

The Transcendental Self

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Introduction

In the previous chapter, "The First-Person Point of View," I said this:

In any moment of experience one finds both noeses – mental acts and structures – and noemata – objects as experienced.

The task of phenomenology is to explicate – to explain and make clear – the noetic structures that constitute the various forms of noemata, or intentional objects, objects as experienced. Noemata can be public, experienceable by anyone, or private, experienceable only by oneself. Noeses are purely private, although they have (Husserl asserts) the same structure and function in everyone's experience. Both noeses and noemata are objects of consciousness, elements that one finds in one's experience. In the natural attitude one ignores or overlooks the noeses and attends only to the noemata, but the noeses are there, available for inspection to whomever would "look."

What is not there is the experiencing subject itself, the "one" in the sentence above who experiences both noesis and noema.

The nature and implications of the pure experiencing subject, which I call the Transcendental Self, is the topic of this chapter.

Who Experiences?

The experiencing subject, that to whom or to which all the elements of experience are present is not itself an element in experience. It is certainly not an Objective thing or process,¹ there for any third-person observer. Such an observer can see people walking around and doing and saying things, but has no direct access to the private thoughts and feelings of any of them, much less to that which experiences or has those private thoughts and feelings. Nor is the experiencing subject an object of experience in a private sense. One can be conscious of a number of private elements in or aspects of experience, notably thoughts (including clear and distinct mental words and pictures, operative noises and everything in between), bodily feelings, emotions and impulses to action. But none of these private aspects of experience are that which is conscious of them, that which has the experience. We can call it, after Husserl, the Transcendental Ego or, as I prefer, the Transcendental Self, where "transcendental" means lying at the root of experience, but one cannot describe it or be conscious of it in any way.

One is barred from becoming conscious of the I, the Self, that is itself aware; for to do so would require that the I be no longer the conscious subject, but an object. The I that is aware cannot be seen or heard, it cannot be intuited through thought (for then one would be aware, not of the I, but of an image or concept of the I). The I which is aware, I-the-experiencer, is ungraspable, a void, a nothingness – it is no thing. One can characterize the Self as that to which the world is present, that for which there is the world, but what it is in itself one cannot grasp in the mode, "it itself," One cannot be directly conscious of it in any way. It is a mystery.

This state of affairs is so peculiar and unique that there is no adequate language for it. If by the term "I" or "Self" we mean I-who-experience, then none of us is there at all! There is no experienceable object which is I-the-experiencer. It seems misleading to use a noun or noun phrase, for there is nothing to which such a noun or noun phrase refers. This, I take it, is the point behind Sartre's talk of Nothingness and the Buddhists' talk of the Void and the doctrine of *anatta*, or no-self. And yet one takes it for granted that one exists, that one experiences the world; nothing could be more obvious than that experience is going on and that it is one's own experience, if only because it is one's own and not someone else's. In the visual field that those of us who are sighted enjoy, everything appears to converge on a central point of view, which each of us takes to be himself or herself. Thus, the Upanishads and the later Hindu tradition speak of the Atman, that innermost Self which experiences the world; and Husserl speaks of the "pure Ego," "the phenomenological Ego which finds things presented to it"²

If, following Husserl, we choose to put a name to that-which-experiences, such as the "transcendental Ego" or the "transcendental Self," we must always keep in mind that it is not in any sense an object. Husserl says " . . . we shall never stumble across the pure

¹ "Object" with a capital O is a translation of Husserl's use of the German word *Objekt* as opposed to *Gegenstand*, translated as "object" with a lower-case O (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, tr. Dorion Cairns, p. 3, translator's note 2). An Object (*Objekt*) is public, "there for everyone," but an object (*Gegenstand*) is simply something present in experience, something of which one is aware in some way. Thus an object (*Gegenstand*) may be public or private.

² Husserl, *Ideas*, p. 156.

Ego as an experience among others within the flux of manifold experiences . . . nor shall we meet it as a constitutive bit of experience appearing with the experience of which it is an integral part and again disappearing. . . . it can *in no sense* be reckoned as a *real part or phase* of the experiences themselves,"³ where "real" means experienceable, present in experience, or present to pure consciousness. Husserl says

. . . the experiencing Ego is still nothing might be taken *for itself* and made into an object of inquiry on its *own* account. Apart from its "ways of being related" or "ways of behaving," it is completely empty of essential components, it has no content that could be unraveled, it is in and for itself indescribable: pure Ego and nothing further.⁴

There is a very good reason why it is "in and for itself indescribable." To be able to describe something, you must be able in some way to perceive it – and the pure Ego is that which perceives but which cannot itself be perceived.

