

WORLDVIEW
AND MIND

RELIGIOUS THOUGHT AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT



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INTRODUCTION

The Power of Worldviews

No human being lives without a worldview, but comparatively few ever give much thought to what worldviews are, how they come into being, how they change, and how they are held. These are questions that come to our minds only when the worldviews we hold cease to be obvious to us. Viewing the matter in a broad historical perspective, it seems safe to say that most people at most times have been blessed with circumstances that have helped them take their worldviews sufficiently for granted that they never needed to wonder much about other possible ways of interpreting their world and their place in it, let alone reflect on questions about the phenomenon of worldview as such.

We do not, however, live in a time that favors the enjoyment of such confidence. Almost every person alive today is aware that there are people who hold visions of life different from his or her own, and almost everyone suffers at least some degree of anxiety about the lack of certainty this implies. Sociologists have coined the term *anomie* to refer to the feeling of disorientation and emptiness people experience when their worldviews are shaken, and they have observed that it can be a powerful force. Peter Berger, for example, has said that “anomy is unbearable to the point where the individual may seek death in preference to it,” since there is “a human craving for meaning that appears to have the force of an instinct,” and “the danger of meaninglessness . . . is the nightmare *par excellence*, in which the individual is submerged in a world of disorder, senselessness and madness.”¹

1. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, 22.

Of course, anomie does not often become so acute. Most people manage to find ways of bolstering their sense of *nomos*, a term sociologists sometimes use for the sense of coherent wholeness of worldview that stands as the opposite of anomie. But the uncomfortable fact is that to be human is to live never in a perfect state either of confidence in *nomos* or of anomie, but rather somewhere between the two, with some feeling that things add up, but also with some fear that they might not do so perfectly or perhaps not even very well. And the ways people try to deal with challenges to their sense of a secure worldview may have important implications—not only for the success with which they will stave off anomie but also for the beneficial or destructive consequences their efforts will have for other people who inhabit the same *real* world, if not the same *nomos* or phenomenological “world.”

The simplest way, after all, to avoid anomie is to eliminate challenges to the taken-for-grantedness of one’s own vision of the world. But the very existence of other people with different fundamental beliefs can be the most disturbing of such challenges, and the only way to avoid it altogether is either to withdraw to some place of relative isolation (as hermits, Amish, and others have sometimes done) or to purge the world, or at least one’s near vicinity, of other voices. In a world as structurally pluralistic as ours has become, both through modern media of communication and through the mixing of populations with diverse cultural heritages, this makes for dangerous possibilities of conflict.

The anxiety of uncertainty seems to be one motive behind the current resurgence of xenophobic ethnicity and religious militancy around the world. The end of the Soviet empire had among other effects the crumbling of walls that served in part to insulate many populations from the shock of too strong a dose of pluralism. As Mark Jurgensmeyer says in *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, “The new world order that is replacing the bipolar powers of the old Cold War is characterized not only by the rise of new economic forces, a crumbling of old empires, and the discrediting of communism, but also by the resurgence of parochial identities based on ethnic and religious allegiances.” He also suggests that “proponents of the new [ethnic and religious] nationalisms hold the potential of making common cause against the secular West, in what might evolve into a new Cold War. Like the old Cold War, the confrontation between these new forms of culture-based politics and the secular state is global in its scope, binary in its opposition, occasionally violent, and essentially a difference of ideologies; and, like the old Cold War, each side tends to stereotype

the other.”² Of course, it is not only the secular West that an anxious people may seek to drive away. The Jewish settlers in Hebron and their Palestinian rivals, for example, are neither of them especially “secular” or “Western” in the usual senses of those words. This does not detract from Jurgensmeyer’s point, however, which is that cultural ideology can be a potent source of conflict.

Samuel P. Huntington proposed a similar thesis in 1996 in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, arguing that what had been global political alignments defined by political ideology and superpower relations are giving way to new alignments based on cultural affiliation that may be much more challenging to deal with. He says, for example, that although a Western democrat could carry on an intellectual debate with a Soviet Marxist, it would be impossible for him to do so with a Russian Orthodox nationalist—or, he might say today, a radical Islamist. Huntington’s principal theme is the idea of civilizational “fault lines,” points where different civilizations encounter each other and compete. He refers especially to the former Yugoslavia, where Western Christian (principally Roman Catholic), Byzantine Christian (Eastern Orthodox), and Muslim populations were in open conflict when he wrote his book. Another is the clash between Israelis, Palestinians, and the Arab states. His main point is that cultural, and especially religious, worldviews, their defense and their preservation, are much more important to many people throughout the world than the secularly oriented, pragmatic Western intellectual is normally inclined to believe and that this factor must be taken into account if we are to understand the challenges that he predicted would face the world in the twenty-first century. Events since that time have underscored his point even if, as I will later suggest, there are other ways of understanding the strains in the world today and other types of fault lines besides those of clashing civilizations.

