

Hidden Price Tags
An Eastern Orthodox Look at the Dark
Side of Technology and Its Best Use

Volume 7: Et Cetera...

C.J.S. Hayward

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*To my abbot, Your Eminence Metropolitan JONAH, and
the fathers of our monastery—
thank you for providing a home for me,
with all of my oddities—
Many thanks and many years!*

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Foreword to the *Hidden Price Tags* series

I gave my heirarch and abbot a copy of *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* for Christmas, and told him, "If I've contributed something to the conversation, it's probably in this book."

This collection is intended to break the contents of that book and a few related works into smaller and more manageable volumes, and give an introduction and discussion questions for individual works.

My life as a whole has been heavy with technology and heavy with theology / patrology, and my distinctive contributions may lie in relation to both. It's very easy to have your life taken over and run by technology; this is about unplugging to an extent, mastering the technologies you use, and using technologies so that they are beneficial instead of draining you. The reality is that without a conscious effort, and perhaps with many kinds of conscious effort, you will be hit by the dark sides of technology.

If this series succeeds, it will be relevant both when it was written, and later on when there are some of the same kinds of forces at play but the list of technologies that are *au courant* has shifted in significant ways.

I do not wish to continue to update this series to continue to give the impression that it was just written, but there is something timeless even to good books on technology. As regards television, I unhesitatingly draw on Neil Postman's 1985 *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*,¹ Jerry Mander's 1978 *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television*,² and Marie Winn's 1977 *The Plug-in Drug*³ as worth listening to today. None of them anticipate ubiquitous mobile devices, and Jerry Mander is skeptical about whether computers would be of any real use for consumers. I don't mean that Mander was skeptical about whether personal-use computers would be an overall improvement to the picture; I mean that he did not anticipate personally owned computers or computer networks at all, let alone mobile Internet devices. But when you read one of his arguments, the argument of "artificial unusualness,"⁴ under "Argument Four: The Inherent Biases of Television,"⁵ a relatively light edit could give the impression of an incisive analysis of technology—*today*—whose ink is still wet on its pages. *Artificial unusuality was part of television when he wrote it, it is more a part of television now, it is a feature of social media, and it is a core part to how you make technology addictive today.*⁶ It is not just because I have heard people say that television is the future of the Internet that I believe these books about technology are relevant.

¹ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness* (London: Methuen, 2007).

² Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial, 2002).

³ Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

⁴ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 299-322.

⁵ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 263-346.

⁶ See, for instance, "The Acceleration of Addictiveness," The acceleration of addictiveness, accessed November 18, 2022, <http://www.paulgraham.com/addiction.html>.

Much may have changed in the intervening 40-50 years since Mander wrote his title, but *the more some things change, the more some things stay the same*. The principles in these precursors to this series are still relevant, and I believe the principles in this collection will likely be at least partially relevant when smartphones and smartwatches are no longer the cutting edge of mainstream consumer use of technology, and, perhaps, there will seem to be something quaint about the concept of watching porn on a flat and external screen.

When I first wrote “‘Social Antibodies’ Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy” (in volume 4 of this series)⁷ in 2014, I made multiple attempts at a literature search on Amazon found nothing much on some other queries, and “orthodox technology” turned up, among Orthodox Christian works on technology: my own work and nobody else’s.

At the time of this writing that is no longer true. The first result for that search is no longer one of my own: *Religion, Science, and Technology*.⁸ Jean-Claude Larchet’s *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*⁹ is on Amazon now and eminently worth reading. But my own works represent six of the first page Amazon search results for that query. As I said in “‘Social Antibodies’ Needed,” about what I found when I searched Amazon, “Um, **thanks**, I think. I guess I’m an expert, or at least a resource, and even if I didn’t want

⁷ C.J.S. Hayward, *Hidden Price Tags: An Eastern Orthodox Look at the Dark Side of Technology and Its Best Use: Volume 4: Nitty, Gritty, Ascesis*, Spotsylvania: C.J.S. Hayward Publications, 2023.

⁸ Katina Michael, M. G. Michael, and Kallistos, *Religion, Science & Technology: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective ; an Interview with Metropolitan Kallistos Ware* (Wollongong, Australia: University of Wollongong, 2017).

⁹ Jean-Claude Larchet and Archibald Andrew Torrance, *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Publications, The Printshop of St Job of Pochaev, Holy Trinity Monastery, 2019).

to, I should probably make myself available to Orthodox clergy, with my spiritual father and bishop foremost.” But for the most part, I am a somewhat obscure local expert if I am in fact a local subject-matter expert.

There may be a number of things I fail to project about the practical realities of the Internet of Bodies but I suspect this book, an attempt at outlining Orthodox asceticism governing technology use, will be somewhere on the scene then. There are some technologies that I have avoided using at all on overpowering negative intuitions, like SecondWife, er, SecondLife, and recommendations may shift from “Use freely,” to “Use carefully,” to “Use very cautiously,” to “Better not to use,” to “Don’t use at all.” We are having more concentrated versions of earlier precursors today, like eighty proof liquor followed age-old wine in ages past. And the case for abstinence may grow increasingly strong as the list of technologies that are *au courant* grows increasingly strong.

So you have in your hands something that may turn out to be significant, possibly moreso than my Amazon reviews may reflect. (After I posted a critique of the “Blessed Seraphim Rose” crowd,¹⁰ admirers were not sated by giving that specific work one star reviews. They also follow through to see that positive Amazon ratings and reviews of any of my works continue to be taken down if they can be dislodged. This may also be part of why my works get one star reviews simply alleging, in two words, “Poorly written.”¹¹)

Reading Marie Winn’s *The Plug-in Drug*¹² helped me

¹⁰ C.J.S. Hayward, *The Seraphinians: “Blessed Seraphim Rose” and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts* (Wheaton, IL: C.J.S. Hayward Publications, 2012).

¹¹ “Amazon.com: The Luddite’s Guide to Technology: The Past Writes Back to Humane Tech!,” Amazon, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://www.amazon.com/Luddites-Guide-Technology-Writes-Humane/dp/1731439539>.

¹² Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

appreciate why my political science professor at Calvin forcefully told a class, “*Playboy* is more Christian than *Sesame Street*!”¹³ I am writing at a time when technologies are addictive and need to be carefully used if they are used at all, and works like “The Acceleration of Addictiveness” (at <https://paulgraham.com/addiction.html>)¹⁴ suggest that such caution will only be more thoroughly justified as time continues and further modifications of technology unfold before us.

Why Orthodoxy?

One Orthodox community member talked about how he asked people, “I want to understand Orthodoxy. What books should I read?” He got an answer of, “You don’t understand Orthodoxy by reading a book. You understand Orthodoxy by attending services.” And that is how he answers requests other people make of him for reading recommendations to understand Orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy is an oral culture that uses reading, and monasticism more so. This book is not intended to explain Orthodoxy; you must attend Orthodox services if you want that. But Orthodoxy is how I understand being human and Orthodox theology has “Who are we?” for one of the biggest questions to answer.¹⁵ This big question includes another

¹³ I believe his reason this forceful and possibly exaggerated statement is that *Playboy* is an open and undisguised evil that young people are warned about; *Sesame Street* is a whitewashed tomb full of rotten things which masquerades as a messenger of all things good, wholesome, and educational, and that is a bigger mark of the satanic. (“And no marvel; for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light,” 2 Corinthians 11:14, *Classic Orthodox Bible*.) ²

¹⁴ “The Acceleration of Addictiveness,” The acceleration of addictiveness, accessed November 18, 2022, <http://www.paulgraham.com/addiction.html>.

¹⁵ When I was beginning studying theology at Cambridge in 2002, in an early tutorial supervision I was told that the three fundamental questions in theology are “Who is God?”, “Who are we?”, and “How do we relate to God?”

capitally important question: “What is good for us as human beings?” This in turn includes “What use and abstention from technology is good for us as human beings?” That question drives this whole series. I do not write to reason you into being Orthodox, but I would be mistreating you to use anything less than the best resources I know to answer the challenges of technology and using technology without burning yourself.

Electronic technology has perhaps been around for a couple hundred years or less.¹⁶ Our genus *Homo* has been around for millions of years,¹⁷ and our subspecies *Homo sapiens sapiens* has been around for over a hundred thousand years.¹⁸ This means that for well over 99% of the time our human race has been around, electronic technology was simply not part of the picture for anyone. *Maybe the keys to human flourishing and the conditions that the human person are adapted to, are older than electronic technology, and perhaps there are things we need to learn from what was normal human life.* Let’s go!

¹⁶ “History of Technology Timeline,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed November 18, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/story/history-of-technology-timeline>.

¹⁷ “Homo,” Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, November 7, 2022), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo>.

¹⁸ Glenn Elert, “Age of Homo Sapiens,” Age of Homo Sapiens - The Physics Factbook, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://hypertextbook.com/facts/1997/TroyHolder.shtml>.

Foreword to *Et Cetera...*

The efforts of the group that wrote under the synonym of “Bourbaki” represented an attempt to systematize mathematics, and the big takeaway from that effort was simply that mathematics, the arguable flagship of disciplines for systematizers, defies systematization.

If that is true for mathematics, it applies *a fortiori* to some other domains; trying to give the Orthodox Church its first systematic theology is begging to receive a heresy trial.

My own works are something I am only able to systematize to a point, and then some of the most interesting works do not meet other categories.

I leave this last section as a catchall for works that are connected with this collection’s theme, but do not fit the categories for the other volumes. This includes some of my more interesting works.

Enjoy!

Note on Footnotes and Claim to Originality

It has been a thing to want originality, and to footnote debts to other authors but otherwise at least implicitly claim, “Except as I explicitly document otherwise, I was born in a house that I built with my own two hands.”

There may be some original content in my writing, even strikingly original and possibly groundbreaking, but the claim I make to originality is nil. I have many debts to many people and more than I can trace (such may be classified as “unintentional plagiarism”), and I do not believe I was born in a house I built with my own two hands. I attempt the renovation and expansion of a mansion whose first roots I cannot trace and which has been touched by many hands before me, and God willing will be touched by many hands after.

When I was an aspiring scholar with an academic library, and I had an essay or assignment, I would do a literature search among the scholarly literature, and document what were often genuine dependencies and my genuine sources. That is not my situation now. *That is not the situation of my readers now.* I made footnotes for the book the first volume in this series was largely drawn from, and what I found was that I was doing five minute

Googlepedia hits that may have documented a claim but generally had nothing to do with where I got my ideas. And today, when in the title of one book I would probably like, we are *Amusing and Informing Ourselves to Death*, people carry cellphones and those who trace a footnote are probably about as capable as I am of a five minute Googlepedia hit.

Additionally, this work as it originally stands has a little more than a thousand pages of various kinds of un-footnoted writing. If we say that comes with an average of three footnotes per page and five minutes per footnote, that comes to over fifteen thousand footnotes, taking more than two hundred and fifty hours, or more than six uninterrupted forty hour workweeks. And I hardly have forty hour workweeks to spare.

Footnoting in this collection is essentially as original, meaning half-fledged Googlepedia hits for the first volume, standard scholarly footnoting in originally academic work, and naming of important sources in the remaining five out of seven volumes.

My apologies for readers who want footnotes; I know it's considered a sign of a serious or formal book, but I would rather make this collection available soon than wait indefinitely for all the half-fledged Googlepedia footnotes to be available.

Introduction

Ambrose Bierce called Revelation “A famous book in which St. John the Divine concealed all that he knew. The revealing is done by the commentators, who know nothing.” A UseNet post I read as a child pointed out that efforts to predict the date of Christ’s return have had an absolute 0% success rate, qualifying such predictions as “the worst Scriptural exegesis of all time.”

Revelation has prophecies, and Biblical prophecies have certain traits that are not necessarily obvious to the reader today. Besides that they fade in and often collapse multiple periods of time into one unity, the truth of prophetic fulfillment is usually rightly understood only in retrospect. Beyond this difficulty, trying to figure out the details of the apocalypse does not make for healthy persons.

However, I have another suggestion which may be of interest. We are living in a singularity, with both technological and cultural elements producing a situation unlike what it meant to be human for hundreds of thousands of years, or more. It may, I suggest, be fruitful to understand this singularity as a singularity without lining it up with details of Revelation.

In fact, this is the point I argue in the opening article in this series, “Revelation and Our Singularity.” This is one of several articles and other writing that were worth including, but unique enough not to fit in any of the other

volumes. Others talk about how psychology is rightly viewed: Elder Sophrony believed we can reach something better than psychology, but he was extremely reticent to forbid psychology to those who have nothing else.

I invite you to enjoy the collection!

Introduction to “Revelation and Our Singularity”

Things are different today with an accelerating rate of change, and it is not terribly unusual for people to raise questions about whether we are seeing what was darkly prophesied in the Book of Revelation.

I do not have a decisive answer to most of that question, but I suggest another question to ask which is easier to responsibly entertain and investigate.

Revelation and Our Singularity

My seminary has Holy Trinity Monastery's *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament*, five-star-reviewed on Amazon (a lone dissenter gave only four stars), and I decided in prayer to read the commentary on the Book of Revelation, which was translated by Fr. Seraphim and published by his St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood.

It helped, in part, to help me see why Fr. Seraphim is so respected in some quarters, and it does not strike me, as do other translations from the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, as being laced with an occult dimension or TMI that monks should normally flee from exposing to laity. It was, overall, a good and lucid translation of a classic commentary, but... I'm a little bit "not surprised" that the translation of Vladyka's commentary on Revelation was the one translation that appears to be Fr. Seraphim's doing. *It has certain fingerprints*. And at risk of irony as someone who dipped into the beginning of the commentary and then honed in on Revelation, it might gently be pointed out that Revelation is the one book of the New Testament that is intentionally not read in Orthodox services.

Among the positive points that may be mentioned, in a text that Fr. Seraphim chose to translate and that bears the Brotherhood's imprint, are that Revelation needs to be interpreted with extreme caution, and that responsible interpretation is layered. For instance, without any pretension of a single, exhaustive exegesis, he notes,

9:7-10 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

This description of the monstrous locusts causes some commentators to think that these locusts are nothing else than an allegorical description of human passions. Each of such passions, when it reaches a certain limit, has all the signs of these monstrous locusts. In describing the coming day of the Lord, the holy prophet Joel describes also the appearance before it of destroyers who in part remind one of these locusts.

I suppose that by these locusts one should likely understand the evil demons who have prepared themselves for battle with us, and as signs of victory, wear crowns when we submit to them as having received an evil victory through pleasure. The hair of women [*in cultures where women covered their hairs,*

out of modesty—CJSH] testifies of the demons' love of pleasure and arousal to fornication; the teeth of lions indicate their hardheartedness; their tails, which are likened to those of scorpions indicate the consequences of sins, which produce the death of the soul, for *sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death* (Jas 1:15). (St. Andrew, Chapter 26)

But then he goes on:

Contemporary commentators, not without a certain reasonableness, find a kinship of these locusts with airplanes and their bombing attack.

This notes a similarity with admitted caution; Fr. Seraphim's translation earlier quotes the reference to hail, and earlier says, without such restraint, "Does this not refer to an aerial bombardment with its destructive and incendiary bombs," and follows with "Some people see also in this frightful mounted army tanks which spurt forth fire."

What is at issue here? It has been said, "**Nothing is as dated as the future.**" And the text, should future scholars wish to date it, could date this text fairly closely by what technology it sees and what it has no hint of.

There is a counterbalance to "Nothing is as dated as the future." *Things fade in*. Prophecy collapses time without sharply distinguishing similar events that occur at different period, and when oca.org/saints, before the prophecies of St. Nilus, the party that posted St. Nilus's story wrote:

Saint Nilus has left a remarkably accurate prophecy concerning the state of the Church in the mid-twentieth century, and a description of the people of that time. Among

the inventions he predicted are the telephone, airplane, and submarine. He also warned that people's minds would be clouded by carnal passions, "and dishonor and lawlessness will grow stronger." Men would not be distinguishable from women because of their "shamelessness of dress and style of hair." Saint Nilus lamented that Christian pastors, bishops and priests, would become vain men, and that the morals and traditions of the Church would change. Few pious and God-fearing pastors would remain, and many people would stray from the right path because no one would instruct them.

The person who assessed the text as referring to the mid-twentieth century was in fact not quoting a timeline given by St. Nilus but giving a gloss by the presumably mid-twentieth century author of his life, and St. Nilus did not in fact give any timeline or date that my historical sensitivities could recognize. I have read his prophecies, the real ones that tell what the wording of the Mark of the Beast will be, a point I have never seen on the urban legend channel. But things are fading in. The original life posted referred to the "radio," not the "telephone." As far as men being indistinguishable from women, we have far eclipsed the summary of the prophecy above, which has no concept of widespread sex-change attempts. As far as passions go, we now have a sewer's worth of Internet porn. The prophecy could apply as much to scuba diving even better than submarines, but the oca.org/saints wording has not been changed. The prophecies stated that wisdom would be found that would let men speak in one place and be heard across the world, a prediction which has faded in in the radio, then also the telephone, then also the Zoom chat. What next? Who knows if haptics might make a "remote touch" that offers some ghastly and obscene parody of a

mother touching her baby, remotely and from a phone? As far as the morals and tradition of the Church, contraception has transformed into being broadly seen as a legitimate option to Orthodox. Examples could easily be multiplied, but I think it would be better to recognize the singularity we live in, a singularity that is unfolding on many dimensions (the gender rainbow, the river of blood from black-on-black murders ever since “Black Lives Matter” took to the forefront (could we please reverse course and go for “All Black Lives Matter?”), a singularity following a century that with artists like Picasso radically transforming artistic conventions that a historian should regard as being like an eyeblink. Now changes are continuing to roll out, at an accelerating pace in a singularity. In a matter of weeks, models who were not half-starved began to be rolled out. Politically correct pictures of people usually did not show white people alone; they included a person of color. Now a further installment has been made: some pictures have a woman wearing Muslim hijabs, and increasingly common are wheelchairs to include people with disabilities (please note that most disabilities, including mine, do not have people using a wheelchair). And dominoes are falling: not only BLM, which seems to always and only be in reference to blacks needlessly killed by white police and by white police alone, but Islam’s surge (with atheislam in which the West accepts under an iron yoke what it spurned under a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light), the cyber-quarantine, vaccines that will be socially mandated, transgender being in truth a prominent and well-integrated addition to what was once really just mostly “LBG”, with schoolchildren being told “There’s no right or wrong age to fall in love” (one archpriest called a spade a spade and said, “Putting the P in LGBTQP+”), and so on.

Update on St. Nilus, April 16 2022:

I have encountered a claimed quotation of St. Nilus’s text that is consistent with my recollection in a book whose

title I have removed after learning it was written by a schismatic. pp. 219-220. I quote:

St. Nilus the Myrrhgusher says: “When Antichrist places his seal on people their hearts will become as if dead. At the time of the prophesied calamity, Antichrist will begin to seal people with his imprint, as though by this seal to save them from misfortune, for those having this seal, according to Revelation, will be able to buy bread. Many will be dying on the roads. People will become like predatory birds attacking carrion, and will devour dead bodies. But which people will devour the dead? Those who are marked with the seal of Antichrist. Since Christians will not have the seal they will not be able to receive or buy bread and will not devour the dead; but those who are sealed, though they can buy bread, will devour the dead. For, when a man is imprinted with the seal, his heart will become insensitive; not being able to bear hunger, people will carry off corpses, and sitting at the side of any road devour them.

“Finally, the one sealed by the Antichrist will himself be put to death; and on the seal the following will be written: ‘I am yours.’ - ‘Yes, you are mine.’ - ‘I go of my own free will, not by coercion.’ - ‘And I receive you by your own will, not by coercion.’ These four sayings or inscription will be shown in the center of that accursed seal.”

The footnote reads, “St. Nilus, in Archimandrite Pantaleimon, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81.”, with “*op.cit.*” referring to

Archimandrite Pantaleimon, *A Ray of Light*, Jordanville, 1996.

I do note, not happily, that one of the quotes on the first pages of the work is the alleged “Old English” prophecy that was alleged to come from the “Mother Shipton” hoax in which a made-up psychic was given after-the-fact retrodictions of past events under the guise of old before-the-fact predictions. However, the author seems to have a source for St. Nilus saying something an urban legend would never drop.

Back to the original article

(“Singularity” is intended by analogy to what the term means in physics. Gravity in physics has been compared to weighted balls moving on a level, stretched-out rubber sheet. Heavier balls stretch the fabric more than light balls, and they tend to draw each other in. They stretch the fabric, but don’t break it. A black hole is when something stretches the fabric so singularly that the fabric of space folds in on itself, and you get potential wormholes etc. The difference between regular gravity and a singularity is loosely the difference between stretching the sheet by your weight on the one hand, and on the other hand ripping a hole in it.)

Furthermore, if I may offer what may seem an overly fine distinction, I think that matching up current events to details of Revelation is best avoided, but understanding that we are in a singularity and understanding that similarity may have value.

