

Notes

Introduction

1. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 303. In the latter half of the twentieth century, “the Other” became a familiar expression, especially among thinkers loosely allied under the label “postmodernism.” In that case, “the Other” often referred to persons who are politically, economically, and socially marginalized. The Other is not only regarded as threatening and alien, but as a necessary foil for those possessing power, someone over whom they can exercise their power and privilege. This reading of the Other was given particular saliency by the French philosopher Alexandre Kojève in his lectures on G.W.F. Hegel’s interpretation of the relationship between master and slave. All of this might well be relevant to my coming face to face with the religious Other. However, the emphasis in what follows is focused upon my ability to maintain the intellectual integrity of my religious beliefs in the face of very different beliefs; the Other is primarily an intellectual, cognitive threat here.

2. I shall be referring frequently in this study to the notion of a social plausibility structure for religious belief, a notion that I borrow from Peter Berger’s classic book, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1967).

3. Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism can each be taken as “mainline” examples of American Judaism despite the differences in belief and practice among them. Christianity faces a larger challenge from the sort of pluralism we will be examining because of Christianity’s greater traditional emphasis upon doctrine and theology.

4. See Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

5. Winthrop S. Hudson and John Corrigan, *Religion in America*, fifth edition (New York: Macmillan, 1992), p. 34.

6. Hudson and Corrigan, *Religion in America*, p. 57.

7. As anyone familiar with the academic study of religion as it has been carried out in the past few decades is well aware, the attempt to define religion, indeed even the notion that there exists a discrete phenomenon corresponding to the term “religion,” has been much debated. While I shall make reference to the “return of religion” in my comments on secularization below and will address the challenges in defining religion at the end of Chapter Three, it is important to note that here at the outset I have self-consciously stipulated working definitions for both “religion” and “spirituality.” This will allow us to focus upon particular phenomena without advancing the claim that there is some objective essence of religion and of spirituality that is, in each case, independent of our interpretive prejudices and simply waiting for us to discover it.

Given the stipulative definitions that I have provided, the title of this book might more accurately be rendered as “*Spiritual Pluralism as a Threat to Belief*,” since spiritual pluralism is the broader category and since non-institutional forms of piety embraced by the Other could in principle be as disconfirming as institutional, “religious” ones. But due to the potentially unfamiliar character of my stipulative definitions and to the fact that the expression “spiritual pluralism” is much less familiar than “religious pluralism,” I have chosen the latter formulation for the book’s title.

8. See Garry Wills, *Head and Heart: American Christianities* (New York: Penguin, 2007), p. 7.

9. See, for example, David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). It must be acknowledged, of course, that some of folk piety’s investment in supernatural interventions in the natural order were brought into the orbit of more mainstream Christian thinking by attributing such interventions to God and the devil. The same cannot be said, however, for something such as astrology.

10. Quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 97.

11. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling; Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

12. Andrew Greeley and Michael Hout, *The Truth About Conservative Christians: What They Think and What They Believe* (Chicago: University of Chicago: 2006), p. 14.

13. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, p. 13. Further references to this source in this chapter will be cited in the text by page number only.

14. As we have defined “religion” and “spirituality,” the latter’s susceptibility to secularization might be conceived as significantly less than religion’s. Secularization is often defined in terms of piety’s retreat from the centers of power in the larger society to the private sphere. Given that spirituality is at home in the private sphere, this version of secularization, at least, is much more corrosive of religion than of spirituality. This has, in fact, been one argument against secularization theory. It often suggests that piety in general is being continually weakened when in fact piety is as strong as ever: it is simply that institutional forms of piety are being exchanged for more private ones. However, in countries such as Sweden and Denmark, even private spiritual convictions seem to have largely disappeared from among the populace. See Phil Zuckerman, *Society without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us about Contentment* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

15. Gregory S. Paul, “The Big Religion Questions Finally Solved,” *Free Inquiry*, December 2008/January 2009: 28.

16. Paul, “The Big Questions Finally Solved,” p. 28.

17. “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2008, Washington, D.C.: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008.

18. “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” p. 5.

19. “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” p. 5.

20. See Greeley and Hout, *The Truth About Conservative Christians*, p. 7.

21. “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” p. 7.