One of the other major points of Huntington’s analysis is that “people use politics not just to advance their interests, but also to define their identity,” because “cultural identity is what is most meaningful to most people.” Religion and cultural worldview are powerful instruments of identity, and when a people is faced with threats to them, the drive to defend and reinforce identity can produce a combustible polarization of their perceived “world” into a dramatic face-off of “us” versus “them.” As Huntington rather starkly puts it, “We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when

2. Jurgensmeyer, *New Cold War?* 1–2.

we know whom we are against.”³ One of the purposes of the present book is to explore the roots of such polarization in psychological impulses and mechanisms, but another purpose is to try to understand what psychological and spiritual counterforces may also be present that can provide hope for the development of personhood beyond such blind, reactive defenses.

At the end of his book, Huntington leaves the reader with a series of questions: “Is there a general, secular trend, transcending individual civilizations, toward higher levels of Civilization? If there is such a trend, is it a product of the processes of modernization that increase the control of humans over their environment and hence generate higher and higher levels of technological sophistication and material well-being? In the contemporary era, is a higher level of modernity thus a prerequisite to a higher level of Civilization? Or does the level of Civilization primarily vary within the history of individual civilizations?”⁴ These are questions that open out, as we shall see, onto still others about the range of possible meanings of words such as *modern* or *modernity*, *traditional*, and even *postmodern*. More important, to consider such questions is to consider not periods or even cultural trends but, rather, types of mental organization, and exploring them in turn points toward the possibility of different patterns of organization within both traditional and modern minds.

These authors are right to draw attention to the important role of religion in maintaining for most people a sense of the meaningful coherence of life. Religion has been at the heart of every traditional society, and as sociologists from Emil Durkheim and Max Weber to the present have said, it is unlikely that any society anywhere could have taken shape without the role religion has always played in that process.

This is true for several reasons. One is that for a worldview to achieve stability, it must be internalized—that is, incorporated into consciousness in such a way that it is deeply ingrained to the point that it becomes virtually automatic. As Clifford Geertz has said, this kind of secure belief is something that normally “comes from the social and psychological workings of religious symbols.” The socially mediated interaction with sacred symbols in society, especially in the form of ritual, is the major mechanism, as Geertz puts it, by means of which people “come not only to encounter a worldview but actually to adopt it, to internalize it as part of their personality.”⁵

3. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 20–21.

4. *Ibid.*, 320.

5. Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Developments in Morocco and Indonesia*, 99, 100.

Another reason is that religion is the principal social vehicle of the sense of the sacred, that powerful feeling of awe and fascination that phenomenologists of religion such as Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade have described as closely linked to the sense of standing in the presence of the mysteriously other and the really real. Eliade speaks of the sacred as equivalent to “reality,” because it is saturated with “being,” that is, with enduringness and force. “Religious man’s desire to live in the sacred,” he says, “is in fact equivalent to his desire to take up his abode in objective reality,” to put an end to the “tension and anxiety” of relativity. Peter Berger, pursuing this line of thought, has suggested, “It appears likely that only by way of the sacred was it possible for man to conceive of a cosmos in the first place.”⁶ Religion, then, is the principal device by which a phenomenological “world,” a world that looks coherent and feels real to those who imaginatively dwell in it, is socially constructed.

That a worldview must be *socially* constructed is an important point. No one comes to adult consciousness without first having passed through a cultural gestation, and no one begins to think by constructing a worldview on his or her own. Every human being is endowed with one from the start by the mere fact of having been born into a milieu where language is spoken and stories are told. Some eventually think of new questions and work out conceptions of their own or at least variations on what they have inherited, but it is inherently difficult, and for most people virtually impossible, to construct and actually believe in a worldview all by oneself.

This is probably one reason, besides altruism, that the founders of new religions seek followers; it is easier to believe one’s own new vision of life if there are others who share it. It is also why those who feel the force of questions that challenge conventional views, but who are not themselves able to develop satisfying answers to them, seek leaders to follow and fellow believers to worship with. As sociologists have often said, charisma is not an inherent quality of certain individuals but a reciprocal relationship between its bearers and those who perceive and defer to it.

It is also a reason that adherents of different religious or secular worldviews seek unanimity around them and sometimes seek to eliminate or at least silence competing views—which, of course, brings us back to the dangers of conflict and polarized worldviews that Huntington and Jurgensmeyer warn us about. Both emphasize the possibility of global conflict arising out of the

6. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 12, 27–28; Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 27.

competition of religions and civilizations—a danger that took a terrifyingly concrete form on September 11, 2001, with the suicide attack of al Qaeda terrorists on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. What that began and what continues from it do not seem to fit very well the model of either a new cold war, as Jurgensmeyer imagined in 1993, or the sort of conventional military war the American administration of the early 2000s tried to cast it as. Other versions of the same danger almost certainly lie ahead, though in unpredictable, unconventional forms and possibly from very different sources.

To call this a clash of civilizations, however, may not be the best approach to understanding it, either. There is certainly a sense in which conflicts arising from some group's religion, sense of ethnicity, or historical resentments involve a civilizational heritage. But to conceive the sort of conflict that is now erupting as an expression of one unitary "civilization" against another seems just one more way of trying to imagine it in the mold of conventional military warfare. I would like to suggest that the real problem is of quite a different order: the great upheaval in worldview going on throughout the world today, within each civilizational heritage, is the transition from a traditional worldview, and the traditional mind that supports it and depends on it, to something new—usually called "modernity"—with all the demands it makes for a reorganization of minds.