I had conversations with an advisor who really should have known better, who asked me, in asking if I was meeting basic duty, “Do you make allowances for greater ignorance in the past?” I answered:

I don’t make allowances for greater ignorance in the past. Allowances for different ignorance in the past are more negotiable. And I would

quote General Omar Bradley: “We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount.”

I don’t want to give an uncritical endorsement of the “Nature Connection” movement, as it seemed as I went through the eight shields thinking always, “This is overall good but I’m holding my nose at the spot we are in now,” and eventually “*I don’t need Coyote as a totem.*”

However, any serious attempt to hear out nature connection, even as literature one does not give more than a willing suspension of disbelief, is that we have lost things that were known to past generations, and that surviving hunter-gatherers have an incredible richness in sensitivity to their surroundings and layers of patterns suburbanites can miss. And the advisor, in my opinion, had read too many ancient texts, and in the original, to have legitimate innocence in seeing the difference in knowledge as ancient Aramaic texts fail to reflect the victories of the Scientific Revolution.

I might briefly comment on the singularity we are in: Recorded history does not really date past ten thousand years. The non-Neanderthal subspecies all living humans belong to dates back to perhaps forty times that length, and our genus dates back to two or four hundred times that length. *Less than one percent of all humans who have ever lived have ever seen a written/printed word, let alone mass produced technology even on par with a pencil or knife.*

I might comment briefly, if perhaps only to Jerry Root and other C.S. Lewis fans, that C.S. Lewis raised an objection to standard evolution that was a form of what is called self-referential incoherence. If evolution is true, then it explains why we have good enough brains to find food, avoid being eaten, and produce offspring... but not why we would have good enough brains to put together a true theory of evolution. Knowledge of evolution is no more than

a biochemical reaction as romantic love is no more than a biochemical reaction, and it reflects philosophical confusion of a major order to say it is even theoretically possible that our theory of evolution could be true. This has been answered in part with a suggestion that evolution would select for brains that could find things that were true, but if that is the case, assuming evolution is true, it is an extremely parochial elite, less than 2% of the age of civilization and less than .0001% of the time people have been around that evolution has given anyone the kind of brains that evolution selects for. In my opinion that response to an objection shows serious philosophical muddle. And, incidentally, I believe that Fr. Seraphim was right, at least as regards popular culture, that evolution is not doing the job of a scientific theory, but the job of philosophy that allows atheism to account for what over 99% of humans have ever lived have seen as the work of some form of spirit.

Now before getting back to Fr. Seraphim, let me get back to my advisor. Elsewhere in our discussion, he hypothetically mentioned ancient prophecies of “mushroom clouds” that would “flatten cities,” and benighted ancients failing to understand a reference to nuclear warfare that is neither particularly like toadstools in a forest, nor something that would make a smooth, level surface out of a city. I think I thought of, but did not mention, a suggestion that “mushroom clouds” are not the only way an ancient prophecy could describe global thermonuclear war; “And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places” (Rev 6:14) could be read as a surprisingly straightforward ancient prophetic description of conditions of nuclear war.

And there are other comparisons that could be drawn. I intentionally don’t want to belabor where tempting comparisons could be made, but the Internet and the whole locus of electronic technology could be described as fire

from Heaven in “great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,” (Rev 13:13), and “With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” (Rev. 17:5), where a basic utility, a socially mandated technology, includes an endless sewer of porn if you want it, and really at least soft porn if you try to research innocent topics on YouTube. There is more I could belabor: SecondLife fascinates the public and has been called SecondWife, with stern moralists saying, “Fornicate using your OWN genitals!” And about Babylon being thrown into the sea, I believe that it will be at some point as easy to take down any technological Babylon as start a nuclear war, and that inadvertently. Read The Damned Backswing as written in fifteen feet high blinking neon about our stack of technologies.

(Fr. Seraphim quotes, “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of this prophecy, God shall take away his share in the tree of life,” and the commentary underscores that Revelation ends with “a strict warning not to distort the words of the prophecy under threat of the application of the plagues that are written in this book.” I might suggest that it may be, if not exactly clear-cut wrong, at least in a gray area to add exact historical correspondences where fire and hail simply refer to aerial bombardment—or fire from Heaven (some people believe Elijah’s “fire from Heaven” as being lightning), simply as neither more nor less than the lightning-like electricity that powers electronic gadgets. There are some points of contact, but it is not clear to me that it is right to make such a simple and complete identification of one historic detail with one text in Revelation.)

However, I present these to illustrate a temptation. **Nothing is as dated as the future.** An archaeologist of

the future, if the Lord tarries (a point on which I am unclear and perhaps must be unclear), who found this article as somehow surviving the Digital Dark Ages and/or World War III, could closely date this article based on the major technologies I call out and the major technologies I don't show a hint of imagining. I wrote, Recognize that it will be easier to get the people out of the cyber-quarantine than to get the cyber-quarantine, our new home, out of the people. We have already with our Zoom chats laid practical foundations for George Orwell's *1984*.

(And I might briefly state that I believe the examples I gave, if there is far future history to assess this article, will be much more dated than Einstein's simple prediction: "I know not what weapons World War III will be fought with, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." That kind of statement tells scarcely less but is far less dated.)

And I would like to state now a cardinal point:

I would be very careful about recognizing prophecies fulfilled in Revelation, but I would be much faster to observe ways in which we live within a singularity, and that is a singularity on par with what is called a singularity in modern physics when a black hole is formed.

There was a classic set of AT&T ads, dated to 1993, with the classic AT&T Death Star logo, looking like a dark vintage science fiction movie:

[Video available at
tinyurl.com/you-will-and-the-company]

And on a humor newsgroup someone followed up with:

Have you ever received an automated sales pitch,
while you were still in your pajamas?

Have you ever had thousands of calls all over the world charged to your stolen account number?

Have you ever had your paycheck deleted by faceless intruders from across the globe?

Have you ever had an employer know more about your whereabouts and activities than your spouse?

Have you ever been snuffed to dust by a satellite laser while lying on the beach?

YOU
WILL

And the company that will bring this to you is AT&T

There was one thing that AT&T wasn't straightforward about: **No technology is permanently exotic.**

The AT&T commercial portrays a world of wonder. However, "YOU WILL" is not especially wondrous to those of us living in that dark science fiction reality. We do not wonder at electronic toll collection; we do not wonder at being able to access webpages on another continent. *No technology is permanently exotic*, and we can obtain momentary relief by upgrading to the newest and hottest gadget, but then, alcoholics can obtain momentary relief of

the living Hell of alcoholism by getting really drunk. The short-term fix does not work in the long run, and is in fact counterproductive. **As far as (anti-)social media go, we have delivered the equivalent of a tofu virtual chicken in every pot.** And tofu does not just feel and taste gross; it is nutritionally an absolutely terrible surrogate for real, honest animal protein. And even the parody left out one point in retrospect: “*Have you ever been drained at compulsively checking your phone at least a hundred times a day?* YOU WILL, and the companies that will bring it to you include AT&T ☹️🌀🌀.*T.”

A Bookshelf for Our Day

Let me give a few titles that I would strongly recommend reading, preferably in paper (kids, go ask your great-grandparents):

Francis Oakley, *The Medieval Experience: Foundations of Western Cultural Singularity*

I’m going to open this list with a dud. I am, or at least have been, a medievalist at heart; one of my books is a take on Arthurian legend, *The Sign of the Grail*, although I have since done something that is overdue. I have backed away from Arthurian legend as however enchanting it may seem if you don’t know it, not being particularly edifying or profitable to explore.

It has been said that the singularity we live in now is the fruit of what developed in the Middle Ages. However, *The Medieval Experience* left me completely underwhelmed, and furthermore the more background knowledge I had of an area, the more hollow a failure to walk in another person’s shoes the text appeared to be.

In the last real chapter, about precursors to feminism, the author quotes a non-medievalist Ibsen in words I wish to repeat in gory detail:

HELMER: To forsake your home, your husband, and your children! And you don't consider what the world will say.

NORA: I can pay no heed to that. I only know that I must do it.

HELMER: This is monstrous! Can you forsake your holiest duties in this way?

NORA: What do you consider my holiest duties?

HELMER: Do I need to tell you that? Your duties to your husband and your children.

NORA: I have other duties equally sacred.

HELMER: Impossible! What duties do you mean?

NORA: My duties towards myself.

HELMER: Before all else you are a wife and a mother.

NORA: That I no longer believe. I believe that before all else I am a human being, just as much as you are—or at least that I should try to become one.

It is a sign of feminism's hegemony that at least some women, despite every effort to want a career, ask "*What is wrong with me?*" because after all feminist direction they have received, they still

can't dislodge a fundamental desire to get married and have kids. This last major chapter in *The Medieval Experience* falls squarely in the "She shall be saved *from* childbearing" camp, and all accounts of the good and/or improving state of women in the Middle Ages describes precursors to feminism's desire that a woman not be a homemaker. It doesn't just say that a woman should have other options besides being homemakers; it is that precursors to the good estate of women are always in terms of dislodging women from the role of wife and mother no matter how much women should want to be homemakers. And on this count, not a word of the book's account of proto-feminist tendencies shows the slightest acknowledgment and respect for some women wanting to be wives and mothers.

This book represents to me a missed opportunity. And for a book copyrighted in 1974, it doesn't seem to show the empathic understanding for today's singularity that it might, alongside failing to walk in a medieval mom's shoes. The original copyright year is the same year as Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television*, and Mander's title remains salient several decades later and after profound increases in technology, but *The Medieval Experience* is as a whole forgettable and gives remarkably little insight into the medieval experience as foundations of Western cultural singularity.

C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*

This book is a little bit more of a near miss.

I do not count it as a strike against this book that it takes some effort to appreciate; I am more than willing to recommend a book that will challenge its readers. But nonetheless, I see one or two major

strikes against the book. Quite simply, it leads the reader to covet magic and many of its most tantalizing passages tantalize with magic from Atlantis. Furthermore, the character of Merlin is singularly riveting. One definition that has been used to describe the difference between a flat and a rounded character is, “A rounded character believably surprises the reader.” Merlin comes awfully close to delivering nothing but believable surprises. And even if Ransom sharply limits Merlin’s initiative, Merlin’s presence is a problem. And I say that as someone who bore the nickname “Merlin” in high school.

However, this book is valuable in offering a sort of literary “YOU WILL” commercials, which admittedly did not portray how we are glued to mobile devices. The heroes are a delight to read about; the villains are more of a chore to read about, and the banality of evil comes through loud and clear. *Furthermore*, it is a description of a singularity, and on that point it is the closest work of fiction I know to a fictionalized telling of the singularity we are in.

On that score, *That Hideous Strength* is well worth the effort to appreciate.

Philip Sherrard, *The Rape of Man and Nature: An Enquiry into the Origins and Consequences of Modern Science*

A couple of comments about the author of this book. First, he is an important figure in the history of English-speaking Orthodoxy and did major work rendering the *Philokalia* in English. Second, he is a hypocrite and an old rogue. He has blasted the Western musical tradition, which an Orthodox might legitimately do, but one friend came to visit him and found him blasting out Wagner’s opera, and that’s Wagner’s opera as in “Wagner’s opera is not as bad

as it sounds.” I would also comment on how he writes.

The Rape of Man and Nature deals in caricatures and not the written equivalent of photorealism. However, this has usefulness if it is taken as caricatures and not a literal account of facts. It is a finding in psychology that people recognize someone more readily from a caricature than from a photograph, and the caricature artist’s job is to take the most striking and salient features in e.g. someone’s face, and then portray them in exaggeration that yields a striking clarity. And if Sherrard is a caricature artist in *The Rape of Man and Nature*, he is an excellent caricature artist.

This book really is a close “near miss,” and I would readily recommend it for people who want a little bit of a feel of what was lost in the Scientific Revolution, and of what developments contributing to our ongoing singularity lost alongside scientific and technical gains.

Jean-Claude Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*

I’ve mentioned other titles as near misses. This one doesn’t just score a three point basket; it is nothing but net. (In more ways than one.)

I’m not going to try to list everything that is worth reading in this title. Buy it and read it yesterday.

C.J.S. Hayward, *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology*

I’m not going to write at length about why I believe my work is relevant, but my suspicion is that this book and not the overlapping *The Best of*

Jonathan's Corner will be my most lasting contribution, if (of course) the Lord tarries.

At the time of its writing, it has two stars on Amazon, two customer ratings, and no reviews. I would ask the interested reader to read what the *Midwest Book Review* has to say about it.

Looking back at C.S. Lewis

"These days of final apostasy" is not a new phrase; St. John Chrysostom in fact said that the world was breaking apart and coming to an end, but while antiquity ended, the world has continued.

The world has continued, and C.S. Lewis, on the eve of World War II, famously addressed students, "Life has never been normal. Humanity has always been on a precipice," although it may be that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night because the end of the world has been so insistently predicted over the ages that no one takes the message seriously.

I think it is worth understanding to what extent we live in a singularity, and we have multiple things that could be apocalyptic events: apart from the obvious threat of global thermonuclear war in a world where each city and each major university has a hydrogen bomb aimed at it, the Internet could collapse like an increasingly brittle house of cards, and take the economy down with it. Or things could continue to change and new societal vulnerabilities could develop. The pace of change has been accelerating, and it might well continue accelerating until there is a step that is *sui generis*, on par with C.S. Lewis in the nonfiction fraternal twin to *That Hideous Strength: The Abolition of Man*, in which Lewis describes the final step in "man's victory over nature:"

The wresting of powers *from* Nature is also the surrendering of things *to* Nature...

Man's conquest of Nature, if the dreams of some scientific planners are realized, means the rule of a few hundreds of men over billions upon billions of men. There neither is nor can be any simple increase of power on Man's side. Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger. In every victory, besides being the general who triumphs, he is also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car...

Man's conquest of Nature turns out, in the moment of its consummation, to be Nature's conquest of Man. Every victory we seemed to win has led us, step by step, to this conclusion. All Nature's apparent reverses have been but tactical withdrawals. We thought we were beating her back when she was luring us on. What looked to us like hands held up in surrender was really the opening of arms to enfold us for ever.

I do not know how the world will end, or whether the apocalypse will turn out to be anything like any of the possibilities I mentioned. There has already passed a moment when a nuclear power ordered a military officer to launch global thermonuclear war. That was during the Cuban missile crisis, and all of us are alive today only in the wake of a soldier who refused to obey an unconditional order. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ says, "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" God provided a way out of global thermonuclear war then, and he may shelter us, at least for a time, from a meltdown of the Internet. We live

and die as God allows, and he may sustain us still. He may give us more to repent. Since Christ's First Coming, his Second Coming has always been imminent, and part of what I omitted from C.S. Lewis's passage above is a reality that has not literally been fulfilled even when *That Hideous Strength's* Pragmatometer is live in what is fed to us by the Internet:

The final stage is come when Man by eugenics, by pre-natal conditioning, and by an education and propaganda based on a perfect applied psychology, has obtained full control over himself.

It is my own opinion that "a perfect applied psychology" is by definition a pipe dream, a materialist's explanation of spiritual phenomena such as is discussed in *How to Think About Psychology: An Orthodox Look at a Secular Religion*. But it is possible that Nature's final conquest of Man as described above will come without needing all-powerful eugenics, prenatal conditioning, or a perfect applied psychology. Pipe dreams have already become real. And one world government is an increasingly real possibility on more grounds than technology.

Conclusion

I have begun with an Orthodox St. Seraphim of Plantina and ended with a Protestant C.S. Lewis. The turn is not expected of an Orthodox author, but I have generally had an easier time with C.S. Lewis fans than those of Fr. Seraphim.

All the same, I hope to have shed some light in the process, and introduced a useful distinction between donning X-Ray goggles that let you infallibly identify historic details cryptically referred to by the details of Revelation, and recognizing and understanding that we live

in a singularity very different from that of over 99.9% of humans who have ever lived.

Much Love,
Christos

Discussion questions for “Revelation and our Singularity”

1. Do we live in times that raise questions about the Book of Revelation?
2. Is working out the details of Revelation easy or hard?
3. Do we live in a singularity?
4. Can we understand our singularity without knowing everything about the Book of Revelation?
5. How do you understand our singularity?

Introduction to “All Orthodox Theology is Positive Theology”

Without intended critique to the rich tradition of Pseudo-Dionysian negative or apophatic theology, this piece looks at positive psychology, the most popular course at Harvard, and suggests that its distinctive traits are in fact shared by all Orthodox theology.

The reader is invited to explore how all Orthodox theology is chosen by God the Spiritual Father to be the most positive force in our lives.

All Orthodox Theology is Positive Theology

The state of psychology

Martin Seligman, a giant in the psychological community, kicked off a major TED talk by talking about how a TV station wanted a sound bite from him, and it should be one word. He said, “*Good.*” Then they decided that as the president of the American Psychological Association he was a figure of such stature that they would let him have two words, and he said, “*Not good.*” Finally, they decided he was of such stature that he would be allowed three words, and his three words were, “*Not good enough.*”

What he was getting at was essentially as follows: clinical psychology had a goal which was remarkably well accomplished: the complete classification of mental health issues, along with psychiatric treatment and psychotherapy. He didn’t really underscore the magnitude and implications of this goal; apart from the fact that public figures know they at least need to act humble publicly, sometimes greatness brings real humility and he was trying to lead people to see there was more to ask for than just getting someone to feel OK, and he did not suggest that clinical psychology is the kind of tool that lets people of all kinds to

thrive in every way. He called for a positive theology to help people thrive, have fulfilling and delightful living, and enable high talent not to go to waste. And the point that I know him for is his calling for positive theology.

What is systematic theology? What is mystical theology? What is positive theology?

One distinction between Eastern Orthodoxy and Rome is that in Rome, all theology is systematic theology, and in Orthodoxy, all theology is mystical theology. This much is true to point out, however it invites confusion.

Thomas Aquinas, were he alive today, couldn't cut it for "publish or perish" academia. He is revered as one of the greatest giants in history, but he would not obviously be welcome as an academic today. While there are many ideas in his *Summa Theologiae*, few or any have the faintest claim to originality. Some people, including me, don't think that a single original idea is to be found. Others think that there are a few, very few: I have not read anyone attribute even a dozen original ideas for his work. But what he did provide was a system: an organized set of cubbyholes with a place for everything and everything in its place. And the claim that all Roman theology is systematic theology means that everything fits somewhere in the system, whether Thomas Aquinas's or something else.

The claim that all theology in Orthodoxy is mystical theology is a different sort of claim. It is not a claim that everything fits under some kind of classification scheme. Systematic theology as such is not allowed, and trying to endow the Orthodox Church with its first systematic theology is a way to ask the Church hierarchy for a heresy trial. "Mystical" in mystical theology means theology that is practiced, experienced, and lived. The claim to "study" a martial art can involve reading, especially at the higher

levels, but if you are going to study karate, you go to a dojo and start engaging in its practices. In that sense, while books may have some place in martial arts mastery, but “studying” ninjutsu is not something you do by burying your nose in books. It is a live practice.

All theology is positive theology, and my assertion is like saying that all theology is mystical theology, and not that all theology is part of systematic theology.

As to the relationship between positive psychology and positive theology, I honestly hope for an interesting conversation with some of the positive psychology community. I do not assert that positive theology contains positive psychology as we know it, or that positive psychology contains positive theology. I do, however, wish to suggest that something interesting and real is reflected in the claim that all theology is positive theology.

A wonderful old world

I wish to make one point of departure clear in the interest of framing what I am attempting.

There is a certain sense that this work could be seen as novel; for all I know it may be the first work discussing all Orthodox theology as being positive theology, but I follow Chesterton’s footsteps here (or rather fall short of them). **I am not seeking to *invent* a positive theology.** I am in fact attempting no novelty of any sort other than a new articulation of timeless truths that are relevant to the conversation. And I am seeking to offer something better than something wonderful I invented. I want to talk about wondrous things that I believe God invented, as old as the hills.

A deliberately *jarring* example

What is positive in the psychology of the Orthodox Church? To get off to a good start, I would like to say

“repentance from sins.” And one of my articles unfolds “Repentance, Heaven’s Best-Kept Secret.”

The *Philokalia* says that men hold on to sin because they think it adorns them. Repentance is terrifying. It is an unconditional surrender. But once you have made that surrender, you receive a reward. You realize that you needed that sin like you need a hole in the head—and you are free of a trap. It is something like a spiritual chiropractic massage, that you walk away from in joy with a straighter spine. And in my own experience, I’m not sure I am ever as joyful as when I am repenting. And the effect is cumulative; repentance represents a rising spiritual standard of living.

Monasticism, which I discuss in “A Comparison Between the Mere Monk and the Highest Bishop,” represents a position of supreme privilege within the Orthodox Church. Now I love my Archbishop dearly and wouldn’t want to take him down one whit, but part of the point of the piece is that if you are given a choice between being the greatest bishop in the world and being an ordinary monk, “ordinary monk” is hands down the better choice to choose. The overriding concern in that environment is the spiritual, human profit of its members. Poverty, obedience, and chastity are all conditions to one of two routes to salvation, and however wonderful marriage may be, monasticism is even better. And as well as other terms, monasticism is spoken of as “repentance.” To live in a monastery is to work at a place that is minting spiritual money and giving all members as copious pay as possible.

