that their thought process, that may once have lacked certainty regarding the outermost frame of reference, now includes sensible religious dimension and clear religious sanction. Truthing henceforth exists as a rational religious imperative. It is compelled by the three most likely eventualities to which we are fated. One of which has to be true.

Freudians could claim that our three parameters correspond roughly to our super-ego (God, "our father"), our id (oblivion, "So what the hell") and our ego (Life Everlasting, "I did the best I could"). Maybe so, but what we have done here is to elevate three parameters that may have their roots in instinctual propensities for group survival and individual survival, from an intellectual awareness to a rational religious context.

Socio-biologists may have clearer understanding of the evolutionary origins of the parameters of the higher good, immediate gratification, and long-term personal good, but dignifying the parameters as religious ultimates more adequately serves our needs of discovering firm religious footing than positing them as mere psychological or instinctual inclinations. It makes truthful decision-making both

an overtly religious act, and more importantly, an unavoidable religious requirement.

Our honest activist thinker now has not only the firm footing of commitment to truthfulness as the ultimate philosophical starting point, and as the rudimentary requirement of world citizenship as mandated implicitly by international law at Nuremberg, but also as mandated by a rational religious context of three ultimate parameters.

Our honest activist thinker now has a process of thought, and an outermost context of thought that is philosophically, politically and religiously coherent. Call it liberalism.

## **Innermost**

Having discovered a rational religious structure of three parameters at the outermost context of our understanding, let us examine the center of ourselves and see what can be said with certainty concerning this realm.

First, a quick review from book one: Truthfulness and untruthfulness are our two and only contexts of thought. Rationality is undergirded by commitment to truthfulness, and irrationality and rationalization by belief in the need, right and utility of deception. Truthfulness is the adult mode of the species leading to liberalism and the mutual solving of problems. Untruthfulness is the immature mode leading to authoritarianism and the waging of battles. There is no neutral point from which to make the choice since we must choose truthfully or untruthfully and therefore will have already made the choice.

We find ourselves in one or the other mode due primarily to how we were raised. Past this point, however, and in facing "moments of truth," we either maintain or opt for the truthfulness context, or we maintain or opt for the untruthful context. Remembering that *soul* originally meant center, and since Socrates and others equate our soul with our integrity, we could say that this choice at the center of our being between truthfulness and untruthfulness is an ultimate or religious choice.

As with book one, this book is written for those already committed to the good – those who are most likely already operating from the truthfulness context of being. Unfortunately, what follows will probably be blocked by those locked

into the untruthfulness context -- those whose innermost ultimates are a confusion of short-circuits, rationalization and a penchant for delusory belief.

## 6. We are a choice

What exactly is at the center most part of our being? If we strip away all that isn't our essence, we jettison arms, legs, and maybe even our five senses. Since we know that we did not create truthfulness and untruthfulness, and that they are simply a part of the world in which we find ourselves, how can they be our center? When speaking of losing one's soul, is the soul the center, or is the center the part that does the losing?

Let's start by assuming that our rudimentary center is the spark of life itself, and maybe even the realization of our existence that does seem to come along with it. Then let's suppose that all other aspects of existence are off the table except the knowledge of one atom and the void it occupies. We are then left with our center, whatever all it is, and the option of thinking about the atom and the void truthfully or untruthfully.

Apparently, the one aspect of ourselves that is uniquely us is the choice between the two contexts. The two contexts are not the center, and in a way are more like two spirits we yield to, but the choice is at our center.

In simpler terms, we are that choice. It is this choice that determines our character -- the integrity of our free will chamber. This choice determines if we run power numbers and manipulate, or solve problems and cooperate. It determines the course of our life, and perhaps our afterlife. This choice is our innermost religious act. It is who we are.

In discussion, it is easy to detect "where they're coming from," as we started saying in the sixties, especially if you ask probing questions. Another expression that surfaced in that era was to say of the closed minded that they "had an agenda" -- that they had a position or ideology (or perhaps simply a personality) that resisted new facts and deeper analysis.

Louis Fisher visited Gandhi in 1942 and 1946. In his 1958, "Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World," Fisher says of conversations with Gandhi:

He did not attempt to formulate his ideas in finished form; he thought aloud so one could hear the brain tick. You heard not just words, you heard his thoughts being born. You did not receive a polished propaganda product as with most

politicians; you watched a mental process which was creative for him and you.

In a more authoritarian mode, Winston Churchill said of Gandhi in 1935, "Gandhism and all it stands for must ultimately be grappled with and finally crushed."

Remember being in Sunday school and objecting to the pronouncement that all those who had not given their souls to Jesus would go to hell, including those who hadn't even heard the Gospel? It wasn't fair, and my friends and I objected. What does seem fair, and consequently a more plausible ultimate, is that the choice of truthing, as the fundamental religious act, appears to be available to everyone.

## **7. Born again or finally growing up?**

Let me suggest that most people (9,999 out of 10,000 say) act truthfully most of the time, but reveal their primary untruthful context depending on circumstances. Such people live unexamined lives and fail to see their internal contradiction. They consider themselves honest, yet they lie.

Then there are those relative few who stay within the truthful context even when it might cost them dearly. When these people slip in minor matters and later regain their truthful perspective, they speak of having "lost it." What they "lost" was rational control -- in other words, the truthful context. At such moments they refused to "listen to reason," especially their own. We could also say that what was temporarily "lost" was their soul.

But what of the many who are basically locked into the untruthful mode as a result of not being raised to adulthood, or of having suffered trauma or severe stress early on? What of those others who constantly shade the truth for personal advantage, or those who believe they are being truthful when they uncritically embrace the truths of authority?

Such people need to be saved. For the good of themselves and the rest of us, they need to grow up. A near-death experience can cause a person to grow up fast, as can ancient trials of surviving alone in the wilderness. Most societies actualize or at least ritualize the coming of age of their members. Various devices have been used, but 2000 years ago when adulthood was thwarted in one particular instance by a stultifying Roman occupation, a ritualized, near-death experience simulated by being held under water became a religious and political

"rite of passage" to adulthood -- a being "born again" into an authentic mode of being.

