

We begin this session by reviewing some of the different theories of the soul. Regardless of whether it is metaphor or real, the soul is what makes us who we are. And the world we live in is what the soul is conscious of.

Hindus use meditation to reach a level of consciousness wherein their individual souls are united with the universal soul. The levels are described in the Katha Upanishad:

- Higher than the objects of the senses is *manas* (mind, from *man* think)
- Higher than the mind is *buddhi*, (awakened intellect, cf. Buddha)
- Higher than the intellect is *mahat* (great self, saint, cf. Mahatma Gandhi)
- Higher than the great self is *avyakta* (unmanifest, transcendent)
- Higher than the unmanifest is *purusha* (cosmic soul, absolute, source of all).


Buddhists use similar approaches. The illustration shows a statue of a *luohan* reaching the unmanifest. A *luohan* (Chinese equivalent to Sanskrit *arhat*) is a Buddhist monk who has attained *nirvana* (enlightenment). The legs are crossed with the feet resting on the opposite thighs: the *padmasana* or lotus posture. The position of the hands, called *dhyana mudra*, indicates concentration. Like the Buddha, *luohans* have prominent earlobes. The fact that they are unadorned indicates withdrawal from the riches of the world. They may also indicate a highly developed sense of hearing, so acute as to hear the cries of all the suffering.

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (*Genesis 2:7*)

As the same air assumes different shapes when it enters objects differing in shape, so does the one self take the shape of every creature in whom it is present (*Katha Upanishad 2:2:10*)

spiritual	individual
persistent	social/moral
conscious	reasoning

### Nature of the Soul



At the end of the last session we considered the Roman Catholic view of evolution. The doctrine is that human beings may have evolved from other animals but that the human soul is special – God-given and unprecedented in other life-forms.

The soul is often held in disrepute by scientists since an incorporeal and spiritual being does not make sense in terms of the physical world. However, the idea of the soul as that which has an individual personality and which interacts freely with the world is worthwhile. Other words are “self” or “person” or “mind” or “consciousness”

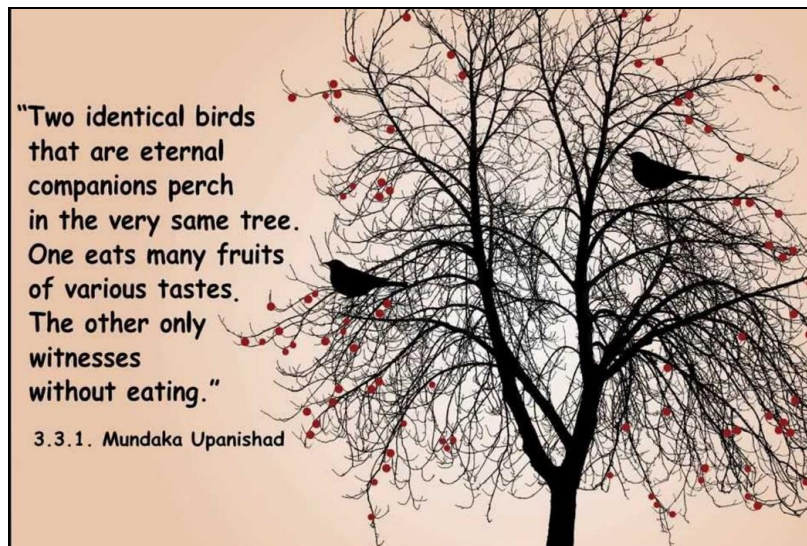
How one considers the soul differs among religions, mainly on how much the soul is individual and how much part of a more universal consciousness. Western religions focus on the individual and his or her responsibilities. Eastern religions consider how the individual can become one with the universal. Buddhism even recommends that one deny or dissolve the individual self – “no-self” or *anatta*.

The lower left shows the main characteristics that have been attributed to the soul. The first is its non-corporeal nature – a characteristic that may not be necessary. The second related attribute is that it persists as the body decays or dies – again something that may not be true. The other characteristics can be used to describe the mind or the brain.

The illustration on the slide uses the alchemical symbol for quintessence (also known as the “philosopher’s stone”) – “Make of a man and woman a circle; then a quadrangle; out of this a triangle; make again a circle, and you will have the Stone of the Wise.” In the inner circle is the symbol for the way in Taoism – the *taijitu*. The background is composed of neurons



Some Egyptian writings propose other parts to the human soul in addition to *ba* and *ka*. The *ren* is the name of a person. The *jib* is the heart (emotional and moral center). The *sheut* is the shadow or death.



The illustration is from  
<http://tripurashakti.com/>

In Hindu religious thought, the "soul" is sometimes considered to be of two kinds. *Jiva* is the individual soul – the one that experiences the pleasures and the suffering of experience. The word in Sanskrit comes from a root meaning "to breathe." It comes down to us through the Latin *vivus* (living) in words such as "vital." *Atman* is the universal soul – the creative life-force of the universe. Each person shares to some extent in this life-force. The word *atman* comes from another Indo-European root meaning "breath." The goal of Hinduism is to join the individual spark of atman to the universal atman – to become one with God.