Not long ago it was widely supposed that an inevitable implication of this process would be the fading away of religion while a scientific, secular worldview replaced religious worldviews of any kind. When Peter Berger published *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* in 1967, he took this tendency for granted. Defining the term *secularization* there as "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols," he said that it "affects the totality of cultural life and of ideation, and may be observed in the decline of religious contents in the arts, in philosophy, in literature, and, most important of all, in the rise of science as an autonomous, thoroughly secular perspective on the world." He also predicted that the secularization process would produce not only a new worldview with a new content but also a new kind of mind. "Moreover," he said, "the process of secularization has a subjective side as well. As there is a secularization of society and culture, so is there a secularization of consciousness."⁷

7. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 107–8.

Three decades later, however, Berger acknowledged that his secularization hypothesis had been proved false in the actual course of events, with religion of all sorts becoming an ever stronger force in many parts of the world, including the eminently modern North America. In 1997 Berger even edited a collection of essays titled *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, with an introduction in which he said that “the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today . . . is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.” He also said that even if modernization can have some secularizing effects, “secularization on the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of individual consciousness.” “To say the least,” he concluded, “the relation between religion and modernity is rather complicated.”⁸

The main purpose of the present book will be to bring to light and explore that relation in all its complexity, which I think is profoundly underestimated by many who write on the topic, especially critics less sympathetic than Berger, of whom there are legion, from Sigmund Freud to Daniel Dennett. I will be discussing the ideas of both of these particular critics of religion later, especially in Chapters 6 through 9, so there is no need to go into them here except to indicate that I think that although many of their criticisms of the types of religion and religiousness they focus on are well founded, the conception of religion among both the critics who think religion can and should be argued away and the secularization theorists who thought it would fade away all by itself tends to be rather one-dimensional, overlooking the great inner diversity of religious worldviews and ways of being religious. Such critics tend to reduce religion as a whole to something that is easily dismissed, but I hope to show that religious traditions, when looked at more closely, can be found to have greater complexity and also greater spiritual depth than their critics usually seem to be aware of and thus have a greater potential for development along lines their critics might even favor.

Religious traditions are not solid blocks or even single streams but consist of many strands and elements that make up an unstable, dynamic mix that is constantly in flux and can develop in various, sometimes contradictory directions. Most observers recognize that there can be diversity *among* religions,

8. Berger, *Desecularization of the World*, 2, 3.

but few seem to give much thought to the diversity *within* them, yet it is this inner diversity that makes for the possibility of change and development that under some circumstances might promise a solution to the problems and dangers the critics of religion point to. Within religious traditions there is the frequently realized possibility of developing toward what might be called a monological mode of faith, a way of believing that tries to fend off uncertainty and anomie by shutting out or silencing all competing voices. But I will try to show that there are also possibilities of religions developing toward an open, dialogical mode of faith in which a diversity of voices and perspectives can be not only tolerated but even religiously embraced.

Whether and how such developments take place must depend not only on elements of tradition that might be interpreted as encouraging it but also on the circumstances of the religious groups and individuals who try to carry the traditions forward and on the types of personal development that take place within them under those circumstances. The conditions of life in the modern world exert pressure on persons everywhere, among the members of both what we think of as “modern” societies and, through “globalization,” what are sometimes referred to as “traditional” societies—although the distinction between them is becoming less and less clear, and even to try clearly to distinguish them might tempt one to the same mistake about societies and cultures that is so often made about religions, that is, to think of them as uniform cultural blocs. It was to underscore this issue that Robert Kegan, whose thought will be the principal focus of Chapter 3, titled his 1994 book *In over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*; his point is that different types of social and psychological environments are pulling against each other within our own society, to the point that individuals can often feel overwhelmed by their conflicting demands.

For good or ill, welcome or unwelcome, the pressure of these circumstances undermines, as I said at the beginning, the sort of easy confidence that might under earlier circumstances have helped people take their worldviews sufficiently for granted that they would rarely need to think about other possible ways of interpreting their world and their selves in relation to it. This tends to force the growth of critical reflection and with it the sense of individual consciousness. In 2002, in a volume of essays on globalization that he coedited with Samuel Huntington, Peter Berger wrote, “If there is one theme that all [types of globalization] have in common, it is individuation: all sectors of the emerging global culture enhance the independence of the individual over against tradition and collectivity. Individuation must be seen as a social and

psychological process, manifested empirically in the behavior and consciousness of people regardless of the ideas they may hold about this.”⁹ That process can be both liberating and acutely uncomfortable.

Whatever the nature of the worldviews they cherish and wherever they may live, virtually all people living today feel the pressure exerted by modern conditions on both their worldviews and their minds. This is why my own focus will be on worldviews and on psychological factors that can contribute to their development and character. The first part of this study will examine some psychological approaches that seem especially helpful for understanding the subjective factors that contribute to shaping worldviews. These fall into two patterns: psychologies of the unconscious that try to bring to light the forces that shape consciousness without our being aware of their workings and psychologies of conscious functioning, primarily in the tradition of Jean Piaget, that focus on the ways consciousness can develop as it addresses itself to various sorts of stimuli and challenges.