The Utopia that is nowhere absent

Robert Goudzward, in *Aid for the Overdeveloped West*, talked about Old Testament law as representing a paradise, and part of the picture is that it represented a paradise in which it was hard to get rich. A sage in the Bible asks, “Give me neither poverty nor riches,” and there is a

sense that having more and more money is not good for us as humans.

This world was created to be a paradise. The Old Covenant represented a paradise. The New Covenant represents a paradise. Marriage represents a paradise. Monasticism represents a paradise.

We were made for human flourishing, and part of what the Church attempts is to provide for each person to flourish as that person should flourish. Abbots (and everyone else) are not to colonize and clone; the authority is profound, but it is a profound authority in restoring a damaged icon—and helping the icon look like itself, not like something it isn't. If you read the saints' lives over time, all the saints represent Christ, but there is incredible diversity among how the saints represent Christ.

What does God ask from us?

If we look at the question of what God commands and what he requests, there is fundamental confusion in thinking God is asking us to fill his needs. God in Heaven is perfect, and has no conceivable needs except in the person of our neighbor. God makes demands of us, not to fill his needs like an incompetent therapist, but to give *us* what is best. St. Maximus the Confessor divides three classes of obedience: *slaves*, who obey out of fear, *mercenaries*, who obey to obtain benefits, and *sons*, who obey out of love. Now all obedience is in at least some sense obedience and sometimes obedience out of fear is just what the doctor ordered, but if you obey as a slave you can be saved, if you obey as a mercenary you do better, and if you obey as a son even better than that. However, none of this is a setup to fill God's needs. The point is not that it is best for God if we obey out of love; the point is that it is best for *us* if we obey out of love.

A better kind of affirmation

This may come across very strangely to a psychologist who endorses affirmations, but the two main affirmations in Orthodoxy are “Christ died to save sinners, of whom I am first,” and “All the world will be saved, and I will be damned.”

Part of this stems from beliefs that I will explain but I do not ask you to subscribe to. Religion has enough of a reputation for focusing on the afterlife that it is provocative for a social gospel poster to say, “We believe in life before death.” This life is of cardinal and incomparable significance; it is a life in which inch by inch we decide whether we will embrace Heaven or Hell when our live ends and no further repentance is available. But it has also been said that birth and death are an inch apart whilst the ticker tape goes on forever, and reform is only possible before we die. What the “affirmations” (of a sort) that I have mentioned do is prepare people like plaintiffs to press forth for maximum awards in their favor. The statements are for our good, and they help before death. Furthermore, it is believed that God doesn’t do everything in our good works for us, but he allows a genuine cooperation of combined powers where we do part of it. We are told, though, that we are not to take credit for one single achievement in our life, but give all the merit to God... but come Judgment Day, all good deeds we have done our part to are reckoned as if we did them entirely ourselves and without any help from God. I do not ask you to believe this or think it makes sense, but I suggests it is a part of a picture where an overriding concern is God blessing us as much as we will accept.

Dr. Seligman’s lecture linked at the beginning of this article talked about how French vanilla ice cream tastes exquisite for the first bite, but by the time you get to the fifth or sixth bite, the flavor is gone. In the first candidate for the good life, people habituate quickly.

I have slightly opposite news about Orthodox affirmations: when you make them central to your life, the sting crumbles. Furthermore, if you see yourself as the worst sinner in a parish, or a monastery, or all prehistory and prehistory, that's the time that real growth and even real joy appear. Orthodoxy's affirmations unlock the door to repentance, and there is no end of treasure to be mined from that vein.

Stoicism and virtue

I've seen TED talks about how stoicism is being taken as some sort of ultimate power tool, and secret weapon, within the professional gridiron or American football community.

Part of my thought was, "Duh!" and with it a thought that it is a mischaracterization of philosophy to assume it's just something for odd and eccentric people, including yours truly, who have their noses in books. Stoicism is legitimately a power tool, but it is one of many power tools that have garnished quite a following and have been as powerful to their practitioners might have been.

I have said elsewhere, "Orthodoxy is pagan. Neopaganism isn't," and The *Philokalia* preserves the very best of pagan philosophy with its profound endowment of virtues. N.B. the same word in Greek means "virtue" and "excellence," and if you want to help people thrive and develop giftedness, the four-horsed chariot of courage, justice, wisdom, and moderation has really quite a lot to go for it, and all the more if these are perfected by the virtues of faith, hope, and love. All of these are called "cardinal" or "hinge" virtues, meaning that not only are they good, but they are positive "gateway drugs" to other and perhaps even greater virtue.

And I would like to say one thing that the authors of the *Philokalia* simply can't much of ever stop talking about. This does not seem a view of yourself that you would want

to have, but I've had some pretty arrogant and abrasive people try pretty hard to teach me about humility. But I will say this: humility is the Philosopher's Stone and maybe the Elixir of Life. It opens your eyes to beauty pride may not see, and I need humility in my daily living more than I need air. I'm not going to try to further argue for an unattractive virtue, but I will say that it looks tiny and constricted from the outside, and vast and spacious from the inside. And for another Chesterton name drop: "It takes humility to enjoy anything—even pride."

If we are going to look at world traditions, the Greek term for virtue, *arete* also meant excellence, and *arete* (I both mean 'virtue' and 'excellence') represents a tradition well worth heeding. Bits and pieces have been picked up on TED talks; Stoicism is a power tool among the professional handegg community, and another TED talk talks about how "grit" (also known as fortitude or courage) makes a big difference in success. But the tradition of virtue itself, and virtue philosophy, is worth attention.

Value-free spirituality?

I haven't read the title, but I have read Fr. Richard John Neuhaus talk about his title *The Naked Public Square*, in which he argues essentially that a religiously neutral public square is an impossibility, and the attempt to produce a naked public square will, perhaps, result in a statist religion.

If serious inner work without the resources of religious tradition is a possibility, I haven't seen it. Present psychotherapy has changed much faster than core humans have changed, and uses yoga practices from Hinduism, mindfulness of a sort (whether a traditional Buddhist would recognize Western exhilaration at mindfulness as Right Mindfulness I do not know), and a couple of other usual suspects like guided imagery (alleged to be known from Graeco-Roman times and known to some traditional

medicines, although the pedigree seems to be copied and pasted across websites).

In my Asian philosophy class, I was able to sympathize with some element of almost everything that was presented. In terms of Hindu claims that inside each of us is a drop of God, I could sympathize, believing we are made in the image of God. But the one point I recoiled from is Buddhism's *anatta*, or *an-atman*: the claim that we, and everything that "exists", are an empty illusion. Or as Chesterton put it: "Buddhism is not a creed. It is a doubt."

Right Mindfulness, in its context in the Buddhist Eightfold Noble Path, is a cardinal virtue, and I count that as a positive. However, I do not see the need for the West to turn to India as a maternal breast. I also don't like being advised to practice yoga. I am already participating in a yoga, or a spiritual path: that of Orthodox Christianity, and it is a complete tradition.

My point, however, is not to attack the medicinal use of Indian tradition (whether or not Indians would recognize their land's spiritualities), but to say that value-free counseling is something I have never seen, and while it may be politically correct to foist Indian spirituality but not Orthodox Christian, I wish to offer a word on my drawing on my religious tradition. Whether you accept it is not up to me, but Orthodoxy is a therapeutic tradition. And the claim has been explicitly made, in a book called *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, that if Orthodox spiritual direction were to appear new on the scene today, it might well not be classified as "religion," but as "therapeutic science."

I have not been directly involved with that therapeutic science. I've tried to reach monasticism, and am still trying, and therapeutic science is included in monasticism. So I cannot directly speak from experience about its fruit. But other things—virtue, repentance from sin and the like, I can directly attest to as positive theology.

A few words specifically about humility

Humility seems at the start something you'd rather have other people have than have it yourself. It looks small on the outside, but inside it is vaster than the Heavens, and it is one of two virtues that the virtue-sensitized Fathers of the *Philokalia* simply cannot ever stop talking about.

Perhaps what I can say is this. I don't know positive psychology well, but one of the first lessons, and one of the biggest, is to learn and express gratitude. And what I would say as someone who believes in gratitude is this: what gratitude is to positive health, humility is *more*.

Let me ask a question: which would you rather spend time with: someone horrible and despicable, or someone wonderful and great? The latter, of course. How it relates to humility is this: if you are in pride, you see and experience others as horrible and despicable, while if you are in humility, you see others as wonderful and great. Church Fathers talk about seeing other men as "God after God." **That is a recipe for a life of delight.**

Eyes to see

There is more to be said; I am quite fond of St. John Chrysostom's "The Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself." In connection with this, there are constant liturgical references to "the feeble audacity of the demons." The devils are real, but they are on a leash, and we are called to trample them.

Here I am starting to blend into something other than positive theology, and making assertions about positive theology and how they have similar effects to positive psychology. But really, all is ordained for us by a good God, a point for which I would refer you to "God the Spiritual Father." There is profound providence, and

profound possibility for profit, if only we have eyes to see it and be grateful for a God who has ordained Heaven and Earth for the maximum possible benefit for each of us. Does this strain credibility? Yes, but I believe it, and I believe it makes a world of difference.

Thomas Dixon on secularism and psychology

The article form of my advisor's thesis¹⁹ offered a case study for an understanding of secularity, and his case study was in psychology. He talked about how an older religious concept of passions was replaced by what was at first a paper-thin concept of emotions which you were just something you felt at the moment, then how the concept of emotions filled out and became emotions that could be about something, and then they filled out further and you could have an emotional dimension to a habit. The secular concept remains alienated from its religious roots, but the common Alcoholics Anonymous concept of being an alcoholic has almost completely filled out what was in the older concept of a passion.

I'm not completely sure secularism is possible; it returns to Hinduism, at least for yoga, and Buddhism, at least for Right Mindfulness, as maternal breasts, and Hinduism has something there as Buddhism does not. Chesterton comes again to mind: "The problem with someone who doesn't believe in God is not that he believes nothing; it's that he believes anything!" I believe the Orthodox Church's bosom offers a deeper nourishment. I'm not sure I have much to back this claim other than by the extent by which this article does (or does not) make sense, or whether it is more desirable to pursue one virtue (giving that virtues are stinkin' awesome things to have), or pursue a panoply of virtues. But I would hope that the reader would

¹⁹ Available from cjshayward.com/wp-content/pdf/dixon.pdf.

by now be able to make sense of my assertion that all Orthodox theology is positive psychology, even if the claim is more superficial than the assertion that all Orthodox theology is mystical theology.

For further reading without a moment's thought to positive psychology as such, **see The Consolation of Theology**, a work of Orthodox theology, and one steeped in virtue philosophy.

Discussion questions for “All Orthodox Theology is Positive Theology”

1. What does therapeutic psychology do?
2. What is positive psychology?
3. What can positive psychology contribute to our lives?
4. Does Orthodox theology possess distinguishing characteristics like positive psychology?
5. What is one thing in Orthodox theology that works like positive psychology?
6. What would you like to learn about positive theology?

Introduction to “How to Think about Psychology: An Orthodox Look at a Secular Religion”

St. Sophrony is keen to say that psychology should not be confiscated from people who have nothing else, but there are limits and defects in what is proclaimed a value-free system and does some of the work of a real religion.

This title looks at some limitations and things that could be better, with interesting implications for how one can have more than clinical psychology offers.

How to Think About Psychology: An Orthodox Look at a Secular Religion

Introduction: A study of secularization

Thomas Dixon in **Theology, Anti-Theology, and Atheology: From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions**, offers a model of societal secularization intended to be a more robust than just seeing “theology vs. anti-theology,” “theology vs. theology in disguise,” or “theology vs. anti-theology in disguise.” He argues for a process that begins with full-blooded theism, such as offered by almost any strain of classic Christianity, and then moves to “thin theism,” such as Paley (today think Higher Powers), then “anti-theology” that is directly hostile to theism, then “atheology” which is alienated from theological roots but is merely un-theological, “in much the same way as a recipe in a cookery book is un-theological.”

Dixon, like a good scholar, provides a good case study explored at greater length in his dissertation, and I

am very interested in the case study he chose. He looks at the formation of a secular category of psychology, and the steps that have been taken to depart from older religious understandings situating the concept of passions, to a secular concept of emotions. The development of the secular category of emotions serves as a microcosm of a study of a society's apostasy (a term Dixon does not use in his article) from understanding aspects of life as features of religion, to covering similar territory in terms of what is explained, but understanding things on secular terms, disconnected from religion. (Much prior to the transition Dixon documents, it's difficult to see what the West would make of psychobabble about "*Feelings aren't right. They aren't wrong. They're just feelings.*")

If I may summarize Dixon's account of the apostasy, while moving the endpoints out a bit, in the *Philokalia*, passions are loosely sin viewed as a state, with inner experience (and sometimes outer) related to how we live and struggle with our passions. Orthodox Christians have quite an earful to give (and sometimes the maturity not to give it) if someone from the West asks, "What are your *passions*?" In an Orthodox understanding, taken literally, that question has nothing to do with activities we enjoy and get excited about (unless they are wrong for us to engage in). It is more the matter of a habit of sin that has defaced their spiritual condition and that they are, or should be, repenting of. That is one of the more "Western-like" points we can take from the *Philokalia*; another foundational concept is that many of the thoughts we think are our own, and make our own (such as authentic handling of non-straight sexuality as is broadly understood today), are the unending attempted venomous injections of demons and we need to watchfully keep guard and destroy what seems to be our own thoughts. This is not present, nor would be particularly expected, in Dixon's account. However, the "before" in Dixon's "before and after" clearly situates what would today be considered feelings as markers and features

of spiritual struggle, spiritual triumph, and spiritual defeat. The oldest so-to-speak “non-influence” figure Dixon attends to lived his life well after the Orthodox eight demons, that attack us from without, were revised to become our own internal seven deadly sins.

The first alternative Dixon studies is a concept of emotion that is paper-thin. The specific text he studies, which is remarkably accurately named, is Charles Darwin’s *The Expressions of Emotion in Man and the Animals*. The title does not directly herald a study of *emotion*, but the *expressions* of emotion, with an a priori that diminishes or removes consideration of human emotional life being distinctive (contrast Temple Grandin, *Animals in Translation*; she believes very much that animals have a psyche, but takes a sledgehammer to all-too-easy anthromorphization of animal psyches). Furthermore, an emotion is something you feel. Emotion is not really about something, and emotional habits are not envisioned. Darwin’s study was a study of physiologically what was going on with human and animal bodies approached as what was really going on in emotion.

Later on, when atheology has progressed, this begins to change. After a certain point people could conceive that emotions are about something; another threshold crossed, and you could speak of emotional habits; another threshold crossed, and you could regard a person’s emotional landscape as healthy or unhealthy. All of this fits Dixon’s category of atheology if one is using his framework. There remain important differences from either the Philokalia or the earliest models Dixon studies: it is today believed that you should let emotions wash through you until they have run their course, an opinion not endorsed by any framing of passions that I know. However, I would recall G.K. Chesterton on why it was not provocative for him to call the Protestant Reformation the shipwreck of Christianity: the proof is that, like Robinson Crusoe, Protestants keep on retrieving things from the Catholic ship.

Perhaps the fullest atheological rediscovery of the concept of a passion I am aware of is the disease model of alcoholism lived out in Alcoholics Anonymous. The passions are, in the *Philokalia*, spiritual wounds or diseases of some sort, and the dominant metaphor for a father confessor is that of a physician or healer. While the important term “repent” is not included in the wording of the twelve steps, the twelve steps paint in powerful and stark relief what repentance looks like when it puts on work gloves. The community is in many ways like a church or perhaps *is* a church. Steps may be taken to qualify strict doctrine, but the teaching and resources are a sort of practical theology to help people defeat the bottle. (One thinks of Pannenberg’s essay “How to Think About Secularism” suggests that secularism did not arise from people grinding an axe against all religion; it arose from people wanting to live in peace at a time when it was mainstream to wish that people on the other side of the divide would be burned at the stake.) There is a bit of haziness about “God as I understand him,” but this is decidedly not the result of hazy thinking. The biggest difference between Alcoholics Anonymous and the Orthodox Church may be that Alcoholics Anonymous helps with one primary disease or passion, and the Church, which could be called Sinners Anonymous, doesn’t say, “Hi. I’m Joe, and I’m an alcoholic.” It believes, “Hi. I’m Joe, and I’m the worst sinner in history.”

Where is the Orthodox Church in all of Dixon’s study?

At a glance, there may not be much visible. The Orthodox Church is not mentioned as such, the text seems to focus on English-speaking figures from the 17th century onwards, and the only figure claimed by the Orthodox Church is the Blessed Augustine, who is first mentioned in a perfunctory list of influences upon authors who retained significant grounding in older tradition. (The next stop seems to jump centuries forward to reach Thomas

Aquinas.) The text does not seem to have even a serious pretension to treat Orthodoxy as far as the case study goes. Furthermore, while passions were and are considered important in Orthodoxy, the theological *affections* that counterbalance theological passions in the “before” part of “before and after” are obscure or nonexistent in Orthodox faith.

However, there is something that would feel familiar to Orthodox. To the Orthodox student in a Roman university, there may be the repeated effect of a Catholic student conspiratorially explain that the Roman Catholic Church has been doing that was daft and wrong, but now Rome is getting its act together, has progressed, and has something genuinely better to offer. To Orthodox, this whole topos heralds something specific; it heralds the dismantling of one more continuity that Rome used to have with Holy Orthodoxy. And while Dixon does not discuss “Catholic” or “Protestant” as such and does not even have pretensions of treating Orthodoxy, he offers a first-class account of Western figures dismantling one more continuity with Holy Orthodoxy. To many Orthodox, the tune sounds all too familiar.

Quasi-Mystical-Theology

In Orthodoxy, all theology is “mystical theology”, meaning what is practically lived in the practice of Holy Orthodoxy. Systematic theology is off-limits, as a kind of formal book exercise that is not animated by the blood of mystical theology.

Clinical psychology offers what Dixon terms quasi-theology, and I would more specifically term quasi-mystical theology. Not all psychologists are clinical practitioners; there are a good number of academic research psychologists who explore things beyond the bounds of what a counselor would ordinarily bring up. For instance, academic psychology has developed theories of memory, including

what different kinds of memory there are, how they work, and how they fit together. These are not only more detailed than common-sense understandings, but different: learning a skill is considered a type of memory, and while it makes sense on reflection, the common, everyday use of “memory” does not draw such a connection.

This is a legitimate finding of research psychology, but it falls outside of common counseling practice unless the client has some kind of condition where this information is useful. Clinical practitioners attempt to inculcate aspects of psychology that will help clients with their inner state, how to handle difficulties, and (it is hoped) live a happier life. All of this is atheology that is doing something comparable to theology, and more specifically mystical theology; the speculative end is left for academics, or at least not given to clients who don’t need the added information. In Dixon’s framing, some atheology is additionally *quasi-theological*, meaning that it offers e.g. overarching narratives of life and the cosmos; he mentions science-as-worldview as one point. Clinical psychology offers a different, humbler, and vastly more powerful quasi-theological project. It offers an attempt at a secular common ground that will let people live their lives with the kind of resources that have been traditionally sought under religious auspices. As far as the *Philokalia* as the Orthodox masterwork for the science of spiritual struggle goes, at times the content of clinical psychology runs parallel to the *Philokalia* and at times it veers in a different and unrelated direction from the *Philokalia*, but it is almost a constant that clinical psychology is intended to do *Philokalia* work that will help overcome bad thoughts, preventable misery, regrettable actions, being emotionally poisoned by people who are emotionally poisonous, etc. There is of course an additional difference in that the works in the *Philokalia* are concerned with building people up for eternal glory, but clinical psychology is meant to build people up for a positive life, and that much is common ground.

What is a religion? Can religion be secular?

Q: With so many religions [in India], how do you stay united ?

A: A common hatred of stupid Americans.

-An FAQ list written by an exasperated Indian

The term “religion” etymologically comes from Latin, “religare”, which means to bind. It is the same root as in “ligament” in the human body, which do a job of connecting bones to each other. And while the FAQ list contains some astonishingly silly questions, there is some degree of insight reflected in a realization of many religions in India leading to a question of, “*How do you stay united?*”

I bristled when I read scholars saying that courtly love and chivalry was the real religion of knights and nobles late in the Middle Ages, but some years later, the claim makes a lot more sense to me. The medieval versions of Arthurian legend I read before and during *The Sign of the Grail* repeatedly talked about how people didn’t love (in courtly fashion) anything like the days of King Arthur, which is a signal warning that courtly love was present in a sense that was unthinkable in the claimed days of King Arthur’s court. The first widespread version of Arthurian legends outside of Celtic legend were in the twelfth century; the dates reported, with mention of St. Augustine of Canterbury, put Arthur as being in the sixth century. The number of intervening centuries is roughly the same as the number of years between our time and the tail end of the medieval world.