The pure Ego or Transcendental Self is not only an observer but an actor as well. Husserl speaks of the ego's "ways of behaving" and of the pure Ego as "free spontaneity and activity," the "primary source of generation," the "subject of the spontaneity."⁵ The transcendental Self is not, in fact, solely passive and receptive; it is also the source of all one's action. And the Self as transcendental agent is also unintuitable, unperceivable.

As long as this point is kept clearly in mind, it need not be misleading to use a noun phrase, "transcendental Self," to refer to the basic state of affairs that is always and everywhere evident regarding oneself, that one experiences and acts. Strictly speaking, we can say that experiencing and acting are functions of the self to which no particular experienceable object corresponds. The important point remains: One cannot become aware of oneself in the mode, "I myself," for one is that which is aware, one is pure transcendental consciousness. One can characterize the transcendental Self as that to which the world is present, but what it is in itself – what one oneself is – one cannot directly experience in any way. At one's deepest core each of us is a mystery.

This is as far as the phenomenological evidence will take us. We have reached, in a sense, the ultimate – that beyond which it is impossible to go. Pure transcendental consciousness is of necessity a mystery, unperceivable.

³ Idem.

⁴ Ibid., p. 214.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 315, 316

Panpsychism and Pantheism

I now make a metaphysical assertion: *the Transcendental Self of each of us is the same as the Transcendental Self of all of reality.* This assertion is entailed by two others:

- *Everything has an inside and an outside.*
- *There is one universal interiority, which incorporates the interiority of all the separate constituents of reality into one unity of experience, one coherence of interiority.*

Everything has an Inside and an Outside

The theory known as Panpsychism – from the Greek *pan*, meaning “all,” and *psyche*, meaning “soul;” the root meaning is “breath” or “that which breathes” or by extension “life”⁶ – asserts that everything has a mental as well as a physical aspect. Also known as Panexperientialism or Panprotoexperientialism, the theory as I am espousing it is not that everything has a fully-conscious mind like human beings have, but that everything is built of events (not substances) that have a mind-like aspect as well as a physical aspect. The most elaborate and fully-formed version of this theory is the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Please refer to the chapters on [Tao Te Ching Ontology](#) and [Metaphysics, or The Nature of Reality](#).

The smallest quantum event is a moment of experience; the event comes into being by incorporating aspects of its surroundings and its past into itself by means of processes akin to the full-blown conscious experience that we know as perception. Such elementary events cohere into temporal strands that appear to us (through the medium of scientific instruments) as elementary particles. Particles cohere into molecules, then objects and living cells, the latter being differentiated from the former by having a unified coherence of interiority lacking in the former, built up of the interiority of its constituents. Objects cohere into substances. Cells cohere into organs and living beings. All of it has interiority, a private experiential aspect, as well as exteriority, a publicly-observable aspect.

I assert this not because there is scientific evidence for it (although it is consistent with scientific evidence) but because it makes a more coherent metaphysical theory than the alternatives: materialism, which asserts that what is fundamentally real is inert matter, and mind somehow emerges from matter or is an epiphenomenon of it; idealism, which asserts that what is fundamentally real is mind, and matter is somehow constructed from mentality; or dualism, which asserts that mind and matter are two distinct categories of fundamental reality. It makes more sense to assume that mind and matter are two aspects of one reality, all the way up and down the spectrum from the least complex, a single quantum event, to the most complex, a fully-conscious human being or a being even more complex than that.

⁶ Wordinfo, “Psych-.”

There Is One Universal Interiority

In terms from the Upanishads, *Atman*, the Transcendental Self of each one of us and (by virtue of the doctrine of Panpsychism) every living and nonliving thing, is the same as *Brahman*, the universal Self of the entire universe: "This Self is Brahman indeed" say the scriptures.⁷ In Arabic, *al-Lah*⁸ is that which is conscious of and which animates everything from the inside.