Confessing one's sins may be used wrongly by today's churches to foster an underlying relationship to church authority, but as a public rejection of psychological defense mechanisms, such confessing may be key to adulthood.

Martin Luther was in law school when he apparently decided to attend first to his immortal soul. He entered a monastery, followed the rules, but failed to achieve a religious experience. The story has it that he tried fasting, even flagellation, but to no avail. Possibly close to death, he admittedly gave up.

However, in that moment of total surrender, he experienced "the peace that passeth all understanding." His analysis was that God's grace is always extended, and that it is man's grasping that is the obstacle. I have to believe that this "born again" experience, like its counterparts of satori and nirvana in eastern religions, is a transition experience from the truths-grasping juvenile mode, to adulthood -- from the bondage of untruthfulness to the liberation of truthfulness.

In the Transactional Analysis school of psychotherapy popular in the 1970s, three ego states were thought to exist: parent, child and adult. The parent and child were thought to be flip sides of the same authoritarian coin, whereas rationality was by definition considered to be the adult ego mode. It failed to catch on, I'm afraid, due to the same one-in-10,000 odds against being honest examined in book one.

It may also have floundered due to conceiving of being rational as holding to supposedly rational truths as absolutes, or more likely, in not realizing that the deeper basis of rationality lies in personal commitment to truthfulness.

A similar problem befell Luther, who immediately after his experience embraced those truths of the church he believed to be true, thus slipping back into the world of religious dogma and its inevitable temptation to place truthfulness subordinate to truths.

What is needed is a coming of age religious experience that doesn't liberate youngsters from the truths of the family and childhood peer groups just to then stick them with the truths of church and state, but an experience that holds to the liberating conversion to adult truthfulness, and no more.

Interesting isn't it, that the Falun Gong now being suppressed in China holds "truthfulness" as its first principle.

## 8. Evil can be fixed

When being hung on the cross, Jesus said, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." This is often taken to mean that those responsible would not have done such a thing had they known Jesus was the Son of God. But what if it was meant literally? What if evil (such as killing a person like Jesus for a supposed higher good) is more a taking leave of one's senses than of rational intent -- more a case of being trapped in the untruthfulness context than of thinking as a responsible adult within one's truthfulness context?

Did those responsible for the deaths of upwards of three million Vietnamese really know what they were doing? To combat evil, what are we to do with these perpetrators?

Liberalism has had a tough time with evil. The transition from authoritarian retribution, to constructively contending with the root of evil, has been slow to manifest in compelling theory.

The word *mad* is used to mean either angry or crazy. Or, are they one and the same? I certainly believe that those who refuse to deal with me truthfully and with civility, and who prefer instead to get angry and argue irrationally, are crazy. There may be an angry/crazy spectrum with genocidal fanatics at one end, and those who always let others say good morning first, at the other. Still, neither is in the truthfulness context, and as such they are not solving problems, but making and exacerbating problems.

In her 1979 "Trouble in School" Patricia Ross tells how her research in Chicago schools revealed that, although punishment was meted out on the assumption that those kids who got into trouble saw constructive alternatives and rejected them, the fact was they didn't. They hadn't learned how not to get into fights. That habit of the mind of expanding one's free will chamber to include the welfare and all relevant factors of those who appeared to be acting unfairly toward them, was not available to them. Fortunately, such behavior can be inculcated in both schools and prisons.

A further complication is that the mind can hide things from itself. As mentioned in book one, Freud termed the entity that hides our dreams if we don't grab them fast, "the censor." Daniel Goleman in his 1985, "Vital Lies, Simple Truths: The Psychology of Self-Deception," employs the word "lacuna" to mark

what he termed the "black hole of the mind." In his 1994 "Emotional Intelligence," the "amygdala," a part of the limbic system, is identified as the seat of such "defensive gaps in awareness."

The point here is that if evil has its roots in our being trapped in the untruthful context, and hence in seeing others as things and consequently not admitting their existence into one's free will chamber as equals, it can be fixed by assisting in the unfinished business of growing up and committing to truthfulness. A good place to start may be with the wisdom and deep civility of:

Forgive them for they know not what they do.

## **9. Liars don't love**

What can be more at the emotional center of the self than those feelings and thoughts we have when falling in love, marrying and having children? When truly in love, the welfare of the spouse is of at least equal importance to that of the self . . . if the person is an adult, that is. If they are still in the self-centered juvenile mode, then what they take to be love is probably not so much their loving, as being loved. Such a "love" is selfish and manipulative.

The only substantial reason to believe in the right, need and utility of lying is if one wants advantage of some sort over others. Otherwise, why lie? Why not just have open and truthful communication so decisions can be made to mutual advantage, and so that empathy and intimacy are deepened as a natural result? What else do we mean by the phrase, "making love."

The concern here is not when both parties are each one of the ones-in-10,000, or if they are both liars. It is for the truthful person who has been hoodwinked into marrying a liar. In particular it is to head off the sort of situation where the truthful party "loses it" and kills spouse, kids and self.

The truthful person needs to understand that what the liar is at base fighting for is the right to be irrational. They defend the self that is locked into the untruthful context of being. They are not doing this on purpose in the rational sense. Most don't even know they are being irrational in defense of their irrational context. Their rational or truthfulness context is blocked, so what they take to be the self, is the self, but it is the juvenile self.

You may wonder why they can't stop lying and just level with you, but that mode is unavailable to them. It is not who they are. During courtship they may

have convinced you that they were mature and fair-minded, but it was a facade. They are trapped and they fight to stay trapped since your demands to be rational are taken as attacks on their very essence, which in a way it is.

In his 1968 best seller, "The Intimate Enemy," senior author and psychotherapist George Bach speaks without overstatement of such mates as "crazy" and as "satans."

Churches whose philosophical and religious basis amount to a similar belief in the right to be irrational are of little help. Schools of psychotherapy that maintain that the norm is normal, and therefore a belief in the right to lie perfectly acceptable, are sponsors of dysfunction -- traitors to our destiny -- apologists for the root of evil. Witness Gina Graham Scott in her 1994, "The Truth About Lying":

The most important questions for you to answer are: What are your own considerations, values, and priorities about lying? What seems to work for you?