As will be discussed in Chapter 1, Karl Jaspers, the originator of the idea of a psychology of worldviews, distinguished worldview as such into a subjective and an objective pole, with the subjective pole (psychological dispositions and basic patterns of thinking and imagining) playing a much larger role than he believed was generally realized in shaping the “what” (the objective pole) of what people think. Jaspers did not believe, however, that what is thought was necessarily reducible to the simple product of unconscious forces in the mind. Rather, he believed that the major challenge for all human beings is to develop a differentiated consciousness that will make careful, conscious thinking possible, which is why he has since become known primarily as a philosopher. The ultimate purpose of the present book is also to point toward the possibilities of developing a critical, philosophically reflective consciousness within traditions of religious thinking.

With Chapter 2, in the discussion of Jean Piaget, we will begin the exploration of the type of psychological thinking that puts its emphasis not on the way minds may be driven by unconscious forces but on the possibility of their developing a capacity to operate intentionally and reflectively. Piaget’s tradition, as we will see, is as much philosophical in its way as it is psychological,

9. Berger and Huntington, *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*, 9. Berger also says in the next sentence that “individuation as an empirical phenomenon must be distinguished from ‘individualism’ as an ideology (though, of course, the two are frequently linked)” — a point whose significance will be developed in Chapter 8, “Religion and Personhood.”

since it focuses on the way the development of a capacity for conscious operations enables people to construct the phenomenological world they live in and the selves they take shape as in doing so. We will also see how that same stream of thinking has fed into modern theological thought, especially through the integration of theology and cognitional theory by the influential Jesuit thinker Bernard Lonergan, whose thought is rooted as much in his early reading of Piaget as it is in the philosophical and theological traditions he also drew on and gave new shape to.

As the founder of modern developmental psychology, Piaget has had many heirs. The most important of them for the analysis of religious thought and its possibilities that I will be undertaking is Robert Kegan, whose ideas about stages of development from infancy to adulthood and also about what he calls the “orders of consciousness” that can develop within adulthood will be discussed both in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 8, on religion and personhood. Some other important Piagetian thinkers who have actually focused more directly than Kegan on specifically religious issues are James W. Fowler, whose study of stages of faith will also be discussed in Chapter 3, and Lawrence Kohlberg, whose efforts to explain moral development led him eventually to something like theological speculation on the ultimate goal of such development, as will be discussed in the first section of Chapter 6.

Lest the emphasis of these thinkers on the possibilities of conscious thinking and positive psychological development seem to neglect the dark side of human psychology, two chapters will take up two different approaches to psychology that emphasize the sort of unconscious forces that subvert reason and tend to generate the kind of polarized worldviews that engender and perpetuate conflict. In Chapter 4 we will look at Ernest Becker and a group of experimentalists working within the framework of his thought, which emphasizes the way anxiety over one’s own possible death can shape our thinking and behavior before we are even aware of it. In Chapter 5 we will consider René Girard’s idea that a virtually automatic tendency to imitate on a preconscious level the feelings, desires, and attitudes of others can drive us both to divinize and to demonize them. We will also see how many scientists working in various fields, some inspired by Girard and others completely independently, have been showing the ways this kind of preconscious “mimesis,” as Girardians call it, has evolved as a hardwired feature of humanity and manifests itself in all areas of psychic life.

Of course, there have also been many other psychologists of the unconscious, most notably Sigmund Freud, whose critique of religion I will take up

in Chapter 8, but my principal reason for focusing on the thought of Becker and Girard, besides what I think is the intrinsic interest and originality of their ideas and the fact that, unlike many others, each has a well-developed basis in experimental studies, is that they simultaneously appreciate the positive potential of religion and are able to be critical of it without reductionism. I recognize that there are also many other thinkers and schools of psychological thought in addition to these, many of great interest in themselves, but it is the ones I have chosen to focus on that I think have most to offer for understanding the special strains, and possible growing pains, that religious thought is experiencing at the present time, especially on the level of larger social movements.

The remainder of the book will relate these patterns of psychological thinking and the philosophical issues connected with them to the principal religious worldviews that are currently playing salient roles in the larger world of affairs in the twenty-first century. This will not, therefore, be an attempt at a comprehensive survey of world religions any more than the preceding part was an attempt at a comprehensive survey of modern systems of psychological thought. Rather, I will focus on those aspects of religious traditions that especially pertain to the exploration of certain central questions of concern in the world today.

One of these is the question of what subjective factors sometimes render religions conflictual and even aggressive and injurious not only to nonmembers but also to their own adherents by stifling their development toward full personhood. Another is the question of what conditions might foster less dangerous, and even perhaps helpful and reconciling, forms of religiousness. These questions are in part psychological, since they pertain to what sorts of unconscious forces drive us and what sorts of psychological development might win us at least a partial freedom from those forces. Developmental issues and philosophical issues related to what human thinking can become at its most developed are directly pertinent to these questions, since differences over cognitive claims and over identity or selfhood are at the root of almost all religious conflict. But there is more to religious thinking than can be encompassed by psychology alone, and so the remainder of the book will also give attention to questions of how religious traditions themselves think about development: What sorts of personhood, both individual and in community, do they seem to aim at? How do religions foster or possibly inhibit psychological, intellectual, and spiritual development? How do these forms of development relate to one another? How do the possible ways religious thinkers conceive of transcendence and ultimacy pertain to all of these questions?