It is rather like divine telepathy. Picture an octopus with an eye on the end of each tentacle. Each eye corresponds to a self. Imagine being at the end of a tentacle, looking out of the eye. That is, figuratively speaking, the condition of a separate self, looking out at the world. Now imagine being in the center of the octopus, being able to see out of all the eyes. That is, figuratively speaking, the condition of a higher-level coherence of interiority, a higher-level soul, which we might term a god, with a lower-case G. One gets an inkling of this when one sees a whole flock of birds or herd of animals turn and move as one; it is as if the flock or herd is one being, animated by one soul. Now picture a super-octopus, which is composed of all the separate octopi. This super-octopus can see through all the eyes of all the octopi. Viewed from the outside, this super-octopus is the universe, the entirety of all that exists. Viewed from the inside, this super-octopus is *al-Lah*, The God, with an upper-case G.

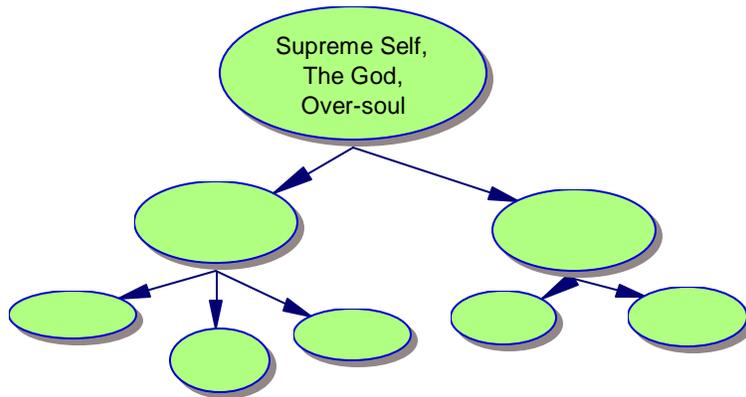
This is a visual metaphor, but one could just as well use an auditory or a tactile one. The point is, regardless of which metaphor one chooses, a self is conscious of the world (from the outside) and of itself (from the inside), and a god would be conscious of many selves from the inside. The God is that which is conscious of all selves from the inside.

The God is not only conscious, but animating. Phenomenologically, the Transcendental Self is the both the unobservable experiencer and the unobservable actor. We could call it a spirit. A spirit, as we perceive it from the outside, is a locus of animation. From the inside it is a point of view. *Al-Lah* is the spirit-that-moves-in-all-things.

⁷ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, IV, iv, 5, in Zaehner, *Hindu Scriptures*, p. 71. See also Mandukya Upanishad, 2, in Zaehner, *Hindu Scriptures*, p. 201.

⁸ I hyphenate the word commonly written in English as "Allah" to emphasize that the literal meaning is The God, rather than a personal name.

Here is a picture showing hierarchical levels or degrees of interiority, which we might call selfhood or soulness:



The term "Over-soul" is Ralph Waldo Emerson's translation of the Sanskrit term *Paramatman*, Supreme Self or Supreme Soul.⁹ In this picture the smallest ovals at the bottom represent individuals such as human beings, and the intermediate ovals represent larger coherences of interiority such as the spirit of a place or time or community in which one can participate, or spirit beings such as angels or gods. Or, since the whole thing is fractal in nature, the intermediary ovals can represent human beings and the lowest level ovals can represent organs or cells. The idea that there are intermediary levels of soul above the human is my own speculation. Of course, this is all speculation, as there is no objective, third-party evidence for any of it. But it does not contradict objective, third-party findings either. It is, like all metaphysical theories, a conceptual framework within which to interpret the totality of our experience, including objective, scientific fact and subjective, private, personal fact.

The last point is important, because it provides a justification for asserting this frankly mystical doctrine. Not all evidence is public, and not all facts are physical. Evidence can be private, or subjective, and facts can be mental. One can perceive the effects of something one may call God in one's own life, and indeed humans are prone to do so. Some examples of such evidence are the following:

- One may perceive portents and signs, patterns of synchronicity that seem to have greater significance than mere randomness.
- One may experience the presence of God as a result of practices that alter experience such as meditation, chanting, fasting, ceremony and ritual, ingestion of certain substances, etc.
- One may experience responses to prayer and hence have a sense of a personal relationship with God.