22. John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, eds., *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), p. 6.

23. Jon Meacham, “The Decline and Fall of Christian America,” *Newsweek*, April 13, 2009, 34-38. Meacham’s article is the cover story, and that cover, with its title displayed in bright red letters against a black background, cleverly alludes to *Time*’s notorious April 8, 1966 cover which boldly asked, in large red letters on a pure black background, “Is God Dead?” The latter was a reference to the “death of God theology” then much in vogue in some circles. Further references to this source will be cited in the text of my essay by page number only.

24. David Ramsey Steele, “Is God Coming Or Going?,” *Philosophy Now*, April/May 2010: 10.

25. Lewis Black, *Me of Little Faith*, ed. Hank Gallo (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), p. 4.
26. Black, *Me of Little Faith*, p. 182.
27. Black, *Me of Little Faith*, p. 35.

Chapter One

1. John Locke, "Essay Concerning Human Understanding," in *Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Lewis White Beck (New York: Free Press, 1966), p. 57.

2. *Dei Filius*, in *Documents of Vatican Council I*, trans. John Broderick (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1971), p. 43. (italics mine)

3. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, in Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

4. See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1959),

5. See Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), and Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004).

6. It must be acknowledged, of course, that while there is, at present, something approaching a common, secular American morality focusing on family values, there are sub-issues under the general heading of family values – abortion comes to mind as an example – that frequently collide with a particular perception of the sacred. Yet what so upsets the anti-abortionist is the fact that abortion is still legal in this country, which suggests to the abortion opponent precisely that the secular component of American culture is almost entirely independent of what he or she takes to be the demands of the sacred.

7. Rita Carter, *Multiplicity: The New Science of Personality, Identity, and the Self* (New York: Little, Brown, 2008), p. 20 (ellipsis in original).

8. Carter, *Multiplicity*, p. 20.

9. Carter actually uses the word "compartmentalization" as a technical term denoting one particular manner in which the brain can produce a multi-faceted self. By contrast, I am utilizing the term in the broader sense of the ability to hold contradictory notions by keeping those notions in temporally separate compartments. The overall thesis of Carter's book is that, while what psychiatrists call Multiple Personality Disorder is indeed an extreme condition that must be deemed pathological, even the best-adjusted person is characterized not by a single, discrete personality, but,

rather, by an array of loosely allied sub-personalities. For her technical use of “compartmentalization,” see *Multiplicity*, pp. 67-69.

10. Carter, *Multiplicity*, p. 21.

11. See, for example, Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 1-4.

12. Georges Roy, “Meta-atheism: Religious Avowal as Self-Deception,” in Louise M. Antony, ed., *Philosophers Without God: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life* (New York: Oxford Press, 2007), p. 245.

13. Roy, “Meta-atheism,” p. 252.

14. Michael S. Gazzaniga, *Human: The Science Behind What Makes Us Unique* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 102.

15. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961).

16. Dorothy Rowe, “Tell Me Lies, Tell Me Sweet Little Lies . . .” *New Scientist*, June 19-25, 2010: 29.

Chapter Two

1. Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, third edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 95.

2. Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, p. 133.

3. Reverend Bailey Smith, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,9528100.00/html>. Accessed January 16, 2010.

4. “Conservative Christians,” in Greeley and Hout’s sense, are defined by being inheritors of the principles of the Protestant Reformation; by belonging to particular denominations; by embracing biblical literalism, the born-again experience, and the duty to evangelize; and by tending to hold what are usually classified as conservative political positions. Given this last characteristic, “Conservative Christians” are to be distinguished from members of African-American denominations, whose members may share the other characteristics listed here. See Greeley and Hout, *The Truth About Conservative Christians*.

5. Of course, this requires that the fundamentalist does not allow himself or herself actually to confront the disconfirming logic represented by spiritual pluralism.

6. Tim F. LeHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 1998). This is the first installment in what turned out to be a series of sixteen books, with the last published in 2007. The film version (2001) was produced by Cloud Ten Pictures in association with Namesake Entertainment and directed by Vic Sarin.

7. See Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 11.

8. “Speaker at McCain rally says non-Christians want an Obama win,” www.cnn.com, October 12, 2008. The rally was held on October 11, 2008.

9. Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, p. 133.

10. That evasion is a part of the fundamentalist use of the sense of moral responsibility to trump the disconfirming power of pluralism is pointed out in note 5 above.

11. We ought not to forget, however, that fundamentalism is, in its own way, a modification of traditional Christian belief rather than the simple defense of that belief that it claims to be. As we have seen, Christian fundamentalism is a peculiarly modern phenomenon, a movement that picks as fundamental precisely those beliefs that appear to be under attack in the modern and contemporary worlds. It is instructive, for instance, that Biblical inerrancy was not taught by Martin Luther in the fashion that it is by Christian fundamentalists.

Chapter Three

1. Gustav Niebuhr, *Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America* (New York: Viking Press, 2008), p. xvi.

2. Quoted in Niebuhr, *Beyond Tolerance*, p. xxiv.

3. For a helpful analysis of the present state of the discussion of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, see Hugh Nicholson, “The Reunification of Theology and Comparison in the New Comparative Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (September 2009): 609-46.

4. It is important to understand at the outset of this chapter that neither it, nor this book as a whole, is intended as an effort to construct a pluralist theology or a “theology of religions.” First of all, I undertake no foundational work exploring the notion of the ultimate, work that is usually necessary for a pluralist theology (we need to know something about the ultimate in order to explain how it can be the object of multiple religions). More important, nothing in this chapter or the chapters that follow endorses a particular form of pluralist theology. Rather, the goal is to explore the contemporary cultural appeal of understanding the world religions as compatible, particularly in the light of the challenge of the disconfirming Other. And while our point of entry into this topic does make mention of John Hick’s famous pluralist theology, the heart of our endeavor deals with three popular writers (only one of whom is a Christian). None of them attempts to build a full-scale “world theology” or “theology of religions”:

Thich Nhat Hahn and Deepak Chopra try to show the compatibility of Christianity with their own Asian spiritual sensibilities. Bishop Shelby Spong mentions compatibility only in passing but sets forth a theological proposal that jells in relevant respects with what the other two writers have to say. Finally, I make no truth claims about the modification strategies that I find in the books by Nhat Hahn, Chopra, and Spong. In short, the goal of this study is not to advocate a new world theology, but, rather, to explore the problem of the disconfirming Other and how contemporary sensibilities align in such a way as to favor a particular type of modification strategies. This exploration will include a consideration of the potential pitfalls of the kind of modification strategies under review.

5. For the best overview of the material in Rahner's thought that is of interest to us, see his *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978).

6. Joseph Ratzinger, *What It Means to Be a Christian: Three Sermons*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 45.

7. Ratzinger, *What It Means to be a Christian*, p. 46. Lest there be any confusion on the matter, it should be emphasized that Pope Benedict opposes, in no uncertain terms, a full-blown pluralist theology, in which Jesus Christ's unique role in humanity's salvation would be relativized. See especially his Declaration "*Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Univerality of Jesus Christ and the Church*," issued when Benedict, as Cardinal Ratzinger, was head of the Church's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (often described as Roman Catholicism's "doctrinal watchdog" agency). The Declaration is available at the Vatican website, www.vatican.va. See also Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

8. See John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1990), pp. 112-19.

9. As I have attempted consistently to make clear, given the many strata that constitute spiritual and religious phenomena, there are also myriad ways to study those phenomena, and in this book I am concentrating on the portions amenable to theology and philosophy of religion. But even the specific question at issue for us here, namely, pluralism and how believers' attitudes to it may change over time, can be studied with tools such as socio-economic analysis and game-theory, as is made evident by Robert Wright in his book *The Evolution of God* (New York: Little, Brown: 2009). Wright makes much of the notion of "non-zero-sum" games or situations versus a "zero-sum" scenario. The latter is

illustrated by you and I making a bet for five dollars. If you win, I have to pay you five dollars: a five-dollar bill leaves my wallet, never to return, while your wallet acquires a new bill. One person must always end up with a score of zero. But other games and phenomena are non-zero sum undertakings. They are “win-win.” We see the non-zero-sum dynamic at work, argues Wright, when members of two different groups recognize that cooperation with the other group will be of advantage to them both (as often happens, for example, as the world economy evolves). Wright sees this in spirituality too, so that it is almost inevitable that spiritual or religious groups will move from something akin to exclusivism to something more like what, on the theological level, we are calling pluralist thinking about the divine.