Furthermore, I have not read *Harry Potter* but I would offer some contrasts. First of all, Harry Potter is produced, offered, and among the more mentally stable

members of the fan base, received as a work of fiction. The version of King Arthur that first swept through mainland Europe was a work of pseudohistory produced mostly out of thin air, but was presented and received as literal history. Secondary, Harry Potter mania is not expected to be a fixture for all of a long lifetime: the cultural place we have is like nothing else in its heyday, but it is a candidate for a limelight that shone on many other things before it and is expected to shine on many things after it. The Arthurian legends were more of a Harry Potter without competition. Today one can walk in the bookstore and see fantasy novels representing many worlds; Arthurian legends tended to absorb anything beside them that was out there (like the story of Tristan and Yseult, included in Sir Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*). It might be pointed out that the present Pope as of this writing is named after a medieval Western saint, Francis of Assisi, who was named under the inspiration of France and more specifically French troubadours. I am not sure where the troubadours' lyrics began and ended, but Arthurian legends entered the vulgar (i.e. common, instead of Latin) tongue in France and troubadours were part and parcel to what spread. Notwithstanding that the Arthurian legends take place in England, they are to this day as well-known, or better-known, in France, than the story of the (French) Roland and his paladins. The Roman Catholic Church forbade reading "idle romances," meaning, essentially, all Arthurian literature, but it seems that, in the circles of courtly love, the active endeavors of chivalry were much more on the front burner with Christianity assumed to be on the back burner, and chivalry was more of one's real religion to knights and nobles than Christianity.

One Orthodox student, perhaps not making himself particularly well-liked in a theology program by complaining about Karl Rahner's reliance on Western analytic philosophy (one particularly memorable cart-before-the-horse heading was "The presence of Christ in an

evolutionary worldview”), and was answered by saying that it was to reach the unbeliever. He responded and said that he did not see why the common ground between all world religions was Western analytic philosophy. The professor said that it was to reach the unbeliever in *us*. The student said that Western analytic philosophy did not speak to the unbeliever in him. (The conversation moved on from there, but without uncovering any particular reason why Western analytic philosophy should fit the job description Rahner was conscripting it to do.)

In psychology today, the common ground that is legitimately given the job of a secular and artificial religion in a sense of what common ground binds us together is material derived by Buddhism and Hinduism (whether or not their incarnations would be recognized by the religious communities). Jainism is omitted perhaps because of a lack of familiarity with Indian religion. (The term “yoga,” for instance, means a spiritual path, in which sense it would be natural for a Christian to claim to be practicing the Christian yoga, but yoga in the usual sense is lifted from Hinduism. As to whether Orthodox may practice yoga, as always, ask your priest; I do not see why Christians need yoga, but many priests are much more lenient than I would be.) What is presented in psychology today is a secular religion, not specifically requiring one to reverence certain deities or providing as complete a moral code as world religions, and for that matter expected to be markedly different than the secular religions offered ten years in the past and ten years in the future, and no less meant to do a religion’s job because it is concocted.

Why are we seeking mindfulness from the East?

Perhaps because we because we have dismantled it in the West.

Buddhism asserts four noble truths, and an eightfold noble path in which a Western philosopher or historian of philosophy would recognize a path of virtue-based morality. One of them, “Right Mindfulness,” has been given a heyday in the sun, although mindfulness is best understood holistically in a society where self-identified Buddhists find license to treat morality as optional (Buddhist societies and religious texts seem to find a great deal of moral debt owed to other humans, as one can likely find by reading whatever the Wikipedia page for Buddhism mentions). Virtue-based moralities are common in many world religions and world philosophical traditions; if Christianity offers a virtue-based morality, this has never been a Christian monopoly. Besides Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism, for instance in the East, and Aristotle and the Stoics in the West, approach morality by virtues. There are important differences in *how* they approach morality by virtues, but the concept of virtues as such is common. (A virtue is a disposition, or an internal state influencing action, that “points towards” some category of good action and/or “points away” from some category of bad action.)

As compared to Western philosophy without much Eastern influence, there is not a packaged standalone virtue of mindfulness. Another Indian virtue that is shared between Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, *ahimsa* or not-harming, says in essence “I cannot harm you without harming myself,” and while it may be easier to see from pantheism, even secular grounds can recognize that divorce is not the only misfortune that hurts all involved. Various stripes of abuse are destructive for the victim, but they are also destructive to the abuser. To steal or lie to another is also a self-violation. This virtue may not be spelled out in older Western texts, but a philosopher who knows Western virtue philosophy should be able to immediately recognize mindfulness, ahimsa, etc. as newly met members of the family of virtues, and possibly cardinal virtues to boot.

(Cardinal virtues are virtues that are both important in themselves, and something that other virtues hinge on.)

Mindfulness is something that's part of the terrain of virtue, in the West as well as the East; it's just that with how something like a "political map" is drawn, it's not framed as its own separate territory. (This kind of thing is familiar enough to students of philosophy and religion.) However, there are repeated points of contact between mindfulness and Fr. Thomas Hopko's "55 Maxims for the Christian Life":

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
 4. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
 8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
 9. Sit in silence 20 or 30 minutes a day.
 13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
 23. Live a day, or even part of a day, at a time.
 29. Be grateful.
 30. Be cheerful.
 33. Listen when people talk to you.
 34. Be awake and attentive, fully present wherever you are.
 35. Flee imagination, analysis, fantasy, figuring things out.
- 34 is not the only item that exhorts us to be mindful.

But we are rediscovering mindfulness after having dismantled it at home. One friend talked about how his grandmother complained about Walkmans, that if you are running through natural surroundings and listening to music, you are not paying due attention to your surroundings. There has been a stream of technologies, from humble, tape-eating Walkmans to the iPod's apotheosis in an iPhone and Apple Watch pairing, whose marketing proposition is to provide an ever-easier, ever-more-seductive, ever-more-compelling alternative to mindfulness. Now an iPhone can be awfully useful (I have a still-working iPhone 7), but using technology ascetically and rightly is harder than not using it at all, and Humane Tech only reaches so far.

One CEO talked about how she wanted to share one single hack, and the hack she wanted to share was that her mother gave you her full attention no matter who you were or what you were doing. And evidently this was something the CEO considered important both to do and to invite others to do. However, her mother's behavior, however virtuous, and virtuously mindful, was nothing distinctive in her generation, nor was it presented as such. Even with no concept of mindfulness as such, people in her mother's generation were taught in life, faith, and manners to give mindful attention to everyone you dealt with.

G.K. Chesterton exposes the sadness of laboring in the prison of one idea, and something similar might be said by laboring in the prison of one virtue, especially if that is not a cardinal virtue that opens to a vista of other virtues. Mindfulness, for instance, is much more worthy of attention when viewed as part of an Eightfold Noble Path of interlocking virtues. A TED talk about what makes people beat the odds, presented as original research to a virtue the presenter calls "grit," which (however much research is done) is quickly recognizable as the standard virtue of perseverance.

There may be hope for a TED talk about an interlocking family of virtues. Tim Ferris's talk about Stoicism does not discuss virtue as such, but does introduce the oblong concept that life lessons learned in ancient times can be relevant and useful today, and discusses Stoicism as the substance of a play George Washington used to strengthen his troops, and discovered as a kind of ultimate power tool by some of the top coaches in the NFL.

The first book of the *Philokalia*, moved to an appendix by formerly Protestant editors, was misattributed to one saint and the stated reason for its banishment was that it was spiritually insightful but not written by a Christian; it was Stoic and not Christian in certain respects. That may be true, but the *Philokalia* is universally human and its authors have usually been quick to borrow from, and respect, Stoic virtue philosophy.

One influential book from the West is Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*. C.S. Lewis gives its reception a cardinal place in *The Discarded Image*, and contests a tendency to have to choose between Boethius's Christianity and his philosophy. Both should be taken seriously, and the book, among other excellences, shows a Christian who has profited from the best pagan philosophy had to offer, including important Stoic elements.

We've seen a TED talk that doesn't name virtues but shows enthusiasm for ancient philosophy in which virtues were important. Perhaps someday we may have a TED talk about an ancient or modern *family* of virtues.

“Hi, my name’s Joe, and I’m an alcoholic,” is fundamentally not an “affirmation.”

I would like to look at the phrase, “Hi, my name’s Joe, and I’m an alcoholic” to dismiss two ideas that might already be obviously ridiculous.

The first is that it's sadistic, Alcoholics Anonymous rubbing member's noses into the dirt because of some cruel glee. The practice of introducing yourself as an alcoholic is part and parcel of a big picture intended to free alcoholics from a suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy, perhaps reminding members that someone who has been fifteen years sober can return to bondage to alcohol. Furthermore, the main intended beneficiary of saying "Hi, my name's Joe, and I'm an alcoholic," is simply the alcoholic who says it.

The second is that it's wishful thinking. Perhaps there are some confused people who believe that it would be nice to be drunk all the time and drink more and more. However, for someone who knows the incredibly destructive suffering alcoholism inflicts on oneself and those one loves, it is an absurdity to think of "Hi, my name's Joe, and I'm an alcoholic" as a way to talk something into being, for someone who's been stone cold sober lifelong to wish to be in cruel slavery to alcohol. "Hi, my name's Joe, and I'm an alcoholic" being an "affirmation" of wishful thinking belongs in a Monty Python sketch. The introduction as an alcoholic falls under the heading of facing already present reality.

"Here is a trustworthy saying which deserves acceptance: Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Such said St. Paul, and such is enshrined in two brief prayers before communion. Confessing oneself the chief of sinners is not a positive affirmation: but it is a handmaiden to being one Christ died for, and another saying which has rumbled down the ages, "The vilest of human sins is but a smouldering ember thrown into the ocean of God's love." The confession as the chief of sinners is not an endpoint. It is a signpost lighting up the way to, "Death is swallowed up in victory." However vile the sins one owns up to, they are outclassed in every possible way by the Lord who is addressed in, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." ("Mercy" is said to

translate *chesed*, a Hebrew word usually translated as “lovingkindness.”)

How do modern psychological affirmations look to a theist? A bit like trying to nourish yourself by eating cotton candy, but I’d really like to give more of an argument than an unflattering comparison. The introduction to *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* describe a shift in wisdom literature (written and other materials about how to live life well; the concept heavily overlaps both theology and psychology). The shift is from a *character ethic*, which says that you get ahead by moral character or moral virtue, to a *personality ethic* which does not call for submitting to inner transformation, and whose hallmarks include exhortations to “Believe in yourself.” (Since Covey wrote his introduction, the jobhunting world is not the only arena to undergo a second fall into a personal brand ethic, but affirmations have not gotten to that point, or at least not that I’m aware of.)

Spirituality and organized religion

One Orthodox priest mentioned, for people who want to be spiritual but express distrust of organized religion, “If you don’t like organized religion, you’ll love Orthodoxy. We’re about as disorganized as you can get.” But he also had a deeper point to make.

That deeper point is that “objection to organized religion” is usually at its core “objection to someone else holding authority over me.” And that is deadly, because someone else having authority over you is the gateway to much of spiritual growth.

Spirituality that is offered as neutral, and has been castrated enough not to visibly trample any mainstream demographic’s religious and spiritual sensitivities, may have

some effect, but true growth takes place outside of such spiritual confines.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's *For the Life of the World* almost opens on "spirituality." He discusses its vacuity, and how it exacerbates an already secular enough life. The reader is directed to him for what one might have that is better than taking a secular life and adding spirituality.

For lack of knowledge my people perish

I would like to take a moment to talk about mental illness.

The teaching of the Orthodox Church on what we understand as mental illness (see some "hard pill to swallow" prayers), as articulated by an Orthodox MD/PhD, is that the terrain we frame as mental illness has already been analyzed and addressed. Mental illnesses, or what are called such, are tangles of passion. But the psychiatrist was clear that he could and did prescribe medications to lessen patients' suffering.

One bugbear that needs to be addressed is the idea that if you are suffering from mental illness, you need more faith, and/or you just need to snap out of it. Now all of us really need more faith, and if you suffer from a mental illness, you obviously should pray. *However*, trying to pray hard enough to make it go away may not work any better than trying to snap out of it.

Now, with caveats, I would recommend Orthodox Christians with mental illness to see a psychiatrist and/or a counselor. Their methods can be very effective, and for all my writing about ersatz religion, they can significantly reduce suffering.

The caveat I would give is not theologically motivated. It is that there are excellent psychiatrists and

counselors, but psychology is a minefield, with counselors who will tell you to use pornography and masturbate. If I were looking for a provider, I would do research and/or ask someone you trust to do research for you (if, for instance, you are depressed enough that it's difficult to get out of bed). And if your provider seems to be acting inappropriately or displaying incompetence, it may be the entirely right decision to switch providers.

However, there is one piece more that the secular category of psychology does not understand. **Mental illness can improve dramatically when you delve into new layers of repentance.** While it doesn't work to just try harder to have more faith, as you walk the Orthodox journey of repentance you will see things to repent of, and some of that repentance can slowly help untangle the knot of passions that the Fathers of the *Philokalia* knew, and St. Isaac the Syrian, a saint who has benefitted many mentally ill people.

The reason this section is titled "For lack of knowledge my people perish" is that we usually don't see what we need to repent of to work at that level. We don't know the steps. The solution I would expect is to work hard to repent, and make your confession include that one sin that you are wishing to forget when you confess. But walk on the journey of repentance: Repentance is Heaven's best-kept secret. Monasticism is rightly called repentance, but the treasure of repentance is for everyone.

For those for whom this is a live option, the care of a spiritual director receives a central endorsement in *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, a classic which says that if patristic spiritual direction were to be introduced today, it would not likely be classified as religion so much as a therapeutic science. A good, experienced spiritual director who is familiar with mental illness as understood in Orthodoxy can be a much better alternative to fumbling around until you find out what sin you need to repent of and reject to turn your back on a particular point of mental

illness. “For lack of knowledge my people perish” can be greatly alleviated by a spiritual director who understands classic Orthodox teaching on mental illness.

One more thing: a wise Orthodox protopresbyter said, “Avoid amateur psychologists. They usually have more problems than the rest of us!”

Et cetera

There are other things I do not wish to treat in detail. After it has been observed that clinical psychology often takes a person who is miserable and raise that person to feeling OK, but not rise above feeling OK, there has been a “positive psychology” meant for everyone, to help people rise above OK and make use of great talents. I would comment briefly that monasticism is both a supreme medicine for those of us who need some extra structure, *and* a school for positive excellence, and the latter is more central than the former.

In terms of “Christian psychology,” Cloud and Townsend’s *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No* is consistently violent to Biblical texts in the process of presenting secular boundaries as Christian. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is ludicrous hyperbole, and not properly understood until it is recognized as ludicrous hyperbole, in which the Good Samaritan goes through a road infested by brigands, gambles with his life when he gives in to what would ordinarily be the bait to brigands’ oldest and deadliest trick in the book, and so on. It was made to make the listener who asked Christ, “Who is my neighbor?” profoundly uncomfortable. Cloud and Townsend, however, present the Good Samaritan as giving a moderate and measured response, and asks us to imagine the rescued victim asking the Samaritan to give even *more*, and the Good Samaritan wisely saying, “No.”

If you have to be that violent to the Bible to make it agree with you, you’re almost certainly wrong.

And there are other things. I'm not going to try to detail life without thinking in terms of boundaries, beyond saying that Christianity, and almost certainly not only Christianity, has a concept of "Love your neighbor as yourself" that unfolds into right relations with other people, but without psychology's concept of boundaries.

Let me mention one more point.

Honest?

Perhaps most striking of all was a session under the heading of honesty, and showed a TED talk where a psychiatrist shared (in retrospect and in context, this seems like a deliberate name-drop) that he was named after his father, a Baptist minister. Then he came out as an illegitimate child, and I would like to repeat why my own parents do not like the term "bastard."

While they wanted to teach polite language, my parents did not object to the term "bastard" because it is forceful enough to be a rude word. They objected to the term "bastard" because the term refers to someone who did not and could not have any say or any agency in a wrong decision. If there is a term forceful enough to be a rude word in this context, and the relevant act was consensual, the abrasive word should refer to the parents and not the child. And now that we've mostly retired the use of words like "adulterer" and "fornicator", we have an abrasive term for the victim who had no choice in a matter and not those who made the victimhood and the victim. If the worst TMI delivery in the TED talk was that the psychiatrist was an illegitimate child, one could have answered, "Well, Christ was also born from a scandalous pregnancy." But in fact this is not all the TMI psychiatrist was "sharing."

Back to the TED talk. Coming out as a bastard was a softening up of the audience for behavior in which the psychiatrist genuinely *did* have agency. He then came out as a philanderer; he did not use any negative terms, but talked

about honesty and authenticity when he opened up to his wife, now his 2nd ex-wife whom he presents as not really harmed, and shared to her, of himself, that he was both *married* and *dating*. It was, to adapt a striking phrase from Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a confession with total absence of contrition or repentance.

No light bulbs went on above staff members' heads when patients complained that this was the most autistic version of honesty they had yet seen endorsed by a mental health professional, and explained that you don't open a coat and say "Here's all there is to see, whether or not seeing it will help you," or that you don't bleed all over a casual acquaintance who asks "How are you?" in passing; as sometimes has to be explained to the autistic patient, it is rarely a shirking of due honesty to withhold a full-strength informational answer in responding to a merely social question.

And perhaps no light bulbs should have gone on over staff heads because the session on honesty had nothing to do with honesty. Staff members were in fact not ignorant of the major concept of "negative politeness" and that right speech usually both conceals and reveals. Ostensible "honesty" was just how an unrelated payload was delivered.

To spell it out, the payload is that whatever sexual practices you find yourself most drawn to pursue, and others pursue, is your real, authentic self, and honesty takes that as a non-negotiable foundation. The lecture was devoid of any clear or even vague reference to any stripe of queers (or whatever they are called this week), and if the speaker's philandering tried out dating a guy, he did not disclose this point. But as much as coming out as an illegitimate child paved the way for coming out as a philanderer, accepting his coming out as a philanderer on the terms he presented was masterfully crafted to pave the way to saying the *only* real payload to that TED talk: "The sexual practices you are most drawn to engage in are your real, authentic self, and authenticity starts with accepting these practices as its

foundation,” and if one labors under the delusion that a successful straight marriage is what happens when one man, and one woman, lay the reins on the horse’s neck, one is in a position that has little to no ground to dissent from a position of, “If you allow straight marriage to be authentic, you have to give queers the same right too.”

The entire session ostensibly offered to teach honesty was itself treacherously dishonest.

(Queer advocacy has long since been baked into the societal common ground that psychology deems inoffensive to all religions.)

Conclusion: Beyond solipsism

The goal and lesson of psychology is quite often solipsistic. There are exceptions: positive psychology may cover three versions of the good life, the last and deepest version being the meaningful life, a non-solipsistic life of service to others. (Though this is seldom covered in psychology, service to others gives a real happiness). However, a session on boundaries covers how to establish and maintain our own boundaries, but probably does not cover respecting other boundaries, including when someone draws a boundary when you think it would be so much better not to establish the boundaries. The further you go, the tightest the constriction of solipsistic self-care. The endgame approached by most pillars of counseling psychology is a client with self-contained happiness.

In Orthodoxy, we do one better: “Only God and I exist.”

“Only God and I exist.” What does that mean? In a nutshell, the only standing that ultimately matters is your standing before God. Now the Orthodox Church has various forms of mediated grace, and that mediation may be included. However, the only one you need seek to please is God; if you are pleasing God, it doesn’t matter what people may do, or even the demons. Arrogance has a place; we are

summoned to be rightly and properly arrogant of the demons in pleasing God. And trample them.

One major difference between ancient Judaism and its neighbors was that, as God's people knew, there was only one God, and our problem before him was sin; if one has sinned, the one and only necessary remedy was atonement. The polytheistic neighbors believed in something much less rational, not to mention far less humane, was that one could do things that offended one or more gods, and the solution to this situation was to appease the offended deity, but unfortunately what appeased one deity could offend another. The unfortunate picture was much like the fool's errand of being on friendly terms with everyone in a bickering junior high.

St. Moses is in fact one who confessed what Orthodox believe as "Only God and I exist."

Once one has crossed that ground, and found that there is only one God to serve and offer our repentance, we move beyond the junior high of our life circumstances... and find that the one God is in fact the Lord of the Dance and the Orchestrator of all Creation. And this time everything besides oneself again becomes real, but not ultimately real. There are billions of people in the world whom we should love, and we should show virtue and politeness to all we meet, but in the end only God has the last word.

Psychology offers a narrower and narrower constriction if you take it a guide to living with others. "Only God and I exist," by contrast, opens wider and wider and wider, in a solipsism that is vaster than the Heavens that it, also, embraces. It is a solipsism in which you are summoned to dance the Great Dance with your neighbors and all Creation!