If one adopts a stance of relating to one's idea of God as if God exists and is person-like, and one can plausibly interpret events as embodying the actions of that person-

⁹ Wikipedia, "Over-soul."

like being responding to one, and particularly if those actions are to one's benefit, then one does have compelling evidence.

None of these types of evidence prove the existence of God publicly, but if others report experiencing them as well, as many do, then they have more weight. In the absence of scientific proof, one may choose to believe in God on the basis of subjective evidence. If the effects of such belief are beneficial – if, for instance, one is happier and functions better as a result of such belief than without it – then one is justified in that belief.

The Nature of The God

I want to note a potential equivocation here. I have used the term “al-Lah,” The God, to refer to the highest (or, since it is all a metaphor, the deepest), most inclusive level of coherence of interiority. And I have just used the term “God” – in Arabic, *Allah* – to refer to something like a person, with whom one can have a personal relationship. The two senses are not the same. The way one accesses the former is from the inside, through meditative practices that bring one’s attention to deeper and deeper levels of one’s own interiority, one’s own self. The way one accesses the latter is from the outside, through prayer and other forms of communion rather like talking to and interacting with another person. These are not contradictory. Since everything has an inside and an outside, one can indeed relate to the All from the outside, as if it were a person. The All is for practical purposes infinite, meaning that as we experience it, we never come to its end. As such, the All can relate to us in an unlimited number of ways and can certainly be experienced by the limited self as a Thou.

The God is not an object or living being in the world, one among many but much bigger or grander or more powerful. The God is the interiority of the totality of all that is. Since interiority is not separate from exteriority – both are aspects, one private, one public, of the same thing – then The God is the totality of all that is. In this sense, the doctrine I am espousing is Pantheism, from the Greek *pan*, meaning “all” and *theos*, meaning “God.”¹⁰ All is The God. I am saying that Pantheism is Panpsychism: the *theos* is the *psyche* of all; the God is the Soul of All.

I say “The God” because there is only one. Nothing exists apart from the universe as we know it. If we suppose that something did exist entirely apart from the universe, then it would have no causal effect on us and, in practice, would be no different from not existing at all.

Divine Influence

This doctrine, that The God is the interiority of everything, explains how the divine can influence the mundane. We need not suppose that an entity external to physical reality somehow intervenes. Instead The God perceives the inside of all the elements of physical reality that are interacting with each other, and can put attention on places of interest. Especially if divine attention is placed on living beings with highly-evolved

¹⁰ Wikipedia, “Pantheism.”

nervous systems, we can imagine that The God could influence what they do by adjusting the probabilities at the quantum level of neural functioning.

We know that the synapses in the human brain are small enough that quantum indeterminacy operates there (see the chapter on [The Quantum Level of Reality](#)), so we cannot predict whether any given neuron will fire or not. Neural firings are correlated with emotion, thought and decision – all the aspects of mentality. Hence, we cannot fully predict what a human being will think, say or do. This does not mean that the neural firings are merely random. Consider a pointillist painting, which consists of distinct dots of pigment. If you look at it up close, all you see is random dots. When you view it from afar, you see identifiable forms and shapes, recognizable objects. I assert that the influence of al-Lah, The God, on the physical world could be like that. What appears to be the random firing of a neuron may in fact be part of a larger pattern that extends through space and time. And, if al-Lah is the ultimate interiority, that which senses everything from the inside, the pattern can span things that appear to us to be separate. In this view, al-Lah is what creates and propagates the pattern. Al-Lah adjusts the probabilities at the quantum level to effect coordination of events on the macro level. I am not saying al-Lah makes everything happen, although some theologies assert exactly that. I am saying that if there is a place where nonphysical¹¹ reality exerts an effect on physical reality, it is in sub-microscopic quantum spaces, in particular the interstices of the neurons; and I assert that it is al-Lah, The God, which exerts that effect.¹²

What al-Lah does is make disparate things move so as to express a common interiority. They become a common locus of animation. Al-Lah is the spirit-that-moves-in-all-things. This idea would make sense of a lot of things, from signs and portents in the outer world to the mysterious source of inspiration in the inner. This could be the means by which The God gives us inspiration and guidance. By our prayers and our practices, we attract benevolent interest.

(Of course, in any given case it might not be al-Lah. It might be a being or conflux of mentality that is greater than a person but not the entirety of al-Lah. This would be a god (lower-case G), an angel, a spirit, some greater pattern, some greater coherence of interiority than the individual human, but less than the entirety. But if it is such a thing, al-Lah is behind or within it, as al-Lah is behind or within all things.)