What is needed is a born-again, coming-of-age experience where the partner gets catapulted into the truthful context of being. Contemplating one's ultimate demise can help in taking the leap, but liberal society needs a formal religious showdown that facilitates this transition. We need marriage vows with teeth in them focused on commitment to truthfulness and problem solving as the ultimate religious acts. We need to regain "pledging one's troth" as a religious covenant. *Troth*, that is, as in the older English word for truth -- as in being true to each other, truthful with each other and worthy of trust by each other.

## **10. Truthing is the innermost imperative**

Before being executed, union leader Joe Hill wrote, "Don't mourn, organize!" Fine, but decades of trying to organize without commitment to truthfulness as political and religious basis has had about as much success as building on sand. What the left has ended up with time and again is the "leftist firing squad" -- a cartoon metaphor where truths-addled zealots stand in a circle and shoot the person next to them over sectarian differences.

Also, how do you organize when the basic unit of husband and wife is vulnerable at the get-go from the same lack of clarity on the essence of solidarity? How can you live a life that creates the good locally, globally and in the home

when your partner's free will chamber is a tangle of short circuits and hopelessly befouled by a belief in the need to lie?

What our examination of the center of ourselves has yielded is the same need to choose truthfulness over untruthfulness as our primary religious act as was discovered at the outermost realm of our being.

At our center lies a choice. That choice is the one unique aspect of ourselves. All else are add-ons provided by the existence in which we find ourselves. As far as our destiny here, and in a possible hereafter, that choice determines our integrity, or lack thereof, and hence our fate as religious beings, as serious political people, and as loving partners.

To what extent it is in our power to make this choice is open to question, but the choice exists nonetheless. It may have been made early on by how we were raised, and it is possible that a near-absolute personal commitment to truthfulness made during a moment of insight, or a "moment of truth," will suffice to accomplish an eventual complete conversion. However, many of us may not be able to fully escape the untruthfulness context without an actual or a ritualized transition experience.

Nevertheless, The Choice exists at our center. This choice is the ultimate religious challenge for all of us. We are that choice. It is clearly a choice between the roots of good and evil.

In his 1880 novel, *The Brothers Karamazof*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky has brother Ivan conceive a story, "The Grand Inquisitor," to prod his deeply religious younger brother. Incidentally, the president's wife, Laura Bush, cited it during the 2000 elections as her favorite piece of literature. The point of the story is that were Jesus to return to earth, the Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition would refute Jesus for bestowing a freedom on the people, which they could not responsibly handle nor be happy with. Jesus never says a word during the encounter, but here are excerpts that illuminate philosophical rationalization for religious authoritarianism, as well as inferring the liberal alternative. The Grand Inquisitor is speaking directly to Jesus:

Didst thou not often say then, "I will make you free?". . .

For fifteen centuries we have been wrestling with Thy freedom, but now it is ended and over for good . . .

But let me tell Thee that now, today, people are more persuaded than ever that they have perfect freedom, yet they have brought their freedom to us and laid it humbly at our feet . . .

They will marvel at us and look on us as gods, because we are ready to endure the freedom which they have found so dreadful and to rule over them -- so awful it will seem to them to be free. But we shall tell them that we are Thy servants and rule them in Thy name. That deception will be our suffering, for we shall be forced to lie.

At the end of his 1869 classic, "War And Peace," Leo Tolstoy has his hero, Pierre, visit St. Petersburg for meetings with those who, due to their opposition to church and state authoritarianism, were then beginning to be called "free thinkers." When reporting excitedly of his optimism for a better future to his wife, Natasha, Pierre confides:

Nikolay says we ought not to think. But I can't help it. To say nothing of the fact (I can say this to you) that in Petersburg I felt that the whole thing would go to pieces without me, everyone pulled his own way. But I succeeded in bringing them all together; and then my idea is so clear and simple. I don't say we ought to work against so and so. We may be mistaken. But I say: let those join hands who care for the good cause, and let our one standard be energy and honesty . . .

I only meant to say that all ideas that have immense results are always simple. All my idea really is that if vicious people are united and form a power, honest men must do the same.

In similar vein, regarding our religious or ultimate choice at the innermost essence of ourselves, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his 1841 essay, "Self-Reliance," equates truthfulness with integrity and adulthood:

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.

Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.

Liberalism is not neutral on this point. In our innermost religious realm, the choice between truthfulness and untruthfulness is not just a saving of our souls, but the choice between authoritarianism and liberalism.

It is a cultural calamity of the highest order that we have failed to conceive and implement coming-of-age and born-again experiences designed to facilitate the relinquishing of the juvenile truths-and-deceit context for that of the truthfulness context of being. Our failure jeopardizes not just the integrity of our citi-

zens, but also the soul of our country, if not our planet. Our failure invites a retreat to a dark age of authoritarianism.

## **Existence**

Having addressed what we can know with certainty concerning the outermost limits of our reality and the center most essence of our being, let us look at everything in between. That is to say, let us look at existence itself and see what it is up to. Let us take our perceptions of reality at face value, see what purposes become evident, and then examine our connection to these defining aspects of the tangible situation in which we find ourselves.

This chapter is largely independent of the question of transcendent meaning or of anything else that might exist past what is known as "the real world." The idea is to focus on our earthly predicament and see if existence, and our relationship to it, dictates constraints and imperatives within this finite context that offer ultimate guides to the good.

The Perfect Quandary, the Three Parameters and The Choice still stand; but the impenetrability of the Perfect Quandary will be taken here to suggest that if there is a God, then God is hidden on purpose. If so, it then becomes a religious duty to contend with life as it is and to look for guides to the good in the apparent ultimates of existence itself.

### **11. Existence is an exertion toward being**

Whether we look at the universe as a whole -- from the Big Bang and its possible endless expansion -- or at the lesser realms of solar systems, planets, life on planets, molecules, atoms or sub-atomic particles, the one constant that appears evident is that a whole lot of thrashing about is going on.

There doesn't appear to be a grand scheme inexorably working toward eventual perfection. On the contrary, whatever complexity develops along the way appears to be more the product of blind forces than of vision or premeditation.