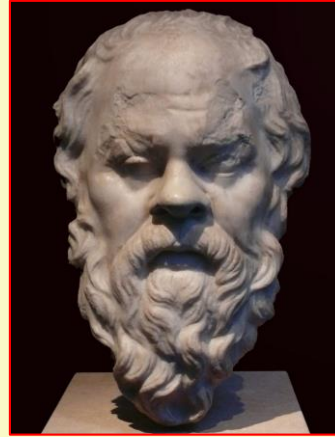
### Soul in Ancient Greece

The Greeks proposed that reason was the main function of the soul. In *The Republic* Plato attributes to Socrates the idea of a tripartite soul (*psyche*):

- reason (*logos*)
- spirit (*thymos*)
- appetite (*epithymia*)

Aristotle wrote in his *De Anima* that there are three levels to the soul

- vegetative
- sensitive
- rational



Socrates (470-399 BCE)

### Amor and Psyche

In his *Metamorphoses* the Roman poet Apuleius tells the story of how the god Amor (Cupid) fell in love with Psyche and visited her at night when he could not be recognized. When Psyche violates his trust and shines a light on him, she is condemned to various trials. Ultimately, she visits Hades and on her return enters a death-like sleep. Cupid revives her, she becomes immortal and they are married.

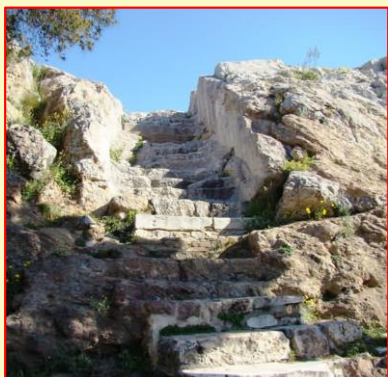


*Psyche revived by Cupid's Kiss*  
Antonio Canova, 1787

An ancient story may provide an allegory of how the soul develops, and how it reconciles passion and reason. The story (much simplified in the above summary) has been interpreted in many ways. One Freudian approach is that Psyche becomes aware of her subconscious passions. Initially she is unable to control them but finally she reaches a compromise with her passions and lives happily ever after.

Apuleius was a Latin author in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE.

## Panentheism



Steps leading to the Areopagus

In his sermon on Mars Hill (the Areopagus) near the Acropolis in Athens, Paul quoted from the Greek Epimenides, urging his listeners:

That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said

*Acts 17: 27-28*

Most western thought has focused on the individuality of the soul. However, another view of the soul's relation to the world is expressed in "panthesim." Theism generally separates God from the world:  $G \neq W$ . Pantheism identifies God with the world:  $G = W$ . Panentheism makes the world part of a greater God:  $G > W$ .

Paul's sermon describes how the individual is infused with the divine.

Several modern philosophers have promoted panentheism, particularly in its process form, wherein God is the universe becoming itself. (e.g. Clayton, P., & Peacocke, A. R. (2004). *In whom we live and move and have our being: Panentheistic reflections on God's presence in a scientific world.* ). Since the process is intelligible rather than mysterious, science becomes the study of God in all his manifestations. Process theology also provides a way of reconciling the existence of God with the presence of suffering in the world. God and the universe are in the process of becoming. Evil and suffering are present to the extent that this process is as yet incomplete.

Panentheism fits well with the writings of Hinduism. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna equates his divine self with the *atman* (soul) that pervades the universe, being part of every individual self that exists therein:

He who sees Me everywhere,  
And sees all things in Me  
I am not lost to him,  
And he is not lost to Me.

Panentheist theology is compatible with many tenets of Christian belief. Christ as the incarnation of God is a powerful metaphor of God infusing the world with love. The God of process panentheism is equivalent to the *logos* of the prologue to the Gospel of John. Christ was sent to the world to make intelligible the idea of God.

However, the resurrection of Christ clashes with the laws of nature. Such an event could not be the work of a panentheist God. Since most Christian theologians have difficulty considering the resurrection as metaphor, panentheism is not accepted by mainline Christian churches.



## Skepticism

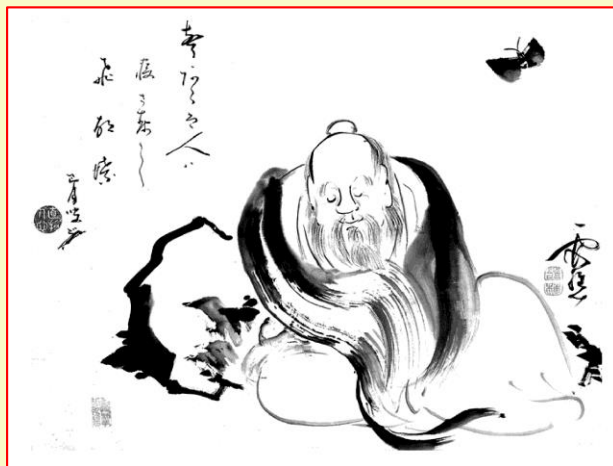
When considering what is true, we are well served by refusing to believe something until it has been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt.

In the 1600s philosophers began to doubt their experience. Dreams seem true at the time but when we awaken we realize that they were only dreams. Our perceptions are often false. Dreams and illusions suggest that things may not actually be how they appear.

Many people are skeptical about such ideas as the soul and God.

Skepticism has a long history Perhaps the most famous skeptic was Pyrrho of Elis (360-270 BCE), who doubted everything. He