If you need psychology and psychiatry, by all means, use them. *But remember that only God and you exist!*

Much Love,
C.J.S. Hayward

Discussion questions for “How to Think about Psychology: An Orthodox Look at a Secular Religion”

1. What is a religion? What does a religion offer to its members?
2. Is psychology reminiscent at times of “A camel is a horse that was designed by a committee?”
3. What religious jobs does standard psychology do?
4. Is it worthwhile to avail yourself of psychology if you need it?
5. What does Orthodoxy offer that is more, and more powerful?
6. In what ways does psychology fail where Orthodoxy can succeed?

Introduction to “A Public Act of Repentance”

After pressure and after being put into a difficult position by my bishop (and being extremely wary of engaging in formal dissent), I received stage 1 of a COVID vaccine. It produced a deadly embolism.

I decided to make my repentance public.

A Public Act of Repentance

I, C.J.S. Hayward, publicly repent of having taken a first dose of a COVID vaccine.

I have in general been suspicious about the genuine helpfulness of vaccines; I wrote *Eight-Year-Old Boy Diagnosed with Machiavellian Syndrome by Proxy (MSBP)* and it was well-received among those who are skeptical about whether vaccines are overall helpful.

Then I was hit from all sides, from family at home and slapped down at church, including being informed my heirarch Archbishop PETER had spoken with many Orthodox doctors and chose to be publicly vaccinated. I wrote and then took down, in the interest of not becoming heretical, one post critical of Archbishop PETER when my spiritual father helped me to see that if I was not in formal dissent, getting awfully close. And as I was reminded in Lenten reading, it is not helpful to criticize one's spiritual authorities: not a monastic priest, not a spiritual father, and all the more not the bishop I answer to in the end. I asked, and received, a blessing to receive vaccination from my spiritual father.

As the time approached, I was aware of unending doubt about my rightness to receive a vaccine, and Rom 14.23). I do not want to give the debate in that passage in cultural context, but after having seen my Archbishop to whom I answer set an example of receiving the vaccine, and receiving a blessing and assurances from my spiritual father to receive the vaccine personally, I still had constant, nagging doubts about whether I should receive the vaccine, and that Biblical discussion was at the forefront of my mind, along with a thought about stopping COVID being justification to make an exception. I claim no confused ideas about the Biblical principle, nor any sense of mixed messages from my conscience, nor anything else of that sort. And I furthermore would point out that my spiritual father is big on listening to that inner voice; he has never to my knowledge put me in a position previously of choosing between obeying that still, small voice and obeying him—and while Orthodox spiritual direction usually requires obedience, he has been clear, when I asked a blessing to have my confessions heard by cathedral clergy, that this is not full monastic spiritual direction and that I do not owe him monastic-style obedience. He allowed me to choose freely whether I wanted to receive the vaccine, so I cannot blame him for how I exercised my freedom. (I see very little mitigating factors once I recognized consciously that something was wrong.)

I sinned by taking the first dose of a vaccine, when my conscience was not in a state where I could legitimately take the vaccine. I do not here make any evaluation of the vaccines in general or specific people; I mentally asked, “What could go wrong?”

I don’t know all of what could have gone wrong. What I did realize after paying the price for drinking a sugary drink two weeks later was that when I received the vaccine, I was told at the top of an information sheet that if certain vaguely COVID-like symptoms if they lasted for longer than 72 hours, and it was two weeks later and I was

ignoring significant and ongoing COVID-like symptoms, including muscle pains, headache, nausea, and by the way the swelling at the injection site is still visible. And (as of two and a half weeks later) they weren't going away. I received, in the language of Romans 1, received in my person a due penalty for my error.

At about two weeks, my conscience was overwhelmingly strong that I should cancel my second dose. It was getting stronger and stronger, and then by chance I read a friend's comment in a paper and while he is not a religious authority I answer to, unexpected words brought my struggle *against* my conscience to the forefront of my attention. I canceled it and haven't had any social consequences *yet*. But my doctor's office gave what I regard as at best excusable advice that I go ahead with the second dose as originally planned. The people giving the vaccines warn people not to have a vaccine within 14 days of receiving any other vaccine or any COVID. My primary told me to go right ahead and receive the vaccine in a few days even when I had significant and ongoing COVID symptoms that prompted her office to ask me to take a COVID test before coming in to the office.

I've been in a mind fog. I don't know if the COVID symptoms are permanent; they do seem to be lasting just a little long even by the standards of a real, honest, legitimate COVID infection, let alone reasonable aftereffects for a vaccine. And tomorrow's concerns are not my concern today; tomorrow's concerns will be my concerns when tomorrow comes.

The adverse reactions are only part of the picture of why I am repenting; I ignored something very clear and mentally asked, "What could go wrong?" and I believe both that God is just to allow me to experience COVID symptoms now, and that ignoring conscience or clear thinking and asking, "What could go wrong?" (in other words, asking in my heart "But what could possibly go wrong?" has

historically been a *dangerous* position for me to be in spiritually.

However, while I absolutely cannot judge Archbishop PETER for his research, actions, or conclusions, it is in my conscience to respond to his publicly receiving a vaccine by my publicly repenting of taking a vaccine that I cannot blame on his influence. And who knows when God might resolve a vaccine injury?

I, Christos Hayward, publicly repent of receiving the first dose of a vaccination.

Epilogue, July 9 2021

I am, by the grace of and generosity of God, my archbishop and his school, a seminary student.

The seminary has assigned some texts to read, and the hardest had been about, for instance, Old Believer and Old Calendarist schisms. The canonical Orthodox authority who in large measure pushed Old Believers into schism was being an incredible jerk towards people who were trying to mind their own business. The canonical Orthodox authority who led people to become Old Calendarists was a Freemason, among other disqualifications, and was something like the Messianic fantasy of a PC-USA radical in the office of an Orthodox bishop. In these and I believe other meetings, I was left with a terrible sense that I would have really liked to sit down for a meal with the non-canonicals (one high-ranking non-canonical bishop radiated the Uncreated Light from his prison cell), while the canonical figures, not so much. (Or to be less diplomatic about it, they mostly left me wanting to puke.)

The USA's Assembly of (Orthodox) Bishops, I have been told, has come out presenting the somewhat bloodstained COVID vaccines as desirable, definitely permitted and encouraged by example even if there has not been a strict requirement made. And... I am willing to see a decision like the OCA decision described in Contraception,

Orthodoxy, and Spin Doctoring

(cjshayward.com/contraception) where a jurisdiction advocated and allowed a practice St. John Chrysostom bluntly called "worse than murder" and tried to explain his horror about it. I have been asked if I had a heirarch's blessing to write that. I'm willing to hold a position, if it comes to that, that I do not share with my bishop and perhaps not anyone in the Assembly.

I have told my spiritual director that if it comes to a choice between not receiving any further vaccination and being admitted to housing, I am willing to go homeless. However, I am not willing to go non-canonical. Never mind if I believe COVID injections are the greatest breakthrough in human health since DDT. If I have to choose between remaining not fully vaccinated and remaining canonical, I will take as many injections as are demanded of me rather than forfeit my status as a canonical Orthodox Christian.

Discussion questions for “A Public Act of Repentance”

1. Are COVID vaccines, as an official document claims, safe?
2. Do COVID vaccines deliver an immunity to COVID?
3. Do we as a society have vaccine-shaped expectations about how to address any disease?
4. Is it possible to be an anti-vaxxer and intelligent?

Introduction to “What Evolutionists Have to Say to the Royal, Divine Image: *We’re Missing Something!*”

Studying humanity as a mere animal is one of many ways to sell humanity short.

Nonetheless, things like the Paleo diet and lifestyle suggest ways that we can live under conditions better for us if we are humble enough to live under the biological circumstances that have been with us for most of the hundreds of thousands or millions of years some form of people have been around.

This piece looks about what positive things can be drawn from an evolutionary picture to help us function like human beings were *designed* to function.

What Evolutionists Have to Say to the Royal, Divine Image: *We're Missing Something*

**Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination
of Television***

**Robb Wolf, *The Paleo Solution: The Original
Human Diet***

I have been rereading and thinking over parts of the three titles above, and I have come to realize that at least some evolutionists have something to give that those of us who believe there is something special about humanity would profit from. I believe more than the “special flower” assessment of humanity that Wolf ridicules; I believe more specifically that humanity is royalty, created in the image of God, and if for the sake of argument at least, the agricultural revolution and what follows are largely a mistake, I can say more than that *Homo sapiens (sapiens)* is the only species out of an innumerable multitude across

incomparable time to be **anywhere near** enough of a “special flower” to make such a mistake. I believe more specifically that man is created in the divine image and is of eternal significance, and each of us is in the process of becoming either a being so glorious that if you recognized it you would be tempted to worship it, or a horror such as you would not encounter in your worst nightmare—and that each of us in the divine image is in the process of freely choosing which we shall be. No other life form is conferred such a dignity—and I would focus that statement a little more and say no other animal.

Alisdair MacIntyre’s title, ‘dependent rational animals’, is an adaptation of Aristotle’s definition of man as ‘rational mortal animal’. His thesis, that virtue is central to the natural condition of man, is well worth studying, and provides a counterbalance to seeing the original condition of the human race in terms of the contemporary Western preoccupations with diet and exercise. The neo-Paleo (‘Paleo’) movement’s diet and exercise are very powerful, and probably very close to optimal, but virtue is worth consideration. But while portraying *Dependent Rational Animals* as well worth a read, I will not engage him to the same degree as the likes of Mander and Wolf.

‘No other animal:’ the phrase is perhaps jarring to some, but I use it deliberately. I do not, in any sense, say *mere* animal. But I do quite deliberately say *animal*. Let us turn to Alisdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, in the opening of the second chapter:

From its earliest sixteenth century uses in English and other European languages ‘animal’ and whatever other expressions correspond to it have been employed both to name a class whose members include spiders, bees, chimpanzees, dolphins *and* humans—among others, but not plants, inanimate beings, angels, and God, and also to name the

class consisting of nonhuman animals. It is this latter use that became dominant in modern Western cultures and with it a habit of mind that, by distracting our attention from how much we share with other animal species...

Since then, evolutionary claims that we are in fact animals is *not* a resurrection of the older usage; it is a new usage that claims we are nothing more than animals, a claim not implied by Aristotle's definition of us as 'rational mortal animals.' There is both a continuity and a distinction implied between rational humans and non-rational animals, and while many animals have intelligence on some plane (artificial intelligence, after failing to duplicate human intelligence, scaled back and tried to duplicate insect intelligence, and failed at that too), there's something special to human intelligence. The singularity we are in now may be a predicament, but no other animal could make such dimensions.

I will be interested in a direction taken by Mander and the neo-Paleo movement, in a line that MacIntyre does not really explore. Perhaps his thesis about why we, as dependent rational animals, need the virtues, is greater than anything I will explore here. But I have my sights on something lower.

I would like to define two terms for two camps, before showing where one of them shortchanges us.

The first is *revolutionary punk eek*. Darwin's theory of *evolution* is no longer seriously believed by much of anyone in the (generally materialist) scientific community. People who say they believe in evolution, and understand the basic science, normally believe in neo-Darwinian theories of *revolution*. That is, with Darwin, they no longer believe that species gradually morph into new species. They believe that the fossil record shows a *punctuated equilibrium*, '*punk eek*' to the irreverent, which essentially

says that ~~evolution~~ *revolution* has long periods of stable *equilibrium*, which once in a long while are *punctuated* by abrupt appearance and disappearance of life forms. (What causes the punctuations is accounted for by the suggestions that life forms evolve very slowly when things are on an even keel, but rapidly mutate substantial beneficial improvements when things turn chaotic. When I protested this, I was told that there were people who evolved HIV/AIDS resistance in a single generation, a premise that I cannot remotely reconcile either with my understanding of probability or of genetics.) As my IMSA biology teacher put it, "Evolution is like baseball. There are long periods of boredom interrupted by intense periods of excitement."

Now I am deliberately making a somewhat ambiguous term, because I intend to include old earth intelligent design movement's authors such as Philip Johnson, who wrote *Darwin on Trial*. Johnson argues that natural forces alone do not suffice to punctuate the equilibrium and push ~~evolution~~ *revolution* forward; but his interpretation of the fossil record is largely consistent with that of someone who believes in neo-Darwinian ~~revolutionary~~ punk eek. And so I lump Richard Dawkins and Philip Johnson together in the same cluster, a move that would probably leave them both aghast.

The distinction between them is between ~~revolutionary~~ punk eek adherents, who believe the universe is billions of years old, and young earth creationists, including perhaps some Jews, most Church Fathers, Evangelical conservatives who created Creation Science as an enterprise of proving a young earth scientifically, and St. Seraphim of Platina, who saw to it that Orthodox would not stop with quoting the Fathers but additionally import Creation Science into Orthodoxy.

Now let me give some dates, in deliberately vague terms. The age of the agricultural ~~revolution~~ and of civilization weighs in at several thousand years. The age of the world according to young earth creationists is also

several thousand years. According to **revolutionary punk eek**, the age of the world is several billion years, but that's a little besides the point. The salient point is where you draw the line, a question which I will not try to settle, beyond saying that the oldest boundary I've seen chosen is some millions of years, and the newest boundary I've heard is hundreds of thousands of years. What this means in practice is that on young earth assumptions, agriculture is about as old as the universe, while on **revolutionary punk eek** assumptions, the beginning of the agricultural revolution occurred at absolute most in the past five percent of the time humans have been around, not leaving enough time for our nature to really change in any way that makes sense for **revolutionary punk eek**. *Or to put it more sharply, young earth creationism implies that agrarian life has been around about as long as the first humans, and **revolutionary punk eek** implies that the agricultural revolution represents a big-picture eyeblink, a mere blip on the radar for people built to live optimally under normal hunter-gatherer conditions. To the young-earther, there might be prehistory but there can't be very much of it; the normal state of the human being is at earliest agrarian, and there is not much argument that the ways of agrarian society are normative. To the **revolutionary punk eek** adherent, there is quite a lot of prehistory that optimized us for hunter-gatherer living, and agrarian society and written history with it are just a blip and away from the baseline.*

The other term besides **revolutionary punk eek** is *pseudomorphosis*, a term which I adapt from an Orthodox usage to mean, etymologically, *conforming to a false shape*, a square peg in a round hole. The **revolutionary punk** implication drawn by some is that we were optimized for hunter-gatherer living, and the artificial state known in civilisation and increasingly accelerating away from these origins is a false existence in something like the Call of C'thulu role playing game played by my friends in high

school, where rifts occur in the fabric of reality and “monsters” come through them, starting with the relatively tame vampires and zombies and moving on to stranger monsters such as *a color that drives people mad*. A motley crew of heroes must seal these rifts, or else there will come one of the “Ancient Ones”, a demon god intent on destroying the earth. (It is an occult picture, but not *entirely* different from the state of our world.)

I don’t want to give full context, but I was in a discussion with my second thesis advisor after my studies, and he asked whether I would make ‘allowances for greater ignorance in the past.’ Now he was a member of a college with one of the world’s best libraries for the study of Graeco-Roman context to the New Testament, and he was expert in rabbinic Jewish cultural context to the New Testament. *Hello?* Has he heard of the Babylonian Talmud? A knowledge of the Talmud is easily on par with a good liberal arts education, and it really puts the reader through its paces. And its point is not just a training ground with mental gymnastics that stretch the mind, but something far greater. My reply to him was, ‘I do not make allowances for greater ignorance in the past. Allowances for different ignorance in the past are more negotiable.’ And if it is true that we live in escalating pseudomorphosis, perhaps we should wonder if we should make allowances for greater ignorance in the *present*. I know much more about scientific botany than any ancient hunter-gatherer ever knew, but I could not live off the land for a month much of anywhere in the wild. Should I really be looking down on hunter-gatherers because unlike them I know something of the anatomical structure of cells and how DNA basically works? If a hunter-gatherer were to answer, an appropriate, if not entirely polite, answer would be, “Here is a knife, a gun, and a soldier’s pack with bedroll and such. Live off the land for a month anywhere in the world, and then we’ll talk.”

To take an aside and try to give something of a concrete feel to what hunter-gatherers know that we do not,

what might constitute 'greater ignorance in the present', I would like to give a long quote from Mander (I am tempted to make it longer), and point out that Mander is following a specific purpose and only recording one dimension. He does not treat for instance, interpersonal relations. Not necessarily that this is a problem; it may be expedient for the purpose of a written work to outline what a friend does for work without making much of any serious attempt to cover who that friend is as a person and what people and things serve as connections. Mander describes what contemporary hunter-gatherers have in terms of perception that television viewers lack:

In *Wizard of the Upper Amazon* F. Bruce Lamb records the apparently true account of Manuel Cordova de Rios, a Peruvian rubber cutter, kidnapped by the Amaheuca Indians for invading their territory and forced to remain with them for many years. Rios describes the way the Indians learned things about the jungle, which was both the object of constant study and the teacher. They observed it first as individuals, experiencing each detail. Then they worked out larger patterns together as a group, much like individual cells informing the larger body, which also informs the cells.

In the evenings, the whole tribe would gather and repeat each detail of the day just passed. They would describe every sound, the creature that made it and its apparent state of mind. The conditions of growth of all the plants for miles around were discussed. This band of howler monkeys, which was over here three days ago, is now over there. Certain fruit trees which were in the bud stage three weeks ago are now bearing ripe fruit. A jaguar was seen by the river, and now it is on the hillside. It is in a strangely anguished mood. The grasses in the valley are peculiarly dry. There is a group of birds that have not moved for several days. The wind has altered in direction and smells of something unknown. (Actually, such a fact as a wind change might not be reported at all. Everyone would already know

it. A change of wind or scent would arrive in everyone's awareness as a bucket of cold water in the head might arrive in ours.)

Rios tells many of the stories concerned with the "personalities" of individual animals and plants, what kind of "vibrations" they give off. Dreams acted as additional information systems from beyond the level of conscious notation, drawing up patterns and meanings from deeper levels. Predictions would be based on them.

Drugs were used not so much for changing moods, as we use them today, but for the purpose of further spacing out perception. Plants and animals could then be seen more clearly, as if in slow motion (time lapse), adding to the powers of observation, yielding up especially subtle information to how plants worked, and which creatures would be more likely to relate to which plants. An animal interested in concealment, for example, might eat a plant which tended to conceal itself.

Reading these accounts made it clear to me that all life in the jungle is constantly of all other life in exquisite detail. Through this, the Indians gained information about the way natural systems interact. The observation was itself knowledge. Depending on the interpretation, the knowledge might or might not become reliable and useful.

Each detail of each event had special power and meaning. The understanding was so complete that it was only the rare event that could *not* be explained—a twig cracked in a way that did not fit the previous history of cracked twigs—that was cause for concern and immediate arming.

Examples could easily be multiplied. There are many passages like that in the book, and many to be written for life. We seem to have a filter where 'knowledge' implicitly means 'knowledge of the sort that we possess', and then by that filter judge other cultures, especially cultures of the past, as knowing less than us. The anthropological term is *ethnocentrism*. I believe a little humility is in order for us.

Humans have eyes, skin, a digestive tract, and other features that are basic animal features. When studying wild animals, for instance, we expect them to function best under certain conditions. Now the locality of an organism can vary considerably: in North America, there are certain relatively generic species of trees that can be found over a broad swath of land, while in Australia, trees tend to be more specialized and occupy a very specific niche. But in some ways human adaptability is overemphasized. The human body can adapt to regularly breathing in concentrated smoke, in one sense: keeping on smoking is so easy it is hard to quit. But that does not mean that human lungs adapt to breathing in concentrated smoke on a regular basis. The ease with which a person or society can adjust to cigarettes exceeds any adaptation revolutionary punk eek would allow for lungs. Perhaps hunter-gatherers have ingested some smoke from fires, and possibly we have enough tolerance that we do not puff up with an allergic reaction at the first smoke. Nonetheless, in no quarter has the human body adapted to be able to smoke without damage to lungs and health.

For most of the human race to embrace the agricultural revolution, and the revolutions that follow, might be like smoking. We can adapt in the sense of making the change and getting used to it. But that does not include, metaphorically speaking, our lungs. We still have hunter-gatherer lungs, as it were, perhaps lungs that work better if we follow neo-Paleo diet and exercise, and we have adopted changes we have not adapted to.

What punk eek revolutionists have to give us

What is perhaps the most valuable thing revolutionary punk has to offer us is a question: “What conditions are we as revolutionary organisms best adapted

to?” And *The Paleo Solution* offers a neo-Paleo prescription for diet and also exercise. This may not *exactly* be like what any tribe of hunter-gatherers ate, but it is lightyears closer than fast food, and is also vastly closer than industrial or even agrarian diets. And the gym-owning author’s exercise prescription is vastly more appropriate than a sedentary lifestyle without exercise, and is probably much better than cardiovascular exercise alone. And Mander’s *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television* argues, among other things, that humans do substantially better with natural organic sunlight than any of the artificial concocted lights we think are safer. They don’t suggest social structure; the question of whether they held what would today be considered traditional gender roles is not raised, which may itself be an answer. (For the text Mander cites, the answer is ‘Yes’, although Mander, possibly due to other reasons such as brevity and focus, does not make this point at all clear.) And they don’t complete the picture, and they don’t even get to MacIntyre’s point that our condition as dependent and ultimately vulnerable rational animals means that we need the virtues, but they do very well with some of the lower notes.