10. See, for example, Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” in *Faith and Rationality*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 16-93.

11. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

12. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 49.

13. It is worth nothing that, for Lindbeck, some Christian language, specifically what are usually labeled “doctrines,” are, contrary to initial appearances, not propositions at all, and hence cannot be threatened by the propositions found in others’ belief systems. Rather, doctrines are second-order rules that specify how first-order propositions are to be properly used. What Lindbeck fails to acknowledge, however, as I read him, is that doctrines such as the pronouncements of the Council of Nicea about Jesus being of the same substance as the Father, *presuppose* various first-order propositions about God and the Christian life. He does point out that doctrines rest upon *some* first-order propositions, but he does not include God-talk itself among these propositions. Lindbeck’s interest in doctrines in particular is a function of the central concern of his book, namely, the ecumenical dialogue within Christianity.

14. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 51.

15. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 50.

16. When Lindbeck’s book appeared in 1984, the cultural-linguistic approach to studying religions had, as he himself points out, already made significant inroads in various academic circles, but not in Christian theology, the reflection on Christian faith carried out from the perspective of that faith itself. There was, then, something undeniably refreshing and provocative about Lindbeck’s application of the cultural-linguistic perspective within the discipline of theology. Time has marched on,

however, and the cultural-linguistic approach in general, particularly insofar as it is considered a form of postmodernist or post-structuralist theory, has lost ground as it has been attacked by those embracing other perspectives, including cognitive science, which puts much greater emphasis upon common human traits, traits built into the human brain, than the cultural-linguistic school allows. As an example of such an attack, one concerned with understanding religion in particular, see D. Jason Slone, *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn't* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). We shall return to Lindbeck's reflections on religion, this time to consider his contrast between the cultural-linguistic approach and what he calls "experiential-expressivism," in Chapter Four below.

17. While both Plantinga and Lindbeck are motivated by relatively orthodox Christian convictions, James Carse provides a more radical approach to thinking about Christianity and the other world religions, but it too might be taken to erase the apparent problem of pluralism and the disconfirming Other: Carse holds that religion is not about belief at all! While Carse's position is genuinely intriguing, it seems to me that Carse's approach cannot help us avoid disconfirmation by the Other, for the simple reason that the vast majority of the adherents of the world religions do suppose that religion entails belief. See James P. Carse, *The Religious Case Against Belief* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

18. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead, 1995), p.1. Further quotations from this book will be cited by page number in the body of my essay.

19. Deepak Chopra, *The Third Jesus: The Christ We Cannot Ignore* (New York: Harmony Books, 2008), p. 211. Further quotations from this book will be cited by page number in the body of my essay.

20. Schleiermacher's central exploration of God-consciousness is to be found in his *The Christian Faith*, trans. and ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

21. Oddly enough, the one place where Chopra's broad-minded pluralist approach displays a dismaying lacuna is in his references to Judaism. He takes for granted the old Christian portrayal of the Judaism of Jesus' day as an unimaginative, constrictive legalism and projects upon that Judaism the distinctively Christian doctrine of original sin. See, for example, *The Third Jesus*, p. 17. One wonders whether, in addition to a simple lack of historical knowledge of Judaism, Chopra's misapprehensions are fueled by his special reliance on the notoriously anti-Jewish Gospel of John for his interpretation of Jesus.

22. Regarding Chopra's apparently more quietest take thanks to his notion of the everyday world as one of illusion, see, for example, *The Third Jesus*: "physical life, even at its most cruel, can be transcended" (i.e., in consciousness) (p. 111). In a similar fashion, he also says: "The rescue that people need today won't conquer Caesar [Jesus' designation for the political powers that be], but it will conquer duality. Jesus symbolized the transcendent self that renders the ego irrelevant and transforms duality into oneness with God" (p. 217).

23. John Shelby Spong, *Jesus for the Non-Religious: Recovering the Divine at the Heart of the Human* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), p. 222. Further quotations from this book will be cited by page number in the body of my essay.