In exploring these issues I will not be attempting to offer a portrait in depth of each of the principal world religions, and I will not try to give even the ones I do talk about equal attention. My purpose, like that which Karl Jaspers stated in the preface to his *Psychology of Worldviews*, is “not simply to present a gallery of worldviews, like pictures at an exhibition, but to illuminate the space in which existential decisions are made.”¹⁰ I will, however, try to go into enough depth on the points pertinent to my questions to make clear what some of the major problems and possibilities in the various traditions are. One of my points, the special focus of Chapter 7, will be that despite superficial appearances, there is great diversity not just among religious traditions but also within them, so much diversity, in fact, that it can seem rather arbitrary to lump them together into the kinds of unit we commonly speak of when we talk, for example, about a “Hinduism,” an “Islam,” or a “Christianity”—as though each of these distinct traditions, to name only these three, constitutes something with enough common characteristics to amount to a single religious stream.

The problem with this sort of attempt to see a tradition as unitary shows up most obviously in the case of Hinduism, a tradition I actually will not be discussing much but can serve to illustrate the point. Far from being one religion, *Hinduism* is simply a term coined by Europeans in the nineteenth century (the earliest recorded instance in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from 1829) to categorize together the vast variety of different religious traditions in different languages, cultures, and ethnicities that happened to flourish in the Indian subcontinent from ancient times until then. There are certain practices common to most of the Indian religious traditions (such as distinction of social castes) and certain ancient texts many of them refer to (the Vedas and Upanishads), but to call them a single religion has about as much justification as for someone from India to coin a term such as *West Asianism*, for example, to designate a supposed religious tradition lumping together Judaism, Christianity, and Islam on the grounds that they are principally found at the western end of the Eurasian continent, share a tendency to represent the divine by the image of a single deity, and tell some partially overlapping stories about ancient Middle Eastern ancestors.

I will not be giving much attention to the religious traditions grouped under that broad classification called Hinduism for the simple reason that the indigenous religious traditions of the Indian subcontinent, however much conflict they have given rise to in India in the past century, are not currently

10. Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, xi.

a major factor in the tensions gripping the world as a whole. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, on the other hand, clearly are. But these traditions, too, involve considerable inner diversity. To illustrate what I mean, let me just mention the problem of conceiving of Christianity as a unitary phenomenon. Most discussion of the issues involved in the encounter of Christian traditions and modernity, from the attacks of the Enlightenment *philosophes* in the eighteenth century to theological programs of demythologizing in the twentieth, have focused on the clash between modern scientific views of the world and a Christian worldview that is usually taken to have been fairly uniform. In Chapter 7 I will show how in the Christian tradition, as in Islam, there have been quite different worldviews present simultaneously, competing with each other sometimes tacitly and sometimes overtly over the centuries and persisting today. This dynamic diversity within religious traditions offers both problems and opportunities for the development of less dangerous worldviews.

Besides clarifying and exploring the implications of the inner diversity of worldviews within the religious traditions most involved in the conflicts of the present century, I will be concerned to show that the objective characteristics of worldviews are in reality only the tip of an iceberg, because they are also the expressions of subjective psychological structures, in the sense of habitual patterns of mental organization and operation. Chapters 8 and 9 will turn from the objective pole of worldviews, from the “what” of belief, to the subjective pole, the “how.” Chapter 8, “Religion and Personhood,” will take up a number of questions pertaining to the ways religious thinking can relate to psychological development—among them, to list just a few, how Freud’s idea of “God” as a projection might relate to theological traditions about the relativity of all images and concepts used to think about radical transcendence, whether religion must be intellectually repressive and what it might mean to speak of rational inquiry as having a spiritual dimension, and the question of what it might mean to speak of a radically self-transcending “self.” Chapter 9, “Dialogical Faith,” will explore these issues further by first taking up the changing history of the idea of what it means “to believe” and the question of what “faith” has meant in relation to both “belief” (in the modern sense of that word) and religious love, then discussing the ways religious thinkers have thought about the relation between love and knowledge and the need for religious thinking to take place in a dialogical community if it is to be authentic and spiritually as well as intellectually open. The conclusion will consider the bearing of all of these questions as well as the historical circumstances of religious traditions today on what kinds of future development may be possible in religion.

There are many critics of religion who fear its dangerous potential and who therefore wish it would simply go away. I share much of these critics' concern, but I also believe there is a positive potential in religions that can develop with the right encouragement, just as there is in human beings. Religions are not born and do not live as monolithic blocks, but develop over time. That development can involve change in the ideas religious people hold about the world, its source, its possibilities, and its ultimate purpose. But religious development may also involve an inner process in which some people within a religious tradition develop the ability to step back from the ideas they hold and from patterns of thinking so intimate to them that they might be said more to be held by them than to hold them. In such stepping back they can discover both new ways of thinking and new ways of relating, with a more differentiated consciousness, to what they think. In the process, they may also become new persons. This is where the psychology underlying worldviews becomes important, and it is therefore to that that we shall now turn.