The argument advanced by vegetarians that we don’t have a carnivore digestive tract is something of a breath of fresh air. It argues that meat calls for a carnivore’s short digestive tract and vegetables call for an herbivore’s long digestive tract, and our digestive tract is a long one. Now there is to my mind, a curious omission; for both hunter-gatherer and modern times, most people have eaten an omnivore’s diet, and this fallacy of the excluded middle never brings up how long or short an omnivore’s digestive tract is: apparently, we must either biologically be carnivores or herbivores, even though the people vegetarians are arguing with never seem to believe we should be straight carnivores who eat meat and only meat; even people who call themselves ‘carnivores’ in fact tend to eat a lot of food that is not meat, even if meat might be their

favorite. But the question, if arguably duplicitous, is a helpful kind of question to ask. It asks, “What are we adapted to?” and the answer is, “Living like hunter-gatherers.” That’s true for the 2,000,000 or however many years the genus *Homo* has been around, and it’s *still* true for the 200,000 years *Homo sapiens sapiens* has been around. Or if you want to subtract the 10,000 years since the agricultural revolution began and we began to experiment with smoking, 190,000 years before we created the singularity that opens rifts in the fabric of reality and lets monsters in, including (as is argued in *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television*, in the chapter on ‘Artificial Light’), the ‘color that makes people mad’ from the phosphor glow of a television screen in a darkened room.

Some arguments vaguely like this have looked at written history, instead of archaeology. Sally Fallon, in the Weston A. Price spirit, wrote the half-argument, half-cookbook volume of *Nourishing Traditions*, which argues that we with our industrial diet would do well to heed the dietary solutions found in agrarian society, and prescribes a diet that is **MUCH** better than the industrial diet. But she essentially only looks at recorded history, which is millenia newer than agricultural beginnings. But the pseudomorphosis was already well underway by the times recorded in *Nourishing Traditions*, and not just diet. Everything had begun a profound shift, even if with later revolutions like electricity and computing the earlier agrarian patterns looked like the original pattern of human life. And indeed if you are a young earther, the first chapters of Genesis have agriculture in the picture with some of the first human beings. And so Bible-focused young earth approaches will not arrive at the correct answer to, “What conditions is man as an animal [still] best adapted to?” In all probability they will not arrive at the question.

Revolutionary punk eek will. It asks the question, perhaps with a Western focus, and its answers are worth considering. Not on the level of virtue and asceticism, perhaps,

but the ‘lower’ questions are more pressing now. The default diet and the default level of exercise are part of a profoundly greater pseudomorphosis than when the agricultural revolution took root. And getting a more optimal diet and exercise now may be a more pressing concern, and a diet of more sunlight and better light, if you will, and other things. There is a certain sense in which sobriety is not an option for us; we have a gristly choice between being 5, 10, or 20 drinks drunk, and people who take into account this gift from **revolutionary punk eek** will be less drunk, not sober. But it is worth being less drunk.

So a word of thanks especially to secular adherents of **revolutionary punk eek** who do not see us who have perhaps made the mistake of civilization as any particular kind of “special flower,” and ask, “What is *Homo sapiens sapiens* biologically adapted to as an animal and an organism?” They might not hit some of the high notes, but I am very grateful for the neo-Paleo diet. And I am grateful to Mander’s *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television* for exposing me to the unnatural character of artificial light and the benefits of real, organic sunlight. I’ve been spending more time outside, and I can feel a difference: I feel better. *Thanks to **revolutionary punk eek**!*

Discussion questions for “What Evolutionists Have to Say to the Royal, Divine Image: We’re Missing Something!”

1. What does the theory of evolution say about us as organisms?
2. Is that the whole truth?
3. What part of the truth does scientific study of the human race as an animal species get right?
4. If most humans who have ever existed have been hunter-gatherers, what in that speaks to us today?
5. Can we in fact choose a diet and life that work with rather than against our hunter-gatherer roots?

Introduction to “Your Site’s Missing Error Page”

People who make webpages tend to think there is an ironclad political boundary where things above a certain line in the URL bar is set by the browser and the specific webpage you’re on, and things below that line belong to the web design and development of the page.

Even something this basic is absent from many user’s minds. Some visitors can and will type URL bar material in your site’s internal search box.

This is a delicate suggestion for at least a couple of search terms that might be special-cased.

Your Site's Missing Error Page

I looked through my search logs and decided to put in a custom-made redirect for “**porn**” or “**xxx**”. This decision was, to put it politely, motivated by data. *Decisively* motivated by data. [N.B.: This has since been on my site when I migrated to a search solution that doesn't provide that flexibility.]

My site has so far as I can tell zero SEO to advertise porn, unless you count sporadic uses of the word “porn”, which should appear *waaaaaayy* down the search results list compared to real porn sites, but...

I would tentatively suggest that handling of searches for porn be treated like professional 404 / 500 / ... pages on sites run by people who care about people trapped by porn, and people assaulted by people trapped by porn. (You're welcome to check out my 404 page, but that's beside the point of this email.) In the abstract, coding for every search for porn and only searches for porn is probably as hard as solving the artificial intelligence problem, but in the concrete it's *easy*. Someone searching for “xxx” is not **really** searching for a letter signed with kisses! You'll catch much more than 90% of attempts to search for porn simply by filtering for “**porn**” or “**xxx**”, and less than 1% of people genuinely searching your site (who could still possibly be accommodated by this “missing error page.”)

So if you're running a website, do your best to have an appropriate error page for people searching it for porn.

Feel free to forward this on to other webmasters who care about possibly reaching a few of the people searching for porn on their sites. Those visitors are in a **deep** trap.

Discussion questions for “Your Site’s Missing Error Page”

1. If you own a website, can you see how people might enter content for a URL bar in your site’s own search box?
2. What is your best response to people who are searching for porn?
3. What responses can you make without special-casing search queries?
4. What responses can you make with special-casing search queries?
5. What might you do to address URL bar terms put into a site search for things besides porn?

Introduction to “iPhones and Spirituality”

“iPhones and Spirituality” was an early Toastmasters speech I gave at a chapter called “Spiritually Speaking Toastmasters.” It does not delve at any especially deep level, and it refers to a prior speech by another Christian, about embracing your pain.

It does, fairly quickly and compactly, cover several of the bases that are to be covered, and it might be given to people not ready to tackle a longer work.

I was cheating by holding an iPhone in hand and using it, but I think I really only cheated myself on that.

iPhones and Spirituality

I would like to talk about iPhones and spirituality, and what spirituality has to do with right use of things like iPhones. This may be a bit of an “opposing views” presentation to other points here; I hope the challenge is ultimately constructive.

My first point has to do with one of Rajeev’s points in our last meeting, of “Embrace your pain,” and what it really means for the iPhone, and more specifically how our use of technologies like the iPhone relates to spiritual work such as embracing your pain. Rajeev really made several excellent points in his lecture last time, and I’d like to pick up on just one: “Embrace your pain.” The iPhone’s marketing proposition is as a game changing technological drug that will help you dodge this spiritual lesson. Not to put too fine a point on it, but the iPhone is designed, marketed, and sold as a portable “Avoid spiritual work” system.

Is there any alternative to using various technologies to avoid spiritual work? Let’s look at recent history, the 1980’s, and how that decade’s technological drug is something we may now have some critical distance to look at. There is a classic Far Side cartoon that says in its caption, “*In the days before television,*” and shows a family hunched around an area on the blank wall where a television would be. The irony is that this wasn’t the days

before television at all; the days before television were that much more dynamic and vibrant, and the cartoon was only what you get if you subtract television from the 80's, when televisions had drained all of the life out of things. The distinction may be subtle, but there is a profound difference between those two versions of what it means to be without television, one vibrant and with people doing things and another with people bleakly staring at a wall—and this is why many people now have made an intentional and mindful decision to avoid television as a pack of cigarettes for the mind. Another Far Side cartoon, as best I can remember, shows an aboriginal tribesman standing on the opposite side of a deep chasm from a crowd of angry middle-class suburbanites, where a vine bridge has just been cut and fallen into the chasm, with a caption something like, “*And so Ubuntu stood, the angry suburbanites stranded on the other side of the chasm. Their idol was now his, as well as its curse.*” And the tribesman was holding a television. One wonders what the Far Side would say about iPhones after they had carved out their niche. And that brings me to my second point, what I call, “the timeless way of relating.”

There is a timeless way of relating, a way that is guarded by Eastern Orthodox ascetics but hardly a monopoly. It has many sides, and there is much more to it than its intentional decisions about technology. It has much to do with embracing your pain and the here and now that we can partly dodge with iPhones, and be **present**. And I'll take an educated guess that Science of Spirituality's leader is among those that have this presence that arises from embracing where you are and its pain.

But a return to the past and laying the reins on the iPhone's neck aren't the only two options, not really. Oliver Holmes said, “I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.” I am quite deliberately delivering this lecture with my iPhone in hand.

And there is ultimately spiritual work on the other side of the iPhone and its kin, that uses it but does not abuse it as a way to dodge the here and now, but uses the iPhone, and embraces one's pain. And it sets limits and sometimes abstains, much as one does with alcohol.

In conclusion, iPhones and similar technologies have changed the game—but not always for the better, not in every way for the better. Not that we must always avoid them (police officers using drug dealers' confiscated iPhones found that they were incredibly useful) but we must set limits as one does with alcohol and be sure that our spiritual work, not technologies, holds the reins. It is an uphill battle, but it is entirely worth fighting.

Discussion questions for “iPhones and Spirituality”

1. Now that we have already had plenty of experience with what smartphones are like, is everything cool about the iPhone?
2. How can phones be used to avoid spiritual work?
3. Could it be said of smartphones, “Their idol was now his, as well as its curse?” Why or why not?
4. How can you embrace your pain?
5. What do you take as the primary takeaway from this piece?

Introduction to “Fire in the Hole”

“Fire in the hole” is a military command that means that an explosion in a confined space is about to happen, and that it might be best to cover your ears.

In this piece, a professor reads a critical section regarding the Pseudo-Dionysian apophatic or negative theology, and then asks for something to be used as a name for God.

When students nominate porn, he takes up the gauntlet in a way that makes it seem relevant to call, “Fire in the hole!”

Fire in the Hole

The professor continued his reading.

In *The Divine Names* I have shown the sense in which God is described as good, existent, life, wisdom, power, and whatever other things pertain to the conceptual names for God. In my *Symbolic Theology* I have discussed analogies of God drawn from what we perceive. I have spoken of the images we have of him, of the forms, figures, and instruments proper to him, of the places in which he lives and the ornaments which he wears. I have spoken of his anger, grief, and rage, of how he is said to be drunk and hungover, of his oaths and curses, of his sleeping and waking, and indeed of all those images we have of him, images shaped by the workings of the representations of God. And I feel sure that you have noticed how these latter come much more abundantly than what went before, since *The Theological Representations* and a discussion of the names appropriate to God are inevitably briefer than what can be said in *The Symbolic Theology*. The fact is that the more we take

flight upward, the more find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing. In the earlier books my argument this downward path from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.

Now you may wonder why it is that, after starting out from the highest category when our method involves assertions, we begin now from the lowest category involves a denial. The reason is this. When we assert what is beyond every assertion, we must then proceed from what is most akin to it, and as we do so we make the affirmation on which everything else depends. But when we deny that which is beyond every denial, we have to start by denying those qualities which differ most from the goal we hope to attain. Is it not closer to truth to say that God is life and goodness rather than that he is air or stone? Is it not more accurate to deny that drunkenness and rage can be attributed to him than to deny that we can apply to him the terms of speech and thought?

So this is what we say. The Cause of all is above all and is not inexistent, lifeless, speechless, mindless. It is not a material body, and hence has neither shape nor form, quality,

quantity, or weight. It is not in any place and can be neither seen nor touched. It is neither perceived nor is it perceptible. It suffers neither disorder nor disturbance and is overwhelmed by no earthly passion. It is not powerless and subject to the disturbances caused by sense perception. It endures no deprivation of light. It passes through no change, decay, division, loss, no ebb and flow, nothing of which the senses may be aware. None of this can either be identified with it nor attributed.

Again, as we climb higher we say this. It is not soul or mind, nor does it possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is it speech per se, understanding per se. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live nor is it light. It does not live nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense in which we understand the term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or any other being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name or knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these.

It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation, it is also beyond every denial.

Prof. Sarovsky slowly and reverently closed the book.

“St. Dionysius says elsewhere that God is known by every name and no name, and that everything that is is a name of God. And in fact in discussing symbols which have some truth but are necessarily inadequate to reality, crude symbols are to be preferred to those which appear elevated, since even their ‘crassness’ is a ‘goad’ spurring us to reach higher.”

“So now I’d like to have an exercise. Could somebody please name something at random, and I can tell how it tells the glory of God?”

A young man from the back called out, “Porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky said, “Ha ha, hysterical. Could I have another suggestion?”

Another young man called out, “Porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky said, “I’m serious. Porn, when you start using it, seems to be a unique spice. But the more you use it, the more it actually *drains* spice from everything else, and eventually drains itself, and when pornography can only go so far, you find yourself not only jailed but charged with *rape*. Lustfulness is in the beginning as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword. And much as I disagree with feminists on important points, I agree with a feminist dictionary: ‘Pornography is the theory; rape is the practice.’ Could I have a *serious* suggestion?”

A couple of cellphones started playing, “Internet is for porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky called on the class's most vocal feminist. "Delilah! Would you pick a topic?"

Delilah grinned wickedly and said, "I'm with the boys on this one. *Porn*."

Prof. Sarovsky paused briefly and says, "Very well, then, porn it is. The famous essay 'I, Pencil' takes the humble pencil up and just starts to dig and dig at the economic family tree of just what resources and endeavors make up the humble lead pencil. So it talks about logging, and all the work in transporting the wood, and the mining involved in the graphite, and the exquisite resources that go just to make the blue strip on the metal band, and so on and so forth, and the 'rubber' eraser and whatnot. The conclusion is that millions of dollars' resources (he does not calculate a figure) went into making a humble wooden pencil, and he pushes further: only God knows how to make a pencil. And if only God knows how to make a pencil, *a fortiori* only God knows how to make a porn site...

"And, I suppose, a pencil must be a phallic symbol."

Then he paused, and said, "*Just kidding!*"

The room was silent.

Prof. Sarovsky bowed deeply and grinned: "I'll see you and raise you."

And this is what he said.

I, Porn, want to tell you about myself. There are options that eclipse me, but I can make my point more strongly if I speak for myself, Porn, who represent myriads of wonders.

It is not my point in particular that only God knows how to make a Porn site. The point has been well enough made that only God knows how to make a pencil, and is a less interesting adjustment to acknowledge that only God knows how to make a Porn site.

Nor do I suggest that the straight-laced print off a Porn image and frame and hang it on the wall. Though if

they understood my lineage, the question would then become whether they were worthy to do so.

I have a magnificent and vaster lineage than “I, Pencil” begins to draw out. A brilliance in economics, the author simply underscores a great interdependent web of economic resources in the humble pencil’s family tree. Equipment, mining, logging, transportation: the economic underpinnings of a humble pencil amount to millions of dollars, and the details mentioned only scratch the surface even of the economics involved.

I have a vaster lineage, including such things as war in Heaven. Now the war in Heaven is over, and was over when the Archangel Michael only said his name, which in the Hebrew tongue says, “Who is like God?” and with that, the devils were cast down, sore losers afflicting the Royal Race one and all. And even then, it was only angelic spirits that could come anywhere close to their war against God. Even then, they are limited. They are on a leash. Perhaps someday I will tell you of why you are summoned to a holy and blinding arrogance towards that whole camp.

What is the Royal Race? I get ahead of myself.

I, Porn, don’t merely share a universe with the divine virtues. In my production there is the cutting off of self-will, long suffering, and as little lust as might be found in a monastery. Dostoevsky offers the image of the chaste harlot; I can add only that if Christ were walking today, Porn models would be among the first he would associate with.

The core impulse I, Porn, draw on, is good. It is a testament to the human spirit that nine months after a natural disaster, there is a wave of babies born. The core impulse is the impulse for the preservation of the species, the possibility by which a community of mortals has itself no automatic end.

It is closer to my point to say that God is not just good and divine; he has created a world that in every way reflects his grandeur. There are no small parts: only actors

who are not really small. Every superstring vibration in the cosmos is grander and vaster than all the pagan gods of all worlds put together.

Or as G.K. Chesterton said, “Once I planned to write a book of poems entirely about the things in my pocket. But I found it would be too long; and the age of the great epics is past.”

It is still closer to my majesty to observe Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who suffered in the Gulag that Hitler sent observers for inspiration for Nazi concentration camps, “Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, not between political parties either — but right through every heart — and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains . . . an unuprooted small corner of evil.”

The Heavens declare the glory of God—*and so do I, Porn.*

Perhaps the most beautiful doctrine in Origen that Orthodox must condemn is the final and ultimate salvation of all Creation: that the Devil himself will be a last prodigal son returning to home in Heaven. But the Orthodox teaching is more beautiful: a teaching that every spiritual being, every man, every fallen or unfallen angel, is given an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell and not one of these will God rape, however much he desires their salvation. To quote *The Dark Tower*: “A man can’t be taken to hell, or sent to hell: you can only get there on your own steam.” God has made a rock he could not move, and that rock is man and angel.

The rising crescendo that practically seals C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” is:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember

that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

Which brings us to the messy circumstances of your lives.

George Bernard Shaw said, “There are two tragedies in life. One is not to get your heart’s desire. The other is to get it.” We can see it, perhaps in a fantasy setting, in a passage from C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, has Lucy tiptoe to a room with a spellbook and see a singular spell:

[Extended quotation available from tinyurl.com/lucys-spell]

The temptation, patterned after real temptation of the real world, is to want a horror. It is because Lucy is bewitched that she even wants what the spell promises. The destruction of kingdoms when lords vie for her beauty? Women may want to feel like the most beautiful woman in

the world, but the count in stacking dead bodies like cordwood is no true metric for beauty. As a faithfully portrayed temptation by C.S. Lewis, what is being desired is not something Heavenly. *It is a vision of Hell, pure and simple.* While in the grips of temptation, she could not be happy without casting that spell until she let go of it from a strong warning from Aslan. But even if she succeeded, she would be even more unhappy. Her success would rival world wars or nuclear wars in its destruction of beautiful worlds, and if it didn't bring her death, she would live on in a wrecked world, knowing for the rest of her life that it was her petty self-absorption that obliterated the majesty of worlds.

Even if we scale from back from undisguised fantasy, we can look at what is a practical possibility for some people in the real world. Cameron Russell's "Looks Aren't Everything. Believe me, I'm a model." The TED talk eloquently explains that being a supermodel is not all sunshine and not the solution to all life's problems. For that matter it isn't even the solution to *body image* problems, and the final point she shares is that as a model she has to be *more*, not less, insecure about her body, no matter how lovely she may appear to others. It turns out that supermodels are intimidated by... other supermodels. Being a model is not a way to be exempt from body image struggles.

And this is in no way a solely a phenomenon about body image. There is one man where professional opinion is that he is smarter than most geniuses, and that the average Harvard PhD has never met someone so talented. And his work history, given that he's tried to give his best? Here's something really odd. One job assistant said, "You don't want your boss figuring out you're smarter than him." When he hands in his first piece of work, only some bosses respond kindly to work that is beyond the boss's wildest dreams. Most of them find themselves in unfamiliar social territory, and strike out or retaliate. He's been terminated a

dozen times and is now retired on disability, the best financial arrangement he has had yet. It may be true, up to a point, that there's something likable about being smart. That doesn't mean in any sense that the smarter you get, the more people like you, or that your life is easy.

There is a portal that far excels entering another world, entering Narnia, Hogwarts, or Middle Earth. And this portal is much harder to see or look for than Narnia. It is entering the here and now you have been placing.

Spiritual masters have said to want what you have, not what you don't have, and want things to be for you just the way they are. Now there is such a thing as legitimately seeking to solve, lessen, or improve a problem, and wishing you had a better-paying job, a car, or a nicer house. Wishing never runs out, and if you get the Apple Watch you want, wishing will just wish for newer or different things. Buy something you don't need but will make you enchanted for a month. *I dare you.*

Oh, and by the way, I, Porn, know all about wishing. I know *everything* about it, and I know everything it *can't* do.

When you let go of escape, soon you may let go of relating the here and now as the sort of thing one should flee, and some thick, sticky grey film will slowly melt away from your eyes and they will open on beauty all around you, and you will have crossed a threshold no fantasy portal even comes close. And you will have every treasure that you have. And perhaps, in and through ancient religion or postmodern positive psychology, cultivate a deep and abiding gratefulness for all the blessings you have.

In the Way of Things, there are two basic options one can pursue. One is the Sexual Way, and the other is the Hyper-Sexual Way. Let me explain.