¹¹ By “nonphysical” in this context I mean “other than what is detectable by ordinary perception” (which may be amplified by scientific instrumentation). Metaphysically nothing is entirely non-physical, just as nothing is entirely non-mental.

¹² The God adjusts probabilities. Ordinary causality consists of overwhelmingly probable sequences of events. In the realm of the personal, one’s habits of action, thought and feeling are just very probable sequences. Where the influence of The God can be detected most easily (at least in retrospect) is in situations of choice whose alternatives have approximately equal weight. One considers the alternatives, and then one or the other alternative is chosen. But who chooses? There is no thing, no object (*Gegenstand*) of consciousness, that is the chooser. Perhaps The God chooses. The God appears to favor tiny interventions, as evidenced by the Bible’s mention of the “still, small voice” of the Lord (I Kings 19: 11-12). It seems to require less effort, so to speak, to make a choice among approximately equal alternatives than to make a choice that goes against a habit.

Dr. Casey Blood asserts that each of us has or is a nonphysical Mind (his capitalization), which chooses, out of all the possibilities inherent in quantum indeterminacy, which to actualize; that is to say, which to concentrate on and pay attention to. He argues that the mathematics of quantum physics has no explanation for why a given possibility becomes perceived rather than any other. Hence, the explanation must lie elsewhere, in the nonphysical Mind.¹³ By "Mind" Blood appears to mean what Hindu philosophy calls *jivatman*, the aspect of Self that appears to be individual, as opposed to *paramatman*, the Self conceived of as the Self of all, what I am calling al-Lah or The God. If so, his view is not much different from mine, because the fundamental teaching of the Upanishads is that *Atman* is *Brahman*, that is, Self is God.

The mystic ascribes causality to al-Lah. There is no way to prove or disprove this theory scientifically, but we can choose believe it on other grounds, such as its internal consistency, its coherence with the other things we know and its practicality for achieving our ends.

Again, this is sheer speculation, but it provides an explanation of one possible means by which divine benevolence can affect human life.

¹³ Blood, *Science Sense and Soul*, chapter 10.

A Mystical Perspective

In previous chapters we looked at human nature from the third-person point of view and from the first-person point of view in order to determine what would constitute a fulfilling life, a life of *eudaimonia*. Now we deepen the first-person point of view to consider human nature from a mystical perspective. From that perspective, each of us is an expression of the One, the All, al-Lah, Brahman, the Supreme Self, The God. The God lives in and through us, as it does through all creation.¹⁴ Hence, each one of us is part and parcel of the Whole. As Ram Dass says, there is only one of us. We are connected, not only by virtue of living in an environment that provides physical nurturance and by having Being-in-the-world as our basic structure of existence, but also by virtue of being part of the Whole from the inside, from the interiority that is the most private aspect of each of us.

The Goodness Ethic and Divine Guidance

The fundamental premise of the Goodness Ethic is reinforced even more strongly. It makes sense to work for the good of all things because in doing so we are working for our own benefit as an integral part and expression of everything there is. We can think of ourselves as being part of a larger organism, like cells in a living body, but cells that have consciousness and will. The world as a whole is a living entity; and The God is the soul, the observer and animator, of it all. We need to fit in with the larger patterns of which each of us is an organic part in an appropriate way, a good way. By promoting the health of the larger organism we promote our own health. And by promoting our own health we enhance our ability to nourish the organism of which we are a part, which in turn nourishes us.

In any event, we certainly do not want to harm the being we are part of because that would be harming ourselves. Any action or attitude that ignores or diminishes anyone's value is harmful. It harms not only that person but the person taking the action or holding the attitude. Because we are all connected, any harm done to someone harms the person doing it as well.

So we try to benefit the whole. We are aided in this effort by divine guidance. The Goodness Ethic advises us to figure out how to benefit all concerned in a given situation, but without the excessive calculation that Utilitarianism seems to require. We should just do the best we can given the time and information we have. In engaging the mystical point of view, we have an ally in this effort, we have more resources for figuring out what to do. The vast intelligence of al-Lah is at our disposal; or, to be more precise, we are at its disposal if we allow ourselves to be. By becoming still, quieting our chattering mind, we become more attuned to the "still, small voice"¹⁵ of God.