1

The Idea of a Psychology of Worldviews

It was Karl Jaspers who first conceived the idea of a psychology of worldviews. Although he is now remembered as an existential philosopher, he began his academic career in the field of psychiatry but moved into philosophy as the natural outgrowth of the ideas he explored in *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (Psychology of Worldviews), published in 1919. In the foreword for the fourth edition of that book in 1954 he said that its idea came to him when he noticed that scientific disputes did not seem to be determined simply by empirical or logical considerations. This led him to suspect that there were deeper factors, working below the level of consciousness, that helped to shape thought and conviction. Although many further conceptions of what those deeper factors might be have been developed in various schools of thought since Jaspers's pioneering work, his ideas on the subject still offer useful insights, many of which have found echoes among later thinkers, from developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Robert Kegan to such figures as Ernest Becker and René Girard.

One of these ideas is his emphasis on psychological development and the construction of worldviews as a continuous, lifelong process stimulated by the experience of disturbance. This happens as a result both of the way one's action and thought can clash with reality and of involvement in what he called "boundary situations" (*Grenzsituationen*), examples of which include strug-

gle, death, accident, guilt, and encounter with mystery, experiences that give rise to ideas of possible transcendence. Fundamental to all boundary situations, he said, is the paradoxical character of human existence and the experience of tension (*Spannung*) it can entail. The fundamental paradox of human existence, or “antinomy,” as Jaspers called it, is that to be human is to be neither simply an object in the world nor simply a subject contemplating worldly existence from some standpoint beyond it but rather something of both—as Ernest Becker would dramatically put it a half century later, to be “half animal and half symbolic . . . out of nature and hopelessly in it . . . up in the stars and yet housed in a heart-pumping, breath-gasping body that once belonged to a fish and still carries the gill marks to prove it.” Becker, whose thought will be examined more closely in Chapter 5, zeroed in as nobody has before or since on the link between this “antinomic” experience of life and the anxiety it can generate, especially as it bears on one’s possible death, the ultimate boundary situation.

Jaspers’s own reflections on the implications of existing between a subjective and an objective pole of consciousness reach beyond the boundary situation alone, however, and point in directions that others have taken up and explored further. Eric Voegelin, for example, who studied with Jaspers and who told me he was especially influenced by this particular book early in his career, came to define the human mode of existence as *metaxy*, or “in-between,” existence, taking the term from the Greek word for “the between,” as used by Plato. It was probably Jaspers who prepared Voegelin to find it there. Describing the universal human experience of living in the “between,” Jaspers said that “the actual—thinking, feeling, acting—human being stands simultaneously between two worlds: before him the realm of objectivity, behind him the powers and tendencies of the subject. His situation is determined from both sides, before him the object, behind him the subject, both limitless, both inexhaustible and impenetrable. On both sides lie decisive antinomies.”¹ To be human is to exist between these, and it is also to feel torn by their dissociation, to long to hold fast to one or the other pole but to find both perpetually out of reach. Utopianisms seek to transcend this existential dilemma, but its reality is inexorable.

The most fundamental requirement of a systematic psychology of worldviews, said Jaspers, is that it be able to encompass all the manifold relations between subject and object, in all their indefiniteness and fluidity. The truly

1. Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 26; Webb, *Eric Voegelin: Philosopher of History*, 20, 23–24; Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, 233.

ultimate point of view would see the subject-object relation in movement, and the best systematic ordering of worldviews would depict them as a developmental sequence (*Entwicklungsreihe*).² This points toward the sort of philosophy of history that Eric Voegelin's thought exemplified, since worldviews take shape historically in communities and their limits of development are largely set by the prevailing levels of psychological and spiritual development among those who engage actively in intellectual and spiritual exploration. But it points equally toward the work of developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Robert Kegan.

For Jaspers, it meant that one could talk about a psychology of worldviews only in periods that included some degree of individuation (*Individualisierung*). Where a worldview is shared obviously by all, he said, there can be only a "social psychology" of worldviews. The key element in individuation is the development of what he called "differentiation of consciousness," a term he used to refer to a multifaceted process that could involve in varying degrees (1) becoming conscious of oneself and one's experience; (2) the development of a capacity for rational analysis; (3) separation (*Trennung*) into opposites where previously there was unity (as, for example, in the realization that consciousness has subjective and objective poles); (4) bringing to formulated consciousness what one previously knew only implicitly; and (5) the expansion of the material of experience into what follows from it, its consequences or implications.³

What "differentiation of consciousness" is, to put it in simple terms, is a kind of inward stepping back from something that was implicitly present *in* consciousness but not exactly present *to* it, something one was too close to or even subjectively embedded in, one might say, for it to be noticed. We are constantly engaged in interpreting our experience of concrete involvement in a world that we first become aware of through sensory experience, but we usually do not reflect on the fact that simple sensory experience by itself would be just a "buzzing, blooming confusion," in William James's famous phrase, if it were not put together into perceptual packages that can give it some sort of apparent unity and coherence. One walks into a room, for example, and sees "tables," "chairs," "windows," "carpets," and so on; one does not usually advert to the process by which particular patterns of color, shape, and texture are organized by the perceiving mind into these interpretive clusters, nor does one

2. Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, 20, 28.