24. If we juxtapose the material elements at the heart of this modification strategy – the emphases on immanence, experience, and ineffability – with the formal approach that our ideal type of Christian (described in the Introduction) takes toward belief, an approach that privileges the cognitive dimension of spirituality, it is tempting to see a tension. If I am particularly invested in the cognitive dimensions of the Christian life, and if it is precisely that focus on the cognitive that attunes me to the disconfirming power of the Other and disposes me toward the modification strategy exemplified by Nhat Hahn, Chopra, and Spong, what are we to make of the fact that that modification strategy itself edges away from cognition and toward experience and ineffability? The answer is to be found in the distinction between the formal and material sides of the equation made above: there is no tension or contradiction, for my cognitive focus is what allows me to calculate and to understand that movement toward a greater emphasis on experience and ineffability will negate the Other's ability to effect disconfirmation.

25. Quoted in Mark C. Taylor, *After God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 5.

26. We have drawn upon Eliade at some length above. For Otto's central work, see *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

27. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New Hope Kentucky: Urbi et Orbi, 1994), pp. 115-16; emphasis in original.

28. Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn, Press, 1973).

29. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo?*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1903).

Chapter Four

1. See, for example, Mircea Eliade, ed., *Essential Sacred Writings from Around the World* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1967), pp. 5-7.

2. Peter Berger explains Weber's perspective in *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1967), p. 111.

3. The forms of Protestantism that are least likely to disenchant the world may well be those rooted in Pietism, for that tradition often views the relationship of the individual believer with Jesus Christ not as threatening and distant, but as personal and akin to the friendship between two human beings. Some commentators go so far as to suggest an erotic relationship in Pietism between Jesus and the believer.

4. Mark C. Taylor, *After God*, p. 297. Taylor's observation here is more applicable to the history of modern Protestant theology than to Roman Catholic thought.

5. See, for example, David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975), and Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

6. See Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

7. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983).

8. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

9. Thich Nhat Hahn, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, p. 194.

10. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 171.

11. One might object that the sort of experience generated with the help of sensible intuition is already "internal experience," given that it too – indeed any sort of experience, qua experience – plays itself out in the mind (and is powerfully molded by the mind, if one accepts the whole of Kant's philosophy). But it is evident, I think, that what we are designating "internal experience" has a peculiar right to that designation insofar as it plays itself out in the mind without being (directly) dependent upon sensible intuition, which can be traced back to physical phenomena external to the mind. Of course, the God believed to be given to consciousness via this internal experience is claimed to be external to the mind as well, but not in the manner of a physical object; God's externality

to the mind is not one of physical distance. What is more, as we have emphasized, this God can be claimed to be immanent at the same time that it is external or transcendent to the mind.

12. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 21.

13. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 31.

14. For a particularly perceptive account of Buddhism's role in contemporary America, see Chapter Twelve, "Western Dharmas," in Pankaj Mishra, *An End to Suffering: The Buddha in the World* (New York: Picador Press, 2004).

15. *The Holy Qur'an*, text, translation, and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Press, 1983).

16. See Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 115.

17. Of course, we have produced no arguments showing that the divine or infinite actually is immanent within human consciousness, nor that the divine can be and actually is experienced by some spiritually inclined persons, nor that such experience and its object, if they exist, are necessarily in some sense ineffable. All we have is the testimony of Nhat Hahn, Chopra, and Spong. Thus, our investigation should in no way be confused with a foundational or apologetic theology: the reality of the ultimate that the believer wants to protect from disconfirmation by the Other may or may not exist. Our concern, rather, has simply been to show how certain modification strategies can render the Other's beliefs consistent with the believer's own and thus no longer disconfirming. Whether the beliefs in question are "true," whether they accurately reflect reality, has not been and will not be part of our topic.

Chapter Five

1. See above, p. 9.

2. See the "Coda" in Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*.

3. At least they need not conflict when viewed simply as practices. If, however, we insist that all such practices presuppose facts about the world and the way in which it works, which indeed they do, then we may reasonably look for contradictions also among the conceptual underpinnings of diverse practices. It is simply that the majority of New Age teachers – though not all, as we shall see below in our discussion of those who attempt to enlist science on behalf of the New Age – have effected an epistemic reordering such that the ontological claims about how the universe is ultimately put together (claims that are on the top rung of our ideal Christian's spiritual concerns, claims that deal with the reality

of God, after all) are now relegated to a lower rung of the ladder, with the top rung now occupied with subjective perceptions of therapeutic efficacy.