Study after study has been launched to investigate which group of mavericks has the best sex, and they have been repeatedly been dismayed to find that the overlooked Sexual Way has the most pleasure. The overlooked Sexual

Way is that of a contest of love, for life, between one lord and one wife, chaste before the wedding and faithful after, grateful for children, and knowing that the best sex *ever* is when you are trying to make a baby. After the first year or two some outward signs get quiet and subdued, but the marriage succeeds because the honeymoon has failed. It deepens year after year and decade after a decade, and a widowed senior can say, “You don’t know what love is when you’re a kid.” And here, like no other place, *beauty is forged in the eye of the beholder*. Here, unlike fashion magazines, sweaty fitness regimens, and dieting, and weighing, and accursed “bodysculpting,” a woman can and should be made to feel like she is the most beautiful woman in the world, to a husband to whom she really is the most beautiful woman in the world, as naturally as the Church on Sunday. As Homer and Marge humbly and quietly sing to each other, “You are so *beautiful* to me!”

If the sexual impulse is spent wisely in the Sexual Way, it is invested at exorbitant interest on the Hyper-Sexual Way. Wonder what all that curious monastic modesty about? It compounds an essential sexual condition, by which a monastic, man or woman, becomes a transgendered god and his sexual desire is entirely fixed on God. Does this seem strange? Let us listen to St. Herman of Alaska:

Further on Yanovsky writes, “Once the Elder was invited aboard a frigate which came from Saint Petersburg. The Captain of the frigate was a highly educated man, who had been sent to America by order of the Emperor to make an inspection of all the colonies. There were more than twenty-five officers with the Captain, and they also were educated men. In the company of this group sat a monk of a hermitage, small in stature and wearing very old clothes. All these educated

conversationalists were placed in such a position by his wise talks that they did not know how to answer him. The Captain himself used to say, 'We were lost for an answer before him.'

"Father Herman gave them all one general question: 'Gentlemen, What do you love above all, and what will each of you wish for your happiness?' Various answers were offered ... Some desired wealth, others glory, some a beautiful wife, and still others a beautiful ship he would captain; and so forth in the same vein. 'It is not true,' Father Herman said to them concerning this, 'that all your various wishes can bring us to one conclusion—that each of you desires that which in his own understanding he considers the best, and which is most worthy of his love?' They all answered, 'Yes, that is so!' He then continued, 'Would you not say, Is not that which is best, above all, and surpassing all, and that which by preference is most worthy of love, the Very Lord, our Jesus Christ, who created us, adorned us with such ideals, gave life to all, sustains everything, nurtures and loves all, who is Himself Love and most beautiful of all men? Should we not then love God above every thing, desire Him more than anything, and search Him out?'

"All said, 'Why, yes! That's self-evident!' Then the Elder asked, 'But do you love God?' They all answered, 'Certainly, we love God. How can we not love God?' 'And I a sinner have been trying for more than forty years to love God, I cannot say that I love Him completely,'

Father Herman protested to them. He then began to demonstrate to them the way in which we should love God. ‘If we love someone,’ he said, ‘we always remember them; we try to please them. Day and night our heart is concerned with the subject. Is that the way you gentlemen love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and fulfill His holy commandments?’ They had to admit that they had not! ‘For our own good, and for our own fortune,’ concluded the Elder, ‘let us at least promise ourselves that from this very minute we will try to love God more than anything and to fulfill His Holy Will!’ Without any doubt this conversation was imprinted in the hearts of the listeners for the rest of their lives.’

Fr. Herman had something better than pixels on a screen. *Much* better.

Perhaps the most controversial argument in the history of philosophy is by Anselm of Canterbury, who said, “If God exists, nothing greater than him could exist. Now God either exists in reality and also in our minds, or only as a concept in our minds. But to exist in reality as well as our minds is greater than to exist only in our minds. Therefore, God must have the higher excellence of existing in reality as well as our minds.”

I am not specifically interested in bringing agreement or disagreement to this argument. First, most people first meeting this argument feel that something has been slipped past them, but they can’t put a finger on where the error is. However, I did not exactly include this argument to discuss what it *asserts*, but what it *assumes*: if God is greater than anything else that can be thought, then

we have something that pierces deeply into the Christian God.

The joke is told that four rabbis would get together to discuss Torah, and one specific rabbi was the odd man out, every single time. And they said, “Three against one.” Finally, the exasperated odd rabbi out knelt down, prayed, “Gd, I’ve worked very hard, and they never listen. Please send them a sign that I’m right.” It was a warm day out, but a sudden chilly wind blew by, and some clouds appeared in the sky. The other three rabbis said, “That’s odd, but it’s still three against one.” Then the rabbi knelt down, prayed, “Please make a clearer sign,” and the wind grew more bitter and it began sleeting. The rabbi said, “Well?” The other rabbis said, “This is quite a coincidence, but it’s still three against one.” Then before the rabbi could begin to pray, bolts of lightning splintered a nearby tree, there was an earthquake, the earth opened, and a deep voice thundered, “*HE’S RIGHT!*” The rabbi said, “Well?” Quick as a flash, another rabbi said, “Well? It’s still three against two!”

The humor element in this element extends beyond, “If God has spoken, the discussion is over.” The humor element hinges on the fact that counting does not go from “one, two, three, four” to “one, two, three, four, **Five**”: there is infinite confusion in adding one God to four men. As written in “Doxology:”

Thou who art One,
Eternally beyond time,
So wholly One,
That thou mayest be called infinite,
Timeless beyond time thou art,
The One who is greater than infinity art thou.
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
The Three who are One,
No more bound by numbers than by word,
And yet the Son is called Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ,
The Word,

Divine ordering Reason,
Eternal Light and Cosmic Word,
Way pre-eminent of all things,
Beyond all, and infinitesimally close,
Thou transcendest transcendence itself,
The Creator entered into his Creation,
Sharing with us humble glory,
Lowered by love,
Raised to the highest,
The Suffering Servant known,
The King of Glory,
O ΩN....

Wert thou a lesser god,
Numerically one as a creature is one,
Only one by an accident,
Naught more,
Then thou couldst not deify thine own
creation,
Whilst remaining the only one god.

But thou art beyond all thought,
All word, all being,
We may say that thou existest,
But then we must say,
Thou art, I am not.
And if we say that we exist,
It is inadequate to say that thou existest,
For thou art the source of all being,
And beyond our being;
Thou art the source of all mind, wisdom, and
reason,
Yet it is a fundamental error to imagine thee,
To think and reason in the mode of mankind.
Thou art not one god because there happeneth
not more,
Thou art The One God because there mighteth

not be another beside thee.
Thus thou spakest to Moses,
Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
Which is to say,
Thou shalt admit no other gods to my
presence.

And there can be no other god beside thee,
So deep and full is this truth,
That thy Trinity mighteth take naught from
thine Oneness,
Nor could it be another alongside thy divine
Oneness,
If this God became man,
That man become god.

The Trinity does not represent a weaker or less consistent monotheism than Islam. The Trinity represents a stronger and more consistent monotheism than Islam, and that is why it can afford things that are unthinkable to a Muslim.

A Hindu once asked a Christian, “I can accept the truth of the incarnation, but why only one?” And in that conversation, where the Christian defended only one incarnation, both were wrong. Or rather, the Christian was *wrong*; the Hindu was merely *mistaken*.

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to BECOME him forever.

One theology professor tried to explain to a Muslim that the Trinity is how Christians get to the absolute Oneness of God. The men who first articulated the doctrine looked with some horror on the concept of using the word “Trinity” as a handle for the doctrine.

Regarding the Hindu mentioned, I would say that there have been many, many true incarnations of God, and

they still continue. Now the Hindu concept of an Avatar can be what Christianity rejected as docetistic, with Christ not recognized to have real flesh. However, what I would rather have been said is this: No one besides Christ enters the world with part or all of God as part of them. However, the reason for the coming of the Son of God is to destroy the devil's work. An ancient hymn states, "Trying to be god, Adam failed to be God. Christ became man, to make Adam god." And the vast company of Saints that God keeps on giving are in fact the gift of a company of Avatars; we just have a different understanding of how one reaches a very similar goal.

The *Philokalia* says, "Blessed is the monk who regards each man as God after God."

St. John Chrysostom comments on the Scripture:

"We beheld," he says, "His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father."

Having declared that we were made "sons of God," and having shown in what manner namely, by the "Word" having been "made Flesh," he again mentions another advantage which we gain from this same circumstance. What is it? "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father"; which we could not have beheld, had it not been shown to us, by means of a body like to our own. For if the men of old time could not even bear to look upon the glorified countenance of Moses, who partook of the same nature with us, if that just man needed a veil which might shade over the purity of his glory, and show to them have face of their prophet mild and gentle; how could we creatures of clay and earth have endured the unveiled Godhead, which is unapproachable even by the powers above?

Wherefore He tabernacled among us, that we might be able with much fearlessness to approach Him, speak to, and converse with Him.

But what means “the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father”? Since many of the Prophets too were glorified, as this Moses himself, Elijah, and Elisha, the one encircled by the fiery chariot (2 Kings vi. 17), the other taken up by it; and after them, Daniel and the Three Children, and the many others who showed forth wonders; and angels who have appeared among men, and partly disclosed to beholders the flashing light of their proper nature; and since not angels only, but even the Cherubim were seen by the Prophet in great glory, and the Seraphim also: the Evangelist leading us away from all these, and removing our thoughts from created things, and from the brightness of our fellow-servants, sets us at the very summit of good. For, “not of prophet,” says he, “nor angel, nor archangel, nor of the higher power, nor of any other created nature,” if other there be, but of the Master Himself, the King Himself, the true Only-Begotten Son Himself, of the Very Lord of all, did we “behold the glory.”

For the expression “as,” does not in this place belong to similarity or comparison, but to confirmation and unquestionable definition; as though he said, “We beheld glory, such as it was becoming, and likely that He should possess, who is the Only-Begotten and true Son of God, the King of all.” The habit (of so speaking) is general, for I shall not refuse to

strengthen my argument even from common custom, since it is not now my object to speak with any reference to beauty of words, or elegance of composition, but only for your advantage; and therefore there is nothing to prevent my establishing my argument by the instance of a common practice. What then is the habit of most persons? Often when any have seen a king richly decked, and glittering on all sides with precious stones, and are afterwards describing to others the beauty, the ornaments, the splendor, they enumerate as much as they can, the glowing tint of the purple robe, the size of the jewels, the whiteness of the mules, the gold about the yoke, the soft and shining couch. But when after enumerating these things, and other things besides these, they cannot, say what they will, give a full idea of the splendor, they immediately bring in: "But why say much about it; once for all, he was like a king;" not desiring by the expression "like," to show that he, of whom they say this, resembles a king, but that he is a real king. Just so now the Evangelist has put the word As, desiring to represent the transcendent nature and incomparable excellence of His glory.

Elsewhere we are asked to consider what things would be like if a King were to take up residence in one of the houses of a city. Would not the entire city, and each house in it, be forever honored? And the Son of God is now one of our homeboys. He ascended into Heaven and brought us with him, enthroned in Heaven with him.

We are the Royal Race. We are made in the image of God, and made to reach unimaginable glory.

And there may be named three laws that are the Constitution of the Royal Race, three laws which are one and the same.

The first law is the Law of the Canoe, as C.S. Lewis summarized his friend Charles Williams:

It is Virgil himself who died without reaching the *patria*, who saw 'Italy' only from a wave before he was engulfed forever. It is Virgil himself who stretches out his hands among the ghosts *ripae ulterioris amore*, longing to pass a river that he cannot pass. This poet from whose work so many Christians have drawn spiritual nourishment was not himself a Christian—did not himself know the full meaning of his own poetry, for (in Keble's fine words) 'thoughts beyond their thought to those high bards were given'. This is exquisite cruelty; he made honey not for himself; he helped to save others, himself he could not save.

...The Atonement was a Substitution, just as Anselm said. But that Substitution, far from being a mere legal fiction irrelevant to the normal workings of the universe, was simply the supreme instance of a universal law. 'He saved others, himself he cannot save' is a *definition* of the Kingdom. All salvation, everywhere and at all times, in great things or in little, is vicarious. The courtesy of the Emperor has absolutely decreed that no man can paddle his own canoe and every man can paddle his fellow's, so that the shy offering and modest acceptance of indispensable aid shall be the very form of the celestial etiquette. [emphasis original]

The second law is the Law of the Long Spoon. As one telling goes from a liberal enough source:

One day a man said to God, “God, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like.”

God showed the man two doors. Inside the first one, in the middle of the room, was a large round table with a large pot of stew. It smelled delicious and made the man’s mouth water, but the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths.

The man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. God said, “You have seen Hell.”

Behind the second door, the room appeared exactly the same. There was the large round table with the large pot of wonderful stew that made the man’s mouth water. The people had the same long-handled spoons, but they were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

The man said, “I don’t understand.”

God smiled. “It is simple,” he said, “These people share and feed one another. While the greedy only think of themselves...”

The last law is the Law of Narcissus's Mirror. It states that the Royal Race are absolutely *forbidden* to stand and gaze at themselves in Narcissus's Mirror, entranced at their own beauty, and *commanded* to gaze at other members of the Royal Race, entranced at *their* beauty.

These three laws are one and the same. One joke, about "communio" theologians who hold the Trinity to mean that God himself is a community, ran:

Q: How many communio theologians does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Only one, but he thinks he is a community.

But we are *not* communities. We are *part* of a community, and the full grandeur of being a member of the Royal Race is that you are no *island*, but a connected and beautiful part of a *continent*.

And furthermore, God has ordered Heaven and Earth for the benefit of us as the Royal Race.

Though this may be more subtle in the Sexual Way than in the Hyper-Sexual Way, but the behavior enjoined on the Hyper-Sexual Way is that of a spiritual miser, who constantly thinks his Heavenly wealth is too little and he must spare no effort to get more, and no matter how much treasure in Heaven he acquires, he never rests on his laurels, but keeps on storing up more and more and more.

Men each have one interest, one *real* interest, and only *one* interest: a good answer before the Dread Judgment-Throne of Christ. This life is inestimably precious, and in treasures such as repentance, Heaven's best-kept secret, we can only store up these treasures before this fleeting life is over. Now the Church Triumphant is no terrible place to be, but there are profound goods that are only open to us, the living, for as long as we live. And the various strange prescriptions of the *Philokalia* and the Orthodox Way, about believing oneself to be the worst of

sinners, about giving oneself no credit for any good actions, about believing “All the world will be saved and I will be damned,” about repenting as if one will die tomorrow but treating your body as if it will last for many years, are in fact braces to support being one hoarding spiritual miser for the rest of one’s life, and crossing the finish line, in triumph, and with treasure after treasure after treasure in your hoard. It is explained that God conceals from us the day of our death, because if we knew we would not die for some decades, we would put off repentance and be incorrigible. Not that God is absolutely unwilling to reveal to people the day of their death: it is in fact considered a mark of holiness to know that, because a person is in a good enough state for the secret not to need to be hidden. But the *Philokalia*’s discussion, perhaps here most clearly of all, explains that things are ordered this way because God has stacked the deck, in *our* favor. And as regards the Sexual Way, the path is said not to be an environment for children to grow up, but an environment for parents to grow up.

C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, fields an objection which was apparently on people’s minds but I have not heard brought up live in my lifetime. However, the answer says everything to a world in disintegrating economy, COVID, Jihad, and more:

[Extended quotation available from
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/cslewisbeyondpersonality.htm>]

And God’s Providence is not just Providence in great things. It is Providence in the small. It is not just Providence in a career, or entering the Sexual Way. It is also Providence when you are stuck in traffic and the light seems never to be turning green and that still, small voice urges you to grow just a little as a person so you can be as happy in your car as in a lounge chair at home. And it is the mighty arm of Providence all the more powerfully revealed when we are

persecuted, or lose money, or any number of other things. And it is a Providence that gives you the here and now, a here and now chosen for you from all eternity, and will, if you cooperate, help you appreciate the gift.

And if you are one of the many who believe that I, Porn, am the only interesting spice in a fatally dull world, I, Porn, can only say this:

Watch me when I am Transfigured.

To quote your own age's little reflection of *The Divine Comedy*:

[Read online from <https://tinyurl.com/oily-ghost>]

An Orthodox would realize in the Burning Angel a clearest reference to the fiery Seraphim, the highest of the nine angel choirs, and the one for whom St. Seraphim of Sarov came, the most beloved Orthodox saint in centuries, the St. Seraphim whose extraordinary conversation with the pilgrim Motovilov reveals the purpose of human life.

We live in interesting times. There is a singularity, or rather has been but keeps growing exponentially, and this singularity may turn in to the end of the world: a strange Ragnarok where the forces of Good resound with apocalyptic triumph. And I, Porn, am part of the singularity, an important part.

Did you know that I, Porn, am not the only thing in life?

Remember: "Every man who visits a Porn site is looking for God."

Delilah's friend turned back. "Yep, dear, he does that sort of thing in practically every class."

Discussion questions for “Fire in the Hole”

1. Does, in fact, anything serve as a name for God?
2. Does the professor succeed in taking the example of porn and infinitely transcending it?
3. Are some images more like God and some less?
4. Where does Pseudo-Dionysius’s concept of negative or apophatic theology apply to your own life?
5. Can you see why Pseudo-Dionysius said the crasser symbols can serve as a goad to reach beyond them, a temptation more strongly present in symbols that represent a closer map?
6. Is God in fact better than porn?

Introduction to “A Few Possible Critiques of the Nature Connection Movement”

As an Orthodox profoundly gifted, I investigated the Nature Connection movement as another area to gain proficiency.

There seemed to be something awry, though, and the biggest cue to this was that I was convinced the Nature Connection movement was right overall, but the individual part of it that I was looking at was always disturbing to me.

Here is a contribution to the conversation, and one that raises a question of why, if the Nature Connection movement sees many different kinds of nature connection, the only model they actively promote is the one based on “Coyote” mentoring.

This is meant to contribute to a balanced understanding of that particular movement.

A Few Possible Critiques of the Nature Connection Movement

The importance of standard critiques

I remember one ethics class where I commented with deliberate wary tentativeness, “One comment that has been made about the atom bomb is that it didn’t just save *lots* and *lots* and *lots* of American lives, it also saved *lots* and *lots* and *lots* of Japanese lives,” and then added something very important: “...but I don’t know what the standard critiques of this claim are,” bracketing that claim in a considerable degree of unknowing. And I was not surprised, nor did I argue, when a later resource in the course had someone comment in reference to just war, “The claim is not, ‘If we do not do this, this is what *they* will do,’ but ‘If we do not do this, this is what *we* will do.’” I have heard some people point out that American politicians had campaigned on a platform of unconditional surrender by the Japanese, but this assertion is a detail of American culture and an irrelevancy if you are going to claim to be within just war theory. (Another unintelligible point on just war terms is

the choice to make civilian cities the ground zero of an experiment.) “*We campaigned for unconditional surrender*” is not a consideration that factors into the principles of just war. Neither *jus ad bellum* nor *jus in bello* explains why it is justifiable to reject any surrender short of an unconditional surrender, a condition tantamount to letting infidel trample on the holy city. I do not know what the terms are on which the Japanese emperor sued for peace before the use of the atom bomb, but he did sue for peace before we dropped the bomb, and the burden of proof falls on people who assert it was a matter of just war to detonate nuclear weapons in a push for unconditional surrender rather than try to work with the Japanese emperor for terms of peace, perhaps not all those originally proposed by the emperor, that would deal with the threat but not insist on unconditional surrender and consent to let the infidel trample on the holy city as much as they saw fit.

(It might also be commented that Albert Einstein asked that his theory be used to develop nuclear weapons to stop Hitler, and he was horrified that his work was used against the Japanese, which he did not consider to be picking on someone our own size: “Should I have known, I would have become a watchmaker.” But, culturally speaking, once we started to develop nuclear weapons there was essentially no way culturally we were not going to use them, and if we did not have nuclear weapons available in time to use them against the Nazis, Japan was next in succession.)

My reason for mentioning this is that I added an important qualifier: “*but I don’t know what the standard critiques of this claim are.*” These are not weasel words. I am no fan of weasel words nor slippery rhetoric: see a dissertation focused on slippery rhetoric. But in a very real sense, what I was saying was that I didn’t understand the right import of the assertion (that nuclear weapons were mercifully quick, and had a far lower body count compared to the anticipated bloodshed of a land invasion where

women and schoolchildren were doing combat drills and preparing in every way for a fight to the death), because I didn't have a situated understanding, in particular knowing what lines of standard critique would be. (I have not heard anyone deny that assertion; the critique I saw essentially said, "No contest that it would be less bloody, but you are using the wrong standard and here is why.") More broadly, understanding an assertion in the Great Conversation is incomplete if you do not grasp how it is situated in the Conversation, and *part* of that is understanding standard critiques.

Two senses of nature connection

I did a search for "nature connection critiques" on Google and DuckDuckGo, and Google got very quickly into academic articles having those three keywords but no connection to the nature connection movement, and DuckDuckGo gave nature connection pages without any critiques I could discern.