3. *Ibid.*, 39–40.

normally realize that a considerable cultural background has previously gone into the development of the ideas that constitute them for us.

I was once on the dissertation committee of a doctoral candidate studying the problems of adaptation faced by Laotian refugees brought to the United States in the 1970s from a remote mountainous region in which there were virtually none of the ordinary things that make up the modern American world. Her dissertation cited studies of the experience of these Laotians that described how when they were first brought to Seattle and saw its tall buildings from the airplane windows, they perceived them as mountains, since the only experience they had had in the world they came from of anything so high was of the mountains their villages nestled among. It took sometimes painful effort for them to learn to interpret the objects in their new world the way their American hosts taught them to. It can take similar somewhat disconcerting and dislocating effort for a philosopher to step back from the processes of interpreting and knowing in order to develop a cognitional theory, as in the case of Bernard Lonergan, or for a psychologist such as Jean Piaget to work out the relations among preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational thinking not only in childhood development but also in that of the investigating scientist and in the development of science as such.

This sort of stepping back will be a central theme of much of this book, since it is at the heart of any psychological or philosophical reflection on subjectivity and also of any religious reflection on spirituality. There are three distinct but related types of differentiation of consciousness with which we will be concerned: philosophical, psychological, and spiritual. The philosophical differentiation of consciousness is the development of critical awareness of the mental operations involved in interpreting and knowing so that one can perform those operations consciously and carefully. Philosophy might be defined as what develops when one steps back from one's initial naive experience of "perceiving" what one takes to be reality and begins to ask questions about whether that really is what it appears to be, how interpretation is involved in knowing, what knowing itself might be, and how one can determine the difference between real and only apparent knowing.

Psychological differentiation of consciousness has two aspects. On the one hand, it is the process by which a person begins to win some freedom from unconscious mechanisms of the sort that Sigmund Freud began the study of, and on the other hand, it also takes place as the process in which the developing person begins from infancy, as we will see in our discussion of Jean Piaget, to develop conscious operative capacities and to use those to

construct a phenomenological “world” and a worldview. This duality at the heart of psychological differentiation was nicely expressed by Freud in his famous injunction: “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden.” This is translated in the Standard Edition of Freud’s Works as “Where id was, there shall ego be,” but it can be translated more literally, and I think with a greater sense of Freud’s actual intent, as “Where ‘it’ was, there should be ‘I.’”⁴ Where there had been a virtual mechanism driven by blind forces, there should come into being a conscious thinker making decisions on the basis of careful deliberation. One way of understanding psychological differentiation, therefore, is to see it as the movement from “it” to “I,” a movement that begins in blind mechanism and moves toward fully conscious, rational thought.

Another way, which does not contradict this but supplements it with a Piagetian developmental perspective, is to see psychological differentiation as a gradual process of awakening of the “I” as it expands within conscious operations. As we will see in detail in Chapter 3, Robert Kegan discusses psychological development as proceeding through a regular sequence of differentiations of consciousness in which a person who was previously “embedded” in some features of subjectivity (such as impulses, desires, feelings, or conventions) gradually begins to differentiate from those so that what was experienced as simply one with his or her subjective being becomes an object for contemplation and regulation. A child of six or seven, for example, who previously was governed by impulses that he or she simply identified with begins to develop the ability to step back from the impulse of the moment and to think about “motives” as a matter of enduring needs and dispositions that may be satisfied more effectively through the control of impulse rather than by simply flowing with its surge.

Spiritual differentiation of consciousness is less easily definable than philosophical or psychological and inherently more controversial, since different religious traditions may be expected to approach it in different even if possibly somewhat overlapping ways, so I will not attempt to define it as neatly as

4. Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, 15:86; *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 22:80. A still more literal translation would be “Where ‘it’ was, should ‘I’ become,” which would have the advantage of emphasizing that what Freud is talking about is a process of becoming more conscious and intentional in one’s psychic life, but this would sound unidiomatic in English. Bruno Bettelheim discusses the problems of the English translation of Freud extensively in *Freud and Man’s Soul*. On “Es” and “Ich,” see especially 49–64. Bettelheim’s main point is that the English translators were trying to make many of Freud’s terms sound more scientific by translating his everyday German expressions not with equally ordinary-sounding English but with Latin and Greek.

the others, but it is an inescapable element of any religious tradition that gives attention to spirituality in any form. It has to be distinguished from theology, as that term is usually used in Western traditions, which is what develops when a religious person steps back from direct immersion in religious experience and tries to find language to articulate that experience, understand it, and relate it to other ways of understanding what it means to be a human being in an interpreted world. Spiritual differentiation of consciousness, on the other hand, lies on the side of the experience that theology reflects on.