The best we can say about all we see taking place is that it appears to be infused with an impulse toward happening. At whatever realm we look, calling its essence an accident, or meaningless, seems to miss the spirit of the thing. Say-

ing it is just some sort of cosmic happenstance misses the point that something is trying to happen.

The expression, "He jumped on his horse and rode off in all directions," always cracks me up, but it does seem to capture the spirit of existence. There is obviously a relentless tendency toward happening or all this stuff wouldn't be happening. There is exertion at every level, and even our personal lives unfold in this image.

Whatever existence is, it seems to be at a minimum, a striving to be. What it is trying to be seems no more clear than the destination of our horseman, but like our horseman it is fervently en route nonetheless. We could borrow a phrase from army recruiters of the 1990s and suggest that existence wants to "be all that it can be."

Given the limitations inherent in the building blocks of reality, there appears to be a tendency to combine immense amounts of energy and near-endless amounts of time to let whatever can happen happen.

We can say then with some degree of certainty that existence as a whole and in part appears to be an exertion toward being. We might also add that it appears undirected by a separate entity, either internally or externally.

If there is a religious constraint or imperative here, it would be that we should get with the program and make something of ourselves. "To be or not to be?" is a question to be answered in the affirmative. It would also mean not putting sticks in other people's spokes, but rather of working together to take the adventure to its furthest limits.

Creating a heaven on earth seems like a good place to start . . . unless you have a better idea.

## **12. We are the conscious self-awareness of existence**

You probably think you are you, and that all this existence surrounding you is not you, but being rational and considering the atoms we are made of, we will have to admit that it appears that we are part of existence and not some separate speck of consciousness here on a visit. We might be that, and regarding the Perfect Quandary we cannot say with certainty either way, but for the purposes of this chapter it does appear that we are part of existence, lock, stock and barrel.

If our consciousness is not something apart from existence, then it has to be part of it. This realization turns the world on its head. Instead of existence being out there with you looking at it, you are actually the eyes of existence looking at yourself.

In other words, we are the consciousness of existence and the conscious self-awareness of existence itself. Judging by the lack of response to Carl Sagan's efforts at detecting signals from other life in the universe, you and I, and a few other members of our species, may be the only instances of existence actually achieving conscious realization of itself.

This is not an easy concept to grasp. As Alan Watts concluded in his 1966, "The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are":

In looking out upon the world, we forget that the world is looking at itself -- through our eyes and ITs.

Actively sharing this insight with others could be understood as an imperative of existence in expanding its self-awareness. It seems then that we are saddled with aligning ourselves with the exertion toward being, and in communicating to others that their consciousness is reality's consciousness, and apparently its only conscious self-awareness in the universe.

At a minimum, this second imperative provides environmentalism with religious dimension. It means we should do all we can to protect our species from extinction, which means protecting our life-sustaining and incredibly fragile ecosystem as a religious duty.

It also sets us at loggerheads with those religions that proclaim as a certainty (and not as a possibility) that our consciousness is not of this world, but apart from it and linked to a personal God and an appropriate afterlife.

This closed-minded belief -- this opting for the untruthfulness context -- turns all of existence into expendable means. Whereas, if existence is all there is, and we are its conscious self-awareness, then far from being expendable, existence is holy and should be considered as such. The concepts of "Mother Earth," and Albert Schweitzer's "Reverence for Life," become deeply relevant.

### **13. We are god's thinking**

The realization that we are the conscious self-awareness of existence might be easier to hold to, and would also put the concept in a more religious context, if

we define the totality of existence as "god" with a small "g." If "God" with a capital "G" can represent the possibility of transcendent meaning as the ultimate reality, then in considering existence as the ultimate reality, it seems reasonable to at least think of it as god. The word might not denote anything more than does the "all-of-existence," but its connotations expand our free will chambers considerably.

Liars may take such a conception as further license, but for the truthful it diminishes alienation from reality. It saddles us with making even better decisions in furthering the exertion toward being. It tells us where we stand in relation to what we perceive as reality. We can forgive a finite god its food chains, and maybe even be more forgiving of the inevitable downsides of our own and others' best intentions.

The conception also gives us a free hand in telescoping the evolutionary process of trial-and-error and survival-of-the-fittest by using genetic engineering to tweak a gene or two here and there. However, it also saddles us with the realization that we are on our own here and if we screw up and do something that is not fail-safe, and that upends the delicate balance of life on earth, then we have truly committed the ultimate sin.

Tweaking a gene to get rid of appendixes could inadvertently influence a gene that increases the gravitational pull of the "black hole of the mind" -- the lacuna -- thus worsening the present odds of one in 10,000.

The realization that we are as one with existence gives us the right to move the agenda, but it also gives us the responsibility to be double damn sure we are not unleashing forms of life that could do us all in. A moratorium on gene tweaking would be rational and prudent. This most important debate is underway, but it is not being conducted with the responsible understanding that our free will chambers may be the only place in the universe where god can think rationally, and, that there may never be a second chance if we blow it.

Rather, the debate is being dominated by closed-minded, money-grubbing liars. The conception that we are god's thinking, and that existence is more than an expendable half-way house on our way to heaven, is far more rational than their profit motive run-amok -- far more truthful than their delusional wishful thinking that, "There's nothing to worry about."

Do not count on our conglomerate owned media, or our corporate dominated government officials, to ever side with reason against profit. Vigorous non-

violent action demanding fair-minded, public debate is needed to put this and other equally dangerous scientific tinkering before the people of the world.

In the spirit of truthing, most every movement demonstration from now on should be a debate or a demand for debate, not an authoritarian construct for "movement leaders" to posture and dispense truths. Why structure events to perpetuate a leader/follower mentality? Why not demonstrate a prototype that can be replicated by all of us in day-to-day encounters? Why not manifest liberalism instead of authoritarianism? Why not supplant juvenile protesting with adult truthing?

#### **14. Existence confronts its finite limits**

A third possibility available to a finite existence is to try to reach past itself to the infinite. This is not to say that finitude can reach infinitude, or even that infinitude "exists," but only that trying to reach past itself is an option that does exist.

The first two imperatives of a finite universe didn't overly burden us, but what of our relationship to this third seemingly inevitable imperative? Well, isn't this what personkind has been attempting for millennia -- a reaching past our finite situation toward the infinite?

Looking at the planet from the air, here are all these spires and steeples and all manner of religious edifices reaching skyward. There are buildings all around the world filled with people likewise attempting to reach past themselves to whatever might lie beyond. The impulse is universal and persistent.

Again, this is not to infer that the infinite necessarily "exists." It is just to say that of the three obvious possibilities open to a finite universe, we have been doing our part fairly well, especially when you consider that for most of our history we didn't really understand what was going on, or what we were supposed to be doing.

Even irrational faith can be understood as pushing the limits in reaching past the finite. In this perspective the world's religious fanatics have to be viewed with sympathetic understanding. There is something pathetic but also inevitable about their zeal.

When we accept that we are of god, and that god seeking God is not so much something we do as something we are, then what all these various sects and denominations are up to becomes literally natural.

That they overreach by fudging on the truth concerning their inside track to God becomes forgivable when you realize that grasping at straws is what is mandated by reality's imperative to reach past itself.

However, we should learn to recognize where authentic truthing leaves off and imagination slips into self-deception. We can all respect the spirit of our ancestors' best efforts at responding to reality's compulsion, especially the magnificent architecture, music, paintings and acts of compassion, but when one group claims primacy over the others and does harm to the others in the name of the transcending infinite, of which no one really knows anything, then it is time for those committed to the good via truthing to step in and try to get the participants to understand their obsession within the perspective that they are god with nothing better to do.

## **15. Truthing is the imperative of existence**

In reviewing the previous four sections, it appears evident that a finite reality couldn't really find much else to do, but exert itself in every way possible, achieve conscious realization of itself, and attempt to reach past its own finite limits. These three eventualities are structured into the nature of being finite. Even without design or intention they become inevitable.

In being part of existence it shouldn't come as a surprise that we function in like manner -- that we reflect these impulses whether we fully realize their origins or not. Nor should it be a surprise that these impulses have manifested over the centuries as attenuated and warring civilizations complete with varying cultures, languages and rituals.

However, in today's interconnected world, the truths on which these belief systems were built, and the deception inherent in their warring with one another, have reached an impasse. In lacking definitive proof, the belief that one group has an inside track to the one true God becomes rationally untenable.

The conflict between their respective truths, and the resentment at the deceptions and delusions in maintaining these truths, especially as played out today between the Christian, Muslim and Judaic worlds has reached a point where a creative accommodation is called for. Crusades, terrorist attacks and preemptive strikes are clearly not the best options available. A universal understanding of our shared situation offers better promise.

In the world of religion it is time for the impulse toward truths and delusion to yield to a countervailing embrace of universal truthfulness. In understanding our past parochialism as historically legitimate manifestations of a universal impulse of existence, we can begin to appreciate the authenticity of pluralist expression, even as the respective truths of the various religions no longer represent ultimate basis.

Our ancestors may have warred over varying conceptions of God, but today we can all have the same generic possibility of God. Also, without question, we can all have the same god, since we are all it. Either way we have common ground. Taken together we have firm and shared religious basis in rational certainty.

Respecting our various traditions in this context becomes a legitimate pluralism that is not a rationalization for relativism. Our traditional forms of expression are plural, but our common ground is that we all stand as one within the Perfect Quandary, and we all stand as one as an integral part of an existence destined toward happening, achieving self-awareness, and reaching past itself.

Accepting that we are the conscious self-awareness of existence does not free us from the Perfect Quandary, the Three Parameters or The Choice, but it does help free us from the juvenile mode of submission to dubious dogma and ecclesiastical authority as ultimate guides to the good. Accepting that we are the consciousness of existence saddles all of us with a religious responsibility that equates to being adult and to making an even more fervent commitment to use our heads.

## Summary

Since the course of our lives is determined largely by the decisions we make, and as we realize early on that some decisions lead to better results than others, the question becomes, how can we make best decisions?

The answer given in book one was by being truthful with one and all. This was our starting point and it is to the truthful and not the untruthful to whom these two books are addressed, hence the sub-subtitle of (in reference to Hamlet's lament), "A letter to one in 10,000."

The remedy given for the untruthful was to grow up, stop lying and stop being subservient to authoritarian truths. However, it was admitted that such a metamorphosis might require a coming-of-age or born-again experience, but that

detailing how to meet this challenge was not within the scope of these two books. It was suggested only that a good place for the truthful to start was to build a base in the schools by organizing and advocating for a curriculum designed to inculcate truthfulness at every grade level.

Likewise, the rational religious basis outlined in this second book is not designed as a proselytizing tool for the untruthful. It is for the truthful who might soon be putting their lives at risk in confronting violence-prone authoritarians. It is for the fair-minded in their struggle with the unfair so that when under dire threat they can think clearly within an ultimate context that justifies, mandates and sustains their commitment to contend truthfully and with civility. Such a context is religious in dimension. Its validity results in being anchored in rational certainty.

Our three-part analysis revealed rational religious basis for liberalism by focusing in turn on the outermost realm of our perceived reality, the innermost essence of the self, and what we perceive as existence.

The challenge was to avoid constructing a context of truths that placed us yet again in the same relativist/absolutist trap as the truthfulness-subordinate-to-truths-based religions. Fortunately, this three-part formulation provides basis in rational certainty, even as its truths mandate truthfulness.

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An examination of our outermost conceivable reality resulted in the Perfect Quandary -- the absolute certainty that there either is or is not some form of transcending meaning, that there either is or is not some form of afterlife and that an afterlife is possible with or without the existence of God.

Looking at our innermost self we determined that the one aspect of ourselves that appears to be uniquely us, and not necessarily part of the reality in which we find ourselves, is the choice between truthfulness and untruthfulness. Further, that our freedom to choose between good and evil (free will) is undercut when being untruthful since truths held closed-mindedly short-circuit our thought process, and deception in its various forms distorts and corrupts it.

Truthfulness, on the other hand, is as one with free will in that it expands consciousness to allow all relevant factors to come to mind. It encourages more alternatives to be realized and for their respective advantages and disadvantages to be understood in the largest possible perspective.