This suggests another implication for conduct: that to function optimally we should cultivate the ability to listen for and heed the voice of God. I devote a chapter,

¹⁴ This is not to posit a creator separate from the creation. I am not addressing the origins of the universe.

¹⁵ Jewish and Christian Bible. 1 Kings 19: 11-12 (King James Version).

["Spiritual Practice,"](#) to this topic. The phrase "voice of God" is a metaphor; the means by which divine guidance comes is different for each of us, and each of us must find his or her own way to become open to it. For some it is indeed a voice that one hears; for others, a non-verbal sense or feeling or intuition. For some it comes as a vision; for others, a simple outcome of acting with no-thought, no-action. For some it comes as a revelation from inspiring words of scripture; for others, a sense of organic appropriateness from the patterns of nature. In all these ways and more, the pinnacle of human virtue is to align oneself with the will of God. In doing so we find our best and deepest happiness.

Living for the benefit of the whole, in the sense of wanting to benefit each part of the whole, is part of the story. In addition one can benefit the Whole as such, the Only Being itself.

I have defined "soul" as the interiority of a being, recognizing that there are degrees of interior complexity that correspond to degrees of physical, or exterior, complexity. The soul in this sense is *coherence of interiority*.¹⁶ The more coherent and the more complex, integrative and harmonious our experience, the higher degree of soulness we (any of us, each one of us) have. The higher degree of soulness we have, the richer is al-Lah's experience of the All, because al-Lah experiences everything that we experience. The Sufi mystic speaks of the need for cultivation of our souls, which means to make the coherence of one's interiority beautiful and productive. When we attain beauty and harmony in ourselves – which necessarily entails creating beauty and harmony in our world, because that is what we experience – we provide beauty and harmony to al-Lah. It is the goal of everything, from the tiniest quantum event to the total unity of the All, to acquire satisfaction, to experience well-being. When we achieve some degree of harmony within ourselves we contribute to a higher harmony and are of service to al-Lah.

That's why spiritual practice is doubly beneficial. It is beneficial for us, certainly, because it enables us more clearly to hear the voice of God and it provides us a sense of peace, harmony and bliss. But it is also beneficial to al-Lah. Al-Lah feels that peace, harmony and bliss. By doing our practices we send nourishment upstream, as it were, to higher levels of coherence of interiority, perhaps to souls that are larger and more inclusive than our separate selves, all the way up to the One Soul that enlivens us all.

The Purpose of Life

It would be presumptuous to guess at the purpose of al-Lah, but if the highest virtue for human beings is excellence at second-order mentation, self-reflective knowledge, then by analogy the highest virtue for al-Lah, the One of which we are all an expression, is its own self-reflective knowledge. And that comes about through the efforts of each one of us to achieve not just an intellectual understanding of, not just a belief in, one's unity with the All, but a living experience of that unity. That is why a great many of the mystic traditions assert that the ultimate purpose of human life is to become conscious of ourselves as divine, as the eyes and ears of the Only Being. Our function in the scheme of things is to participate and do our part, consciously and deliberately, in the divine unfolding from ignorance to self-knowledge.

¹⁶ See the chapter on ["Self, Soul and Ego."](#)

The purpose of existence is that The God may become more fully conscious of itself. Human existence is the culmination, the most advanced expression of that divine purpose. The function of the human being, what we are good at and good for, is to live in harmony with the purpose of the universe, which is to become increasingly Self-conscious. The purpose of human existence is to become aware of and live in the knowledge and awareness of the presence of The God, to know oneself as divine. The Only Being is evolving from unselfconscious absorption in the One toward completely self-conscious knowledge of the All, and it is our great privilege and blessing to be able to participate in that unfolding.

Loving God

Many religions enjoin us to love God. This can mean two things. One is that one enjoys God's presence and feels good and nurtured by being around God and wants to be with God a lot, even all the time. Another is that one wants to do something for God, be of service in some way. If we think of God as the totality of all there is, and in addition think of God as that which is conscious of all there is from the inside, then whenever there is an opportunity to reduce the amount of distress, pain and hatred that someone experiences and increase the amount of love, joy and peace, that they experience – regardless of who it is, oneself or someone else – then the loving thing is to take that opportunity. Doing so benefits God; it does good to God; it is of service to God. It increases the joy and harmony that God experiences, and if we love God we will want to do just that.