When Eric Voegelin took Jaspers's idea of differentiation of consciousness and used it to discuss the distinctive intellectual and spiritual developments in ancient Greece and Israel, he spoke of them as "noetic" and "pneumatic" differentiations of consciousness, respectively—his terms for what I am calling "philosophical" and "spiritual." Essentially, what Voegelin meant by pneumatic differentiation (from the Greek *pneumatikos*, or "spiritual") was the experiential realization of existential tension (another term he found in Jaspers) as a pull toward a pole of transcendent perfection; historically, it meant for Voegelin the realization among both the ancient Israelites and the early Christians of an absolute distinction between the finite realm and a radically transcendent source and goal of being.⁵ This is a definition that can work fairly well for Western religious traditions, including Islam in its Sufi form. As regards Indian traditions, Voegelin himself spoke of how it was reading the Upanishads in his youth that first stimulated him to think about such issues. It is also compatible with the more challenging, nontheistic thinking of Buddhism, since terms like *tension*, *transcendence*, and *perfection* need not necessarily entail the imagery and terminology of divinity. So perhaps it can suffice for the time being as a working definition of spiritual differentiation. Theology, on the other hand, as a reflection on and articulation of spiritual experience, must lie at the intersection of the philosophical and spiritual differentiations.

Any such differentiations of consciousness, when they occur, will bring with them a corresponding alteration of worldview, said Jaspers. Similarly, as soon as one formulates a worldview, one becomes altered inwardly by that very fact. "Whatever I am, I cannot remain simply that if I also develop self-awareness with regard to it, if I come to know it."⁶

5. I will not go further into the thought of Eric Voegelin in the main text of this book, since I have already written extensively about him in two earlier books, *Eric Voegelin: Philosopher of History* and *Philosophers of Consciousness: Polanyi, Lonergan, Voegelin, Ricoeur, Girard, Kierkegaard*, but its pertinence to this topic is extensive, as I will occasionally indicate in notes.

6. Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, 40.

In his approach to the psychological study of worldviews, Jaspers looked first for their relatively most differentiated forms. He divided the field of worldview (*Weltanschauung*) as such into subjective and objective aspects or poles: dispositions (*Einstellungen*) on the subjective side and particular world pictures (*Weltbilder*) on the objective. He described dispositions as general ways of relating to the objective pole of consciousness; they could be considered something like Kant's transcendental forms, he suggested, insofar as they involve a tendency of the subject to apply a particular grid of interpretation to experience.

These dispositions fall into three basic patterns, according to Jaspers's analysis: object-oriented dispositions, self-reflective dispositions, and enthusiastic dispositions. The object-oriented dispositions could lean toward the active (he mentions Marx as an example) or the contemplative (Plato, Eckhart, Spinoza, Kant, Schopenhauer, Hegel), as could the self-reflective ones. He thought of the enthusiastic disposition as trying to reach beyond the subject-object division. It was caught up in striving and movement not toward a grasp of some object, but "upward" or "beyond." The enthusiastic disposition, he said, is essentially love, enthusiasm for life itself, transcending all particular drives.⁷ Enthusiasm, Jaspers believed, is not only the predominant element in mystical experience (it is worth remembering that the word enthusiasm originally meant "filled with the divine" or "possessed by a god") but also present in all the other dispositions as the principle of vitality in each—which means, he said, that the vital principle of psychic life as such is love.⁸ Enthusiasm in Jaspers's thought is clearly somewhat like what *élan vital* was in that of Henri Bergson or "existential tension" in that of Eric Voegelin. Behind all three, of course, lay Plato's concept of Eros, to which Jaspers himself explicitly referred as a parallel and which might most precisely, if a little clumsily, be rendered into English as something like "existential appetite" or "longing for fullness of life" or even "love of being."

Each of the dispositions, he said, tends toward some particular pattern of objective worldview (that is, *Weltbild*):⁹ the "sensory-spatial," the "intellectual-cultural," and the "metaphysical," which, in Jaspers's scheme, includes both

7. *Ibid.*, 123.

8. "Wie in allen Einstellungen der Enthusiasmus das eigentlich Lebendige ist, ebenso gilt allgemein, dass Leben Liebe ist" (*ibid.*).

9. Since English does not distinguish in Jaspers's manner between *Weltanschauung* and *Weltbild*, I should explain that in my own use of the term *worldview*, I mean by it, as I think English usage does generally, the "object" of thought that Jaspers refers to as *Weltbild*.

the “mythic-demonic” and the “philosophical,” which in turn includes within itself the effort to use reason in the construction of worldviews, negative theology (the attempt to stretch thinking beyond all images and conceptualization), and the mythic-speculative worldview, which, he believed, satisfies the enduring human need to objectify whatever one thinks about and can never be entirely transcended by the efforts of negative theology. There is no need, however, to go into further detail about Jaspers’s analysis of dispositions and their corresponding worldviews; the psychology of dispositions as such is not a focus of the thinkers whose thought we will be exploring in this book.

What Jaspers’s approach calls to attention that is important for the present purpose is that every way of conceiving of the world is related to some more fundamental but less easily noticeable factor in subjectivity. There have been many further suggestions regarding what these subjective factors may be, from death anxiety, Freudian biological drives, and Girardian mimetic impulses to Piaget’s operations and psychological structures, and all of them are valuable as at least partial explanations of why and how we come to think as we do under various circumstances. The next five chapters, beginning with the thought of Piaget and thinkers working out of his tradition, will explore some of those factors that I think are especially helpful for understanding the various forms that religious thinking can take in its manifold evolutions.