Our investigation of existence revealed three characteristics seemingly inevitable for finite existence: An exertion toward being, achieving conscious awareness of itself and attempting to reach past itself to the infinite or to whatever else might surpass its own finite limits.

Apparently, we exist as manifestations of these three tendencies. We are an exertion toward being. We have evolved to achieve consciousness, then conscious self-awareness, and most recently the conscious realization that we are existence and that we therefore constitute the consciousness of existence and the conscious self-awareness of existence itself.

Third, we embody the compulsion to reach past our finite limits to whatever might lie beyond. Clearly, we manifest this compulsion in religious edifices and practices around the world. Since we are free to define the all-of-existence as "god," it is not an overstatement to say that we are god seeking God.

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Therefore, when making decisions, whether they be momentous or mundane, we can have firm, rational, and universal religious basis by first reconfirming our near-absolute commitment to truthfulness, thus exercising our free will by allowing the spirit of truthfulness to open our minds to everything that might possibly pertain to the decisions at hand.

Having reconfirmed that we are in essence this choice between truthfulness and untruthfulness, and next that our total self appears to be as one with existence, we can then consider each decision within the outermost context of the Three Parameters of life ending at death, every second of our lives continuing to exist as one unit outside time (as in near-death experiences when our "whole life flashes before our eyes") and that there may actually be transcending meaning with an afterlife reflective of the lives we have lived.

A further step in making best decisions is to be open to whatever might emanate from what might lie beyond; but also, to accept that whatever might transcend our known reality has probably chosen to remain hidden so that our decisions will be made according to the real-world factors before us.

Far from subjugating our decisions to an ideology of rigid truths, this religious constellation of truths compels the on-going process of being truthful. However, our truthful process no longer flounders in a religious vacuum. It is bounded and propelled by what we now know with certainty concerning our perceived reality.

This rational religious basis for liberalism is universal and egalitarian. It is compassionate and self-correcting. It is both prudent and liberating. It is a decision-making framework vastly superior to the blind obedience required by delusional religions. It is a truthful alternative to truths-based authoritarianism.

The interlocking concepts presented here fulfill the hope of Paine and Jefferson by providing a common sense religious foundation for liberalism. They provide ultimate basis in rational certainty for the transition from our truths-and-deceit-based civilization to a truthfulness-based civilization.

## Conclusion

We began our search for rational religious basis with the realization concerning our existence that many of us had at an early age, "It's impossible, but yet it is!" The fact of existence, as improbable as it appears, opens the door to the possibility of just about anything.

Entertaining ideas of possible transcendent meaning and of a possible after-life may strike many as absurd, yet such ideas, including the contrary ideas that what we see is all there is, and that our lives end at death, are tame compared to the incredible and seemingly impossible fact of existence itself. In comparison, such possibilities are not absurd. They command our best analysis. In being truthful we should prudently yet courageously live our lives accordingly.

Book one concluded with the suggestion that those committed to assisting in the transition to a truthfulness-based civilization might form discussion groups and possibly run candidates for school boards. The suggestion here is that these groups meet on Sundays to place the enterprise in a religious context. Meeting on Sundays should help attract those who have thought their way free of delusional faiths, but who still hunger for meaningful lives with religious basis.

These discussion groups could even take place at churches before or after services. Since the analysis contained in these two books is not opposed or indifferent to religious observance per se, as is atheism, such discussion groups might be welcomed. Sophisticated church leaders today realize that faith of a few centuries ago was truthful. Before "the death of God," most parishioners believed that their church would get them to heaven with the same certitude that we believe our rockets will get us to the moon. Many modern church leaders under-

stand that honest faith has degenerated into a form of self-deception, but few see an alternative.

In want of ecumenical basis, they capitulate to supposedly benign relativism rationalized as pluralism. Certainly, there is no contradiction between the conceptions presented here as the religious basis of liberalism, and theologian Paul Tillich's definition of religious faith as "ultimate concern" and his, "the courage to be."

Understanding what Tom Paine called the "adulterous connection between church and state" is vital here. Authoritarian states enjoy a symbiotic relationship with authoritarian churches as a matter of course. Both are violent and truths-based, both resort to deception in defense of their truths and both are dependent on unthinking followers.

Today, as countries attempt to evolve from authoritarianism to liberalism, religions will either resist or evolve as well. They will either assist in taking us toward a golden age, or resist and pull us backward toward a dark age.

Religion cannot be ignored. Liberal activist thinkers would do well to focus on schools and churches in facilitating the transition from a truths-based to a truthfulness-based, universal ethic and religion. Ours is a moment in history more latent with peril and potential than has ever been. Without exaggeration, success or failure may well prove to be as stark as extinction or a heaven on earth.

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Liberals have been without ultimate basis from the get go. Their recent philosophical and religious floundering has even rendered the term *liberal* a term of derision. The formulations presented here should put an end to this retreat. We can now expect a rapid and radical evolution of liberalism worldwide. With ultimate philosophical and religious basis in rational certainty, a renaissance of liberalism is not only likely, it is inevitable.

## **Afterword**

### **Religious faith -- the Achilles' heal of liberalism**

The intention in these two books was to reveal the philosophical and religious basis of liberalism. Since liberalism has evolved over the centuries as the

fair-minded alternative to authoritarianism, it was necessary to outline the essence of authoritarianism as well. In fact, they both define each other. Liberalism is rooted in truthfulness, equality and the solving of problems to mutual advantage; and authoritarianism in deception, closed-minded belief in truths, hierarchy, physical force and the maintenance of privilege at the expense of others. Liberalism facilitates cooperation. Authoritarianism fosters dysfunction.

What was not undertaken was a direct attack on authoritarianism. The emphasis was placed on the more urgent task of clarifying the long-observed basis of liberalism. However, before closing it is important to focus on one insidious aspect of authoritarianism. What needs to be examined here is what may just be the Achilles' heel of liberalism -- religious faith.

Certainly, individuals must be free to embrace religious beliefs of their choice; up to, that is, but not past that point where the swinging of one's religious arm intrudes on the noses of others. One protection against this intrusion, erected and maintained by liberal constitutional government, is "the wall separating church and state."

Presently, authoritarian religion is assaulting this wall, not just here where two centuries of high-court decisions have reaffirmed the wall's constitutional legitimacy, but throughout the world. Fledgling liberal democracies are under attack from religious fundamentalists across the board.

### **Liberalism need no longer be considered synonymous with secularism**

A weakness in the construction of the wall is the conceiving of liberal government as synonymous with secularism. The wall was conceived as separating religion from the secular state. However, the certainty of the Perfect Quandary surpasses non-religious secularism. It not only trumps religious faith with religious certainty, it supplants secularism with religious certainty.

Consequently, liberalism need no longer be equated with secularism. Liberalism now has religious basis. The distinction between liberal religious basis and authoritarian religious basis is no longer between agnosticism, relativism and secularism on the one hand, and religious faith on the other, but rather between the religious certainty of the Perfect Quandary, and irrational religious faith in whatever.

“In God we trust” and “One nation under God” have long been rationally untenable, as well as a breach in the constitutional wall separating church and state. Now that liberalism has religious basis in the Perfect Quandary, the breach can be corrected and the efficacy of the wall assured.

“Freedom of religion” is being used by delusional religionists to rationalize attempts to breach the wall, but their irrational religious basis can now be countered from the other side with rational religious basis in logical certainty. No longer is the contest between dogma-heavy religionists and a secularist vacuum, but rather between irrational religious basis and rational religious basis. That is to say, between authoritarian religious basis and liberal religious basis – the untruthfulness context of being, and the truthfulness context of being.

However, rather than change our coins to read, “In God?/god we trust,” the more sensible change might be, “In truthing we trust.” As for the pledge to the flag, let’s make that a pledge to the Constitution, and let’s change the wording to, “One nation in truthfulness.”

### **Is a liberal “faith” possible?**

To play devil's advocate for a moment, let us assume that the human psyche is such that we cannot be spiritually fulfilled without faith in a "higher being." I doubt this is the case for adults of the species, but it probably is for the immature, perhaps even by definition.

Nevertheless, were we to contemplate a "leap of faith" it would be reasonable to take the most rational leap available. It would make sense, at least to me, to use the body of thought developed in these two books as a jumping off point so as to narrow the leap as much as possible. The Perfect Quandary would probably be the best place from which to leap since certainty that transcendent meaning either does or does not exist provides absolute firm footing.

Such a leap may be akin to what Paine and Jefferson had in mind when suggesting a minimalist deism. Their using of such phrases as "Nature's God," and an "unadulterated belief of one God, and no more," as well as by both embracing Unitarianism, suggests they either were not opposed to faith per se, or they thought the existence of a God of some sort to be beyond reasonable doubt. “Nature’s God” does sound a bit like our “god” defined as the all-of-existence. For the record, the “N” was lower case in all but the final draft of the Declaration of Independence.

If for no other reason than respect for Paine and Jefferson, let us continue in this vein and see if we can define a reasonable deism, and then let us see if liberalism as conceived in these two texts can be extended to include this minimal and least unreasonable leap of faith.

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If we accept that our finite universe is composed of matter and energy, and if our apparent present state of universal entropy means that all matter will eventually degenerate to energy and all energy will eventually dissipate to nothing, then this suggests that in the beginning was a similar void, and that through some potentiality latent in nothingness, a rudimentary plus and minus, for example, came into being. However, rather than canceling each other out and returning immediately to the nothingness of zero, they caused a massive and near instantaneous replication until a limit of sorts was reached and our Big Bang took place.

If so, the question then becomes, was this primal potential an aspect of god or God? Even if we say it was a chance happening, that chance is still a part of the all-of-existence that we earlier defined as "god."

We need no leap of faith that such a potential was present. If it hadn't been present we wouldn't be here. However, we do need a leap if we choose to believe this all-important latent possibility to be exclusively an aspect of finite existence, or exclusively an indication of a transcendent realm. In other words, is our knowledge of this potential a glimpse of God, or is it the then necessary and presently unfathomable essence of a finite god?

The temptation is to assume it to be one or the other, but we have no basis in fact or logic for doing so. More importantly, to make the leap, no matter how simple and well intended it may appear, it nevertheless does require a relinquishing of our near-absolute commitment to truthfulness. It means relinquishing the basis of liberalism. To make the leap removes us from the realm of truthfulness and places us into the realm of untruthfulness. It makes us susceptible to all that pertains thereto -- namely, the authoritarian mentality.

To maintain that one of these two possibilities is true and the other false, is a lie. Such mendacity opens the door to authoritarianism and to the religious wars the founders of our liberal democracy so desperately hoped to relegate to the ashbin of history.

The immature of the species may have no choice but to choose one over the other, but for adults -- for those who hold firmly to truthfulness -- the fact is ines-

capable that we do not know which one is true. However, we do know with absolute certainty that one or the other must be true. We just don't know which one.

Clearly, choosing on faith falls outside the religious basis of liberalism. Either choice invites closed-minded belief, and thus converts a mind-set of liberalism to that of authoritarianism. If one makes such a leap, and thus ascribes the Primal Potential to either God or god, the choice is no longer open, and the two possibilities no longer remain as defining aspects of the two parameters of the Perfect Quandary. Free will is then diminished, and we are left with intellectual zombies wielding pat-answer truths.

### **Certainty in the Primal Potential is the “faith” of liberalism**

Although the source of the Primal Potential cannot be rationally decided, can the absolute fact that the potential must exist substitute as a religious faith of sorts for liberalism? Can this fundamental religious fact compete with going a step, or a leap, further as far as fulfilling spiritual need is concerned?

It most certainly can since the spiritual needs of adults reside in rationality, whereas the spiritual needs of the immature reside in delusion. What we have here is the ultimate distinction between liberal religious basis and authoritarian religious basis.

This insight also reveals most of our politicians as having succumbed to the temptation of authoritarianism and as having become unwitting advocates of an American counter-revolution. It unmask many of our piously pathetic leaders as anti-liberal.

The purpose is to win the culture wars. That is what we are about here. Those authoritarians who would breach the wall and betray American liberalism under the fraud of being honest conservatives are unmasked.

Let the debates intensify, and let us chase these philosophically and religiously compromised usurpers from office. They are welcome to their delusional beliefs, but they and their beliefs need to be cast back over the wall separating irrational church from rational state.

We need rational people in office who are constitutionally capable of solving problems. We do not need our rational system of government corrupted by those intent on “holy wars” and resigned to “Armageddon.”

Don't be surprised if we encounter extravagant resistance, but let us hold to truthfulness and civility as our standard. Let us win with numbers and through evolutionary process. As world citizens in truthfulness under international law, let us take our struggle to the schools and churches of the world. Let us initiate an era of universal adulthood. Now that liberalism has rational religious basis, let us solve the world's problems rationally and as a rational religious way of life.

### **Our own potential is in the same image as the Primal Potential (be it of God or god)**

Acknowledging the certainty of the Primal Potential, and the certainty that it is either of God or god, becomes the "faith" of liberalism. It fulfills the intention of Paine and Jefferson without breaching the wall. It is rational and liberal, not irrational and authoritarian.

This "faith," which is more on the order of rational acknowledgment, links to our own nature in that we are made in the image of the Primal Potential. The same impulse to make something out of nothing exists as our own innermost spark of life. This same or similar spirit, if we can call it that, exists at our center and is fully available to the truthful.

Many of the world's foremost religious teachers have been trying to tell us as much for centuries. It is the immature who need something ultimate outside of themselves. This is natural for children in looking with love and respect to parents, but the perversion of protracted childhood and the delusional subordination to a father in heaven is not needed by those who have seen the light, as it were - those who have forsaken untruthfulness in preference for the truthfulness way of being.

Our commitment to truthfulness provides not just political and philosophical basis, and not just religious basis as developed in the preceding text, but an ongoing state of communion with the Primal Potential. This relationship is more than something we find within the truthful context, it is something we *are by being* the truthful context. Welcome home.

Unlike authoritarian prayer that assumes that answers lie outside the self, liberal prayer becomes a total opening of the free will chamber as our fundamental religious practice – a willing synchronicity with the heart beat of reality.

Does this mean we no longer need churches? On the contrary, they're our heritage. They have been critical to getting us to this present understanding, and they will be the staging areas leading to even further understanding.

Personally, I love the fellowship, the songs and the tangible link to the many centuries of searching and wondering. We might think of our upcoming cultural metamorphosis as similar to the Reformation sparked by Luther. We can also think of it as the renaissance of liberalism

### **The truthfulness and civility of liberalism will displace the deception and violence of authoritarianism**

Life is so latent with unfathomable potential that we need only have the "faith" of a mustard seed to realize the seemingly impossible. At the time of our revolution violence was endemic to most every aspect of life. Today, ship captains no longer insist on keelhauling to maintain order. Nor do husbands believe in wife beating as a necessity and as their due.

The "right of the lord" of feudalism is no more. Dueling, flogging, slavery and blood feuds have declined to near extinction. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is no longer taken seriously.

It is not unrealistic to think of ending war. The corporate cabal in control of our government may be intent on militarizing space, creating ever more unconscionable weapons of mass destruction, initiating preemptive attacks, legitimizing torture and the killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians in Latin America through the covert actions of our secret government and US sponsored death squads, but the patterns of thought that sustain their madness all stem from lives lost to the untruthfulness context of being. Their basis is deceit. They have a pretend God.

Their minds and their souls are a mess. We have the stronger basis and will prevail. We can and will end war. At this writing the debate is between those for and against invading Iraq. This debate is wrongly framed by authoritarian preconceptions. Being for or against violence is a dead-end construct. The liberal dialogue that will displace it is framed by a search for root causes and the discovery of mutually constructive solutions. It is the adult way of thinking. It is key to displacing our deceit-and truths-based civilization with a truthfulness-based civilization.

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## About the author

Jon Read was raised in Inglewood California and received his bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from the University of California at Berkeley in January 1961. He has been self-employed as a landscape architect and landscape contractor doing design/build for most of his life. When 21 he visited three countries in Latin America while on Navy Reserve duty. He hitchhiked to Alaska the next summer, and went around the world on his own when 23. He worked on a Norwegian freighter to cross the Pacific, spent three months traveling overland in four countries in South East Asia, and six weeks in India, Nepal and Sikkim. In May and June of 1962 he visited Cuba with a friend, Jim Dey, and on his return played a leading role in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in New York during the October missile crisis. In 1963 he was investigated by the FBI and called before HUAC (House un-American Activities Committee) with which he refused to co-operate. In the summer of 1965 he was central to the Vietnam Day Committee's troop train demonstrations. He was Field Secretary for the San Francisco office of the War Resisters League, 1965-68, and the author of the Free Cities Plan (a constructive alternative to the Vietnam War) published in the 1968 Jan/Feb. issue of *The Humanist* (for the record, the listing of Paul Salstrom as co-author was an editor's error). In Berkeley, in the spring of 1969, he and Mike Delacour were the two activists considered most instrumental in initiating People's Park. He wrote "The Activist" column for the *Berkeley Gazette* and for the *Daily Cal* (the UC Berkeley student newspaper) during the anti-apartheid protests of 1983-84. In the mid 1980s he was director of an urban-forestry, community-development agency in Oakland California planting street trees with neighborhood volunteers in low-income neighborhoods. He organized 600 volunteers for the planting of 505 fifteen-gallon trees in one morning along the seven and a half mile length of Martin Luther King Jr. Way. He also worked for seven months as a substitute teacher in the Oakland School District (and loved it). He had a 14-year marriage and a 17 1/2 year common law marriage. His father was born in Dublin, his mother in Manches-

ter. He lived in Greenwich Village in 1962, North Beach during the Beatnik era, the Haight-Ashbury during the Hippie era, and Cambridge Massachusetts in 1995-96. Jon Read presently lives and writes in Tucson, Arizona.

Troop Train Picket No. 4 - this Thursday, 8:45 a.m.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN THIS TIME ?**



Copy of a Vietnam Day Committee (VDC) leaflet showing the author and Jerelle Kraus at the third anti-Vietnam War troop train demonstration at the Santa Fe tracks in Berkeley, California, August 1965.