4. See, for example, Michael Shermer, "Hope Springs Eternal: Science, the Afterlife, and The Meaning of Life," *The Skeptic*, 13, no. 4 (2010): 52-55, and Michael Shermer, *How We Believe: Science, Skepticism, and the Search for God*, 2nd ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 2003), pp. 48-58. Shermer actually critiques John Edward and James Van Praagh in particular.

5. For a particularly thorough exercise in the scientific scrutiny of alternative medicine, see R. Barker Bausell, *Snake Oil Science: The Truth about Complementary and Alternative Medicine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

6. Susan Blackmore, "Where Are You, Sue?" in *What Have You Changed Your Mind About: Today's Leading Minds Rethink Everything*, ed. John Brockman (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), p. 19.

7. Blackmore, "Where Are You, Sue?," p. 20.

8. See, as but one example, Benedict Carey, "Long-Awaited Medical Study Questions the Power of Prayer," *New York Times*, March 31, 2006, p. 1.

9. Lynne McTaggart, *The Field: The Quest for the Secret Force of the Universe*, updated ed. (New York: Harper, 2008), p. xxiii.

10. Phaedra and Isaac Bonewits, *Real Energy: Systems, Spirits, and Substances to Heal, Change, and Grow* (Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press, 2007).

11. See Victor J. Stenger, *Quantum Gods: Creation, Chaos, and the Search for Cosmic Consciousness* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2009).

12. See Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret* (New York: Atria, 2006), and the film *What the Bleep Do We Know?* (2004), directed by Betsy Chasse *et al.*

13. See Michael Shermer, "Quantum Flapdoodle and Other Flummery," his Foreword to Victor Stenger's *Quantum Gods*, p. 8. Some readers, having seen the New Age's traditional emphasis on technique, and noting that even when New Agers give more weight than usual to the New Age as a belief system it remains inconsistent with the scientific worldview, might conclude that the New Age ought to be categorized not as "religion" but as "magic." The traditional divide between religion and magic suggests that, for the religious person, any supernatural favors granted one are the gracious gifts of a power beyond one's control, while magic is all about mastering techniques for controlling the world. Given that the religion versus magic distinction is most often invoked by those in favor of religion, it is not surprising that, despite the admiration, or even envy, that one might feel for Harry Potter, magic is usually frowned upon as a self-deceived quest for the essentially selfish ability to manipulate reality. However, given

that our approach to the New Age sees it as a contemporary manifestation of what Albanese calls metaphysical religion and that our particular concern is with its highly pluralistic character, it would not, I think, prove illuminating for us to pursue the magic versus religion distinction here.

Chapter Six

1. "Christians and Lions," *The Economist* (December 31, 2011-January 6, 2012): 9.

2. See Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili, and Vince Rause, *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001), and Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *Born to Believe: God, Science, and the Origin of Ordinary and Extraordinary Beliefs* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

3. This goes to show that the plausibility structure for my belief being strengthened via the modifications has at least two different moments. First, and most important, the plausibility of my beliefs will be reinforced when I adopt the modifications. Second, the attractiveness and apparent wisdom of that process of adoption will itself seem the more plausible the larger the number of persons in my society who have already adopted the modifications before me.

4. See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951-63) vol. 2.

5. "Pew Forum: Many Americans Mix Multiple Faiths," at <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=490>, p. 2. Accessed December 14, 2009.

6. For my attempt to treat this hypothesis in detail, see *To Re-Enchant the World: A Philosophy of Unitarian Universalism* (New York: Xlibris Press, 2004).

7. The first law of thermodynamics states that matter and energy in a closed system can never be either created or destroyed but can only change their form.

8. See Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1993).

9. For an analysis that focuses exclusively upon making spiritual affirmations consistent with the scientific worldview, see my *Beyond the God Delusion: How Radical Theology Harmonizes Science and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).