Alignment with Divine Will

Unlike other animals, we humans have the capacity for second-order mentation, the ability to reflect on ourselves, to think about ourselves and our place in the world; and this gives us a sense of separation from the world, of standing apart from it. It gives us a sense of freedom (and indeed more than just a sense), but also a sense of disconnection, of alienation. We don't just organically move and act in the world as other beings do. We foresee events, think about goals and strategies, make plans. It is easy to think of ourselves as beings apart from, above, better than the rest of nature. This is the germ of truth in the religious doctrines of sin. By virtue of our capacity to think ahead and think about ourselves as well as our world, we are able to go our own way, which might not be the most fitting and appropriate way for the whole. In religious terms, we elevate our own will above the will of God and become fallen from a state of grace. It is no accident that much of religious teaching exhorts us to become simpler, to become as little children (Christianity), to act with no-action (Taoism), to overcome ego (Hinduism, Buddhism), to submit to the will of Allah (Islam).

We find ourselves thrust into the world, and we believe ourselves to be isolated, separate entities. To alleviate this sense of isolation it does not work very well to stifle the ability for second-order thought, whether the means be mind-numbing drugs, devotion to a religious leader or succumbing to existential despair. Instead, we can achieve a higher synthesis by deliberately and consciously aligning our intention with the intention of the greater whole of which we are a part. If it suits us to think of that whole in agential terms, as something like a human person with desire and intention,

then we can strive to align our will with the will of God. If it suits us to think of that whole in impersonal terms, then we can cultivate mindfulness – careful observation of our immediate experience – in order to allow the Void or the Tao to move through us. In any case, by deliberately attuning to a greater wisdom in full knowledge that we are doing so we can achieve a greater coherence of interiority, a greater sense of satisfaction arising from the harmonious placement and interaction of all elements of our experience, than by not doing so.

Duality of Good and Evil

Al-Lah contains and is the interior of everything, good and bad, beneficial and harmful. If this is so, one might ask why one should align oneself only with the good and not with the bad as well. Aligning only with the good seems a bit one-sided. Perhaps from the point of view of perfect enlightenment it is, but very few us are perfectly enlightened. Aligning oneself with the good gives one a better chance of experiencing one's unity with the whole than not, and especially than aligning oneself with the bad. What is good is analogous to light and what is bad, or harmful, is analogous to darkness. If one lives in darkness, one can't see very well; one's strategies are limited because of lack of information. They may be brutally effective for a while, but are ultimately self-defeating. It is more efficacious in the long run to live in the light, and it is much more pleasant as well. Light and dark endlessly alternate, it is true, and the alternation is all part of the whole. If one lives in that knowledge then one is enlightened. If one doesn't, then turning toward the light will make it more likely that one will come to that realization.

God's Goodness

We are investigating how human beings can be fulfilled by discovering their function, what they are good for or at. If we are an expression of The One, then, we should want to discover the function of The One, what The One is good for or good at. But The One, encompassing everything that is, is beyond categories of good and bad. The One is not good for anything beyond itself because there is nothing beyond The One. From an absolute point of view The One is neither good nor bad. (Except one cannot take an absolute point of view, one can only imagine taking such a view. If one were to take such a point of view, one could say nothing about it.)

There is a sense in which The One is good, however, the same sense in which the harmonious functioning of one's body is good for each part of the body. Allah (let us now take the One in its personal aspect) is good for human beings. In fact, Allah is the best for human beings. If you turn your life to Allah, all will be well for you. You can rely on Allah, for Allah is generous and merciful. The One has vast intelligence which it directs for the welfare of anyone who calls on it. That vast intelligence knows better than our limited minds what is good for us. Allah might lead us through pain and suffering, but it will ultimately turn out for the best.

I invite you to view the world as if The One, the spirit-that-moves-in-all-things, is in fact moving in and through you and is operating to your benefit and the benefit of your surroundings and of all things. Find practices that enable you to actually experience this state of affairs rather than merely thinking about it or believing it. See what

difference it makes in your life. Observe what happens when you take this stance and then decide whether to continue taking it.

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Revision History

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1.1	18 June 2010	Bill Meacham	Minor edits