So I may be blazing a bit of a trail here in trying to situate nature connection.

I would like to begin by making a distinction between two significantly different senses of "nature connection."

The **first** sense is an engagement with nature across many times and places, usually without any sense of nature connection in the second sense.

The **second** sense is an engagement with the nature connection movement's tools, core routines, etc.

The distinction between these is the difference between a general first category and a specific second type. The concerns I raise here mostly regard the second specific type. I desire greater connection in the first sense, and it is one of the things I hope for in Orthodox monasticism, an arena that normally exposes one to nature a great deal and reaches further. (Perhaps I should say a third and other specific type centered on such things as virtue.)

A glimpse into a larger pattern

One place to start is Coyote the Trickster. Coyote is described in the pages of *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature*, or at least what he does is described, and I'm not sure how to pin Coyote down (if he even should be pinned down). Is he only an animal as materialist science would understand an animal? That one possibility is the one I would be quickest to reject. Perhaps a coyote, the animal, is special, but what is Coyote? A spirit? A god? An archetype? A familiar? A patron saint? A Platonic Idea? An astrological sign? A totem? One god who is part of a henotheist God or Greatest Spirit in vaguely Hindu fashion?

I think that all of the possibilities above are at least illustrative, but this choice of the coyote writ large is perhaps not best for Christians, and not just because Coyote is coyote writ large. The text asserts Jesus and Buddha represent the Trickster; Jesus the trickster is illustrated by the cleansing of the Temple. Now it would perhaps be unfair to ask the work to do serious Biblical exegesis, but the cleansing of the Temple was one of the least prank-like actions he took. He wasn't manipulating people; he was deeply offended by irreverent use of the Temple and drove people and animals out without the faintest mercurial intent. Not to say that there is nothing like the trickster in Christ; the story of Christ and St. Photini ("the Woman at the Well") has St. Photini enlisting Christ's help in fleeing from her shame, and Christ opening things up until she has been pulled through her shame and runs with no further shame saying, "See a man who told me everything I ever did! Could this be the Christ?" Christ was mercurial enough that if you tried to catch Christ the Word in some trap of words, you always, always lose. And, perhaps, it is an exegesis of Christ that Orthodoxy has what are called holy fools. But the use of the cleansing of the Temple gives a sense that the text has been conscripted to fit the Trickster

archetype. (For that matter, the story of Buddha has his father trying very hard to ensure that he would be a political leader, and he chose instead to go on a quest and found a religion. Perhaps in the cornucopia of Mahayana Buddhism we have Zen masters who may use trickery to teach, but I do not see that Buddha was being a Trickster to choose a divergent career path from what his father wanted.)

And I was trying to think of a good way to present a companion aspect, and I'm not sure I've found one. When I was in middle school, one Social Studies question was, if we had lived in the 19th century, we would have braved the hardships to settle the West. And I, little schoolboy that I was, said that the question was irrelevant because the West was already settled by people who had a right not to be killed. My teacher didn't like that and tried to push me to answer the question on the terms that it was posed, and none of my classmates said anything like that. But to Native Americans, apart from *Guns, Germs, and Steel* concerns about Europeans carrying diseases Native America had no defenses for, how should Christianity be seen? It was the religion of white Americans who disregarded as basic interests among the Native Americans as life and not being subjected to needless and major suffering, and so it is not a surprise that my brother, a historical re-enactor, talked about one re-enacting group who re-enacted a first contact between white and Native American and who were explicitly Christian, calling themselves The King's Regiment or the like, and were distinguished for all other re-enactors in that they did not engage in native American spirituality which was understandably laced with something anti-Christian.

Nothing I have listened or read from the nature connection movement is explicitly or directly anti-Christian. Critique may be implied in assertions that reject Christian practice, however nothing I have seen appears to be there for the purpose of facilitating attack on Christianity. However, nature connection is largely grounded in Native American figures, and even if nature connection is mostly

secularized, people who dig into nature connection roots beyond nature connection will sooner or sooner run into this. We have, perhaps well outside of Native American culture, seen T-shirts saying, "Homeland Security. Fighting Terrorism Since 1492.

But there is something profoundly important besides the humor. As I explained it to a friend at church, if we dug into the Book of Grudges we could probably find that far enough back, his ancestors did nasty things to my ancestors, and far enough back my ancestors did nasty things to his ancestors, *but the only things he had needed to forgive me were things I had done personally*. That's not how all cultures work, and that's not how most or all of the Native American cultures work. The Problem, as seen in Native American cultures, is not just that reservations have 35% unemployment. The Problem is that living conditions in today's reservations are one link in a continuous chain of maltreatment that is the same thing as the Indian Removal Act and every other form of terrorism since 1492.

I don't blame Native Americans for this. And I'd be very wary of claiming a teachable moment to impress on these people that Eastern Orthodoxy is not the Christianity of the settlers and it is the #1 religion among indigenous peoples in Alaska, and that my archbishop's patron saint is one of the patron saints of our land, an Aleut martyr killed by the Jesuits. (N.B. I know a man whose academic career was ended by today's Jesuits in a singularly unfortunate fashion.) But there are elements in Native American nature connection that conflict with Christianity, and others who dabble in Native American spirituality may dabble in something anti-Christian.

I might also point out that I have looked through wildernessawareness.org and 8shields.org and none of the bios I found let me discern a self-identified Christian of any stripe. I expect that at least a few of the members self-identify as Christian, but if nature connection is just for human beings, and you're not trying to call people out of

Christianity, not having Christians represented is kind of a gap.

A body without a head

The nature connection movement does much of the job of a religion: it does the work of peacemaking without invoking the Price of Peace, its practitioners engage in culture repair without exploring the cultic element of worship, and more broadly it treats what it means to be human without addressing created man as made in the image of God. Possibly there is a failure of complete secularity in pursuing “sacred fires;” I am not completely sure I understand what the word “sacred” means but it is culturally important and best started with a bowdrill or other ancient means. However, I find it difficult to construe the term “sacred fires” as it is used while neutering the term “sacred” to mean something secular.

I might comment in regards to secularity: secularity didn’t arise in Western history because of atheists crying for the Church’s blood; it arose when Western Christianity fragmented and each community treated others as infidel. It arose out of really nasty religious wars as a voice saying, “Can’t we all just get along?” and I call the nature connection movement “secular” as a recognition that it is intended to be appropriate to everyone. I have yet to detect a derisive word from a nature connection leader towards any religious community or tradition. However, this choice of common ground has an anemic dimension, something to do some of the work of a religion, but in a secular way, which psychology does on a larger scale. Orthodox would see this as a body needing a head, and wonderfully animated if we receive it.

Closing words

The final critique I would give, with a challenge, is this: nature connection, as it is pursued, is a body without a head that only becomes richer and deeper if it has a head. I would challenge you to read my book *The Best of Jonathan's Corner*, or for a better text, take a rebel author who works in caricatures, who decries Western music and blared Wagner's opera ("Wagner," as in, "Wagner's opera is not as bad as it sounds"), and wrote, *The Rape of Man and Nature*, and see rebellion against all things Western done right!

Furthermore, these words are not meant to dismiss nature connection in either sense. They are written to family, not meant as taking no prisoners. Much of what is delivered in *Native Eyes* is an approach to core routines, and core routines are about equally foundational to Orthodoxy. It's nice to see discussion of engaging in core routines. And it's nice to see agape or love (or as nature connection has called it, "connection") in reference to nature. A Christian could summarize ethics as saying we should love God with our whole being, love our neighbor as ourselves, and love nature as our kingdom. Furthermore, if you read closely, you may see that I don't find any critique of nature connection in the broader and more generic sense. I may question Coyote as totem, and I would gently note that my brother with the "What Would Loki Do?" T-shirt says for that trickster that the line between "Ha ha, fooled you!" and "Ha ha, killed you!" is a remarkably fine line. But I do not see a trickster edge as necessary for nature connection in the first, broader sense. Certainly it is not a necessity for nature connection in Orthodox monasticism, where animals cease being afraid of monks and cease to harm them.

Furthermore, the perceptive reader may note that none of my critique really affects nature connection in the broader sense. Historically, it is a rule in ethics that you don't forbid what isn't happening. The New Testament was written in an agrarian society where a large amount of

nature connection was assumed. A parable takes its literal sense from a Sower sowing seed; Christ says that he is the Vine and his Father is the Vinedresser, and perhaps no one felt a need to explain something a friend pointed out, that you have to love a vine to prune it well. There were some moral failures common to ancient times and our own; the older Ten Commandments remain relevant. But the fact that the New Testament never condemns disengaging from awareness with nature in favor of an inanimate thing: this does not necessarily prove that the New Testament authors would make such condemnations if faced by today's issues, but it also doesn't make silence mean that there is no nature connection implied in the New Testament. The evidence concerning "nature deficit disorder" suggests to the person interested in ascesis that the harm caused by a lack of engagement with nature is a failure with a moral dimension. Furthermore, as has been pointed out, "Silence does not equal contempt." In the Christian tradition, you have homilies for some religious feast which never mention the occasion for the feast. And this is true for questions that had been explicitly raised and addressed.

The human race is built on a hunter-gatherer chassis. The human race is built on a hunter-gatherer chassis, and we ignore this to our peril. The core insight to the Paleo diet is that the human organism works best on the kind of foods available to a hunter-gatherer, even if it takes extra effort to eat that way instead of MacDonald's and Cheetos, and also that it is highly desirable to approximate hunter-gatherer exercise. The nature connection movement says that we need more than food and exercise, and as much as doctors may prescribe vitamin D for people who don't get enough sunlight to synthesize the vitamin the natural way, we need to take added effort to consume vitamin N, Nature, even or especially if it takes going out of our way. There may be a Standard Social Sciences Model which asserts that human nature is infinitely malleable, but it is not, and we can still

be biologically alive while living in a way that humans aren't made to function.

There is an insistence among some that "Biology is not destiny." Maybe, but biology *is* a de facto and ersatz destiny to those heedless of the chassis we are running on. The less than ten thousand years of civilization (without which written history is possible) represent an eyeblink next to the four hundred thousand years we've had *Homo sapiens sapiens* and perhaps two million of some form of humans: written history represents less than 2% of the time we have existed as humans, with no significant evolution represented. Freedom, such as is available, recognized is as hunter-gatherers. And this may be a point where the nature connection movement deeply informs the conversation.

The nature connection movement is a voice worth listening to, and I hope these words can help it contribute to the conversation.

Discussion questions for “A Few Possible Critiques of the Nature Connection Movement”

1. Have you explored the Coyote-based nature connection movement?
2. What ways are you connected to nature now?
3. What, if anything, do you wish to do to connect with nature?
4. Do you see anything unnecessary in the Coyote-centric approach to nature connection?
5. What do you agree with, and disagree with, in that approach?

Introduction to, “ ‘Why?’ A Look at Matthieu Pageau, *The Language of Creation: Cosmic Symbolism in Genesis*”

This last piece is about an occasion where I looked for an ally and found some disappointment.

My own concerns about science holding roles it shouldn't is less of a concern about whether science has the right *answers* than whether it has the best and most human *questions* right.

This piece covers some of the great expectations and disappointment. It may, too, feed into understanding and standard critiques of someone who introduces himself as a “carver of Orthodox icons and other traditions.”

But I do not think that this should particularly be considered a last word.

“Why?” (A Look at Matthieu Pageau, *The Language of Creation: Cosmic Symbolism in Genesis*)

Great Expectations

“I am a star at rest, my daughter,” answered Ramandu. “When I set for the last time, decrepit and old beyond all that you can reckon, I was carried to this island. I am not so old now as I was then. Every morning a bird brings me a fire-berry from the valleys in the Sun, and each fire-berry takes away a little of my age. And when I have become as young as the child that was born yesterday, then I shall take my rising again (for we are at earth’s eastern rim) and once more tread the great dance.”

“In our world,” said Eustace, “a star is a huge ball of flaming gas.”

“Even in your world, my son, *that is not what a star is but only what it is made of.*”

C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, as quoted in “Physics”

The reader is now thinking about evolution. He is wondering whether Genesis 1 is right, and evolution is simply wrong, or whether evolution is right, and Genesis 1 is a myth that may be inspiring enough but does not actually tell how the world was created.

All of this is because of a culture phenomenally influenced by scientism and science. The theory of evolution is an attempt to map out, in terms appropriate to scientific dialogue, just what organisms occurred, when, and what mechanism led there to be new kinds of organisms that did not exist before. Therefore, nearly all Evangelicals assumed, Genesis 1 must be the Christian substitute for evolution. Its purpose must also be to map out what occurred when, to provide the same sort of mechanism. In short, if Genesis 1 is true, then it must be trying to answer the same question as evolution, only answering it differently.

Darwinian evolution is not a true answer to the question, “Why is there life as we know it?” Evolution is on philosophical grounds *not* a true answer to that question, because it is not an answer to that question at all. Even if it

is true, evolution is only an answer to the question, “*How* is there life as we know it?” If someone asks, “Why is there this life that we see?” and someone answers, “Evolution,” it is like someone saying, “Why is the kitchen light on?” and someone else answering, “Because the switch is in the on position, thereby closing the electrical circuit and allowing current to flow through the bulb, which grows hot and produces light.”

Where the reader only sees one question, an ancient reader saw at least two other questions that are invisible to the present reader. As well as the question of “How?” that evolution addresses, there is the question of “Why?” and “What function does it serve?” These two questions are very important, and are not even considered when people are only trying to work out the antagonism between creationism and evolutionism.

“The Commentary,” on Genesis 1

I was enthusiastically introduced to Matthieu Pageau, *The Language of Creation: Cosmic Symbolism in Genesis*, and enthusiastically looking forward to posting a review saying, “I speak of answering the question, “Why?” as is neglected in science, but in occasional hints and riddles. This is a full and direct treatment of the matter.”

The snake in the ointment

I viewed a podcast with the author, and on rational grounds this looks interesting. The best books to me are ones that challenge me enough to cause culture shock, and

this did cause culture shock, and was as different and concerned with the question, “Why?” as I respected.

About two thirds of the way through the book, though, I put my finger on something I’d been ignoring to be able to see other things: *reading the book was not prayerful*. When my abbot loaned me a manuscript he asked feedback for, the most vital feedback I could give him was that when I began it reading was deliberative information processing, but well before the end reading was prayer, and good theology leads you into the presence of God. As a relatively minor symptom, the comments on divination were all secular in character, and though forbidding divination was mentioned at least once, it was never discussed as an evil sin and a shameful error that opens a gateway to demonic possession. The concepts of ‘space’ and ‘time’, put in quotes in the text itself to indicate a usage very different from any mainstream usage, brought the kind of interesting culture shock produced by good science fiction and fantasy, a bit like *The Dark Tower* that C.S. Lewis wisely refrained from publishing. Also somewhat unusual for an author presented as Orthodox is a claim to “carves Eastern Orthodox and other traditional images.” And the book freely refers to later parts of the Old Testament, but never the New Testament or the Church as realities shadowed in the Old Law.

A more serious problem is that the book tastes to me too much like Jung, and was recommended to me by a good friend in the process of leaving Jung behind. Carl Jung has been called the greatest threat to the Church since Julian the Apostate, and some people have said that at the beginning of every failed clerical career known to the speaker came finding insights in Jung. I do not object to a portrait of archetypes as such; I trade in archetypes myself and would never want to leave them behind. But whether this is a fruitful engagement... it is a hint and a riddle to point out that the book briefly mentions alchemy as something you’d never guess by studying today’s chemistry.

It doesn't mention alchemy as offering a shortcut by technique for inner transformation that all of the major world religions are inclined to answer, "Sorry, kid. You need elbow grease." Even if conservative Protestants may be very eager to clarify that they believe you are sanctified by faith alone and not by elbow grease, they are also usually quite clear in a belief that if you have a living and a healthy faith and relevant opportunity, you had better be *producing* elbow grease. (Possibly Taoism is an exception? The Buddha left an interlocking eightfold path of ways to produce elbow grease.) But Pageau's book never talks about alchemy as a cheap shortcut, and if you are going to declare that alchemy is different from anything you'd guess from looking at chemistry, you would do awfully well to say its techniques for producing spiritual transformation are shallow and flat next to any proper religious tradition.

There was one conversation I had with a famous egalitarian when I mentioned enthusiastically about John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*, and he pointed out how the book was Jungian. And that was the hook when I swallowed a bait of quasi-traditional teaching about men and women at a time when live proponents of the position were few and far between.

I don't want to repeat that error here, and I speak no words of ill-will if my friends fell for something I fell for hook, line, and sinker. But the book pulls off a reconceptualization big enough to provoke culture shock, and a many-layered understanding of symbol, but for all that it I found very little, if anything, that constituted a specifically *patristic* way of opening up the Old Testament to unhide the New, and while the book mentions details like alchemy and Tarot, I searched and failed to find mention of "Jesus," "Christ," "Church," and so on.

I deem this book a failure, but I would really like to read another book that would succeed where it had failed.

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Discussion questions for “ ‘Why?’ A Look at Matthieu Pageau’s *The Language of Creation: Cosmic Symbolism in the Genesis*

1. What is Matthieu Pageau’s title about?
2. What turf does it cover?
3. Does Matthieu Pageau’s title represent an interesting failure?
4. Can you see how people might have great expectations for Pageau’s title?
5. What might be a more successful attempt look like?
6. Is there a danger analogous to traditional thinking their group has found a voice in *Wild at Heart*?

Introduction to “Using an Apple Watch as a Better Slow Watch”

Before there was the tyranny of the phone, there was the tyranny of the clock, and it remains slightly addictive to check your watch much more often than you really needed.

A “Slow Watch” is an expensive brand of watch that has only an hour hand, and is designed not to encourage you to check it each minute. It remains an example of less obtrusive technology.

This is a collection of a few brief notes about how to make an Apple Watch function like a better Slow Watch.

Using an Apple Watch as a Better Slow Watch

I've wanted a Slow Watch, but besides being expensive, it was a little while before I saw one that looked water resistant.

The reason I wanted a Slow Watch is because when I've eased up on using my phone, the "stickiest" remaining bit of technology left to me was frequently checking the time.



So I used the default solar watch face (not Clockology, which should make it easy to make a Slow Watch, but which seems practically used more to keep watches sticky), set it to analogue time so the hour and minute would be easier to cover, put one or two half inch blue dots near the center, and set alarms for when I want to

do something at a particular time. And when I really need to know the hour and minute, I tap the calendar complication at the top right.

The result is that my watch is less sticky and does not reward frequent additional checks of the time, and I am one degree less in the thrall of technology.

(The blue dot does get in the way of seeing things besides a watch face, but I've been able to get by with what I need.)

Discussion questions for “Using an Apple Watch as a Better Slow Watch”

1. Can more powerful and flexible technologies be set up to be less addictive?
2. Can you see how to use, for instance, accessibility features at humanetech.com/take-control to make a phone display black and white and be less addictive?
3. Can we think outside the box and maybe cut out a sticker to temporarily cover part of a watch face?

Conclusion

How shall we then live?

The guidance in the Scripture reaches deeper than e.g. the Paleo diet. While that diet has much to commend it, guidance was capable of appearing when people's food day-in and day-out was bread, and people were far shorter than people who have had today's diet of meat.

The Sermon on the Mount remains ever available. Furthermore, while I have not been given a blessing to read more than one work in the Philokalia since being at my monastery, that collection has been called a "time bomb" that is being discovered among married Orthodox today. We live in an exciting time.

St. Ignatius (Brianchinonov), in *The Arena*, talked about accommodations to adapt to the weakened and watered-down conditions of his own day in nineteenth century Russia, and steered people away from not only immediately trying to be hermits without rubbing against other stones in coenobitic living to have faults addressed first, but also of unconditional obedience to an elder. He tried to adapt and express monasticism to the humble conditions of his day. He had reason to be humble, and we have more.

But the best old advice applies. In response to the questions, "Who is the most important person?" "What is

the most important time?” and “What is most important to do?” the answer, from a time when mindfulness did not need to be imported from Buddhism, is, “The most important person is the one you are with, the most important time is now, and the most important task is the one you are doing.”

My own experience, and I really do not think this is just for me, is that trying to solve a life’s problems on a day’s resources is a sure ticket to despair. We only need to solve now’s problems on now’s resources, and to quote other old and famous words, “I do not know what tomorrow will bring, but I know who will bring tomorrow.”

In an early spiritual direction session, my spiritual father said that our Plan A may fail, and Plan B, “and so on down the alphabet,” but God is only, always, and ever on Plan A. If I had made some decisions more wisely, I might have earned a Ph.D. from Fordham.²⁰ Now I am slightly glad not to have letters after my name from that school.

Now I am at a monastery that is a godsend, under an Abbot whose encompassing care includes seeing that my gifts are put to use and who has encouraged my work. But that is a relatively little detail in a place intended for my spiritual profit.

God is on Plan A with you too!

²⁰ See <https://cjshayward.com/orthodox-fordham/> for documentation for an attempt to appeal my status as having washed out due to my grades not being high enough for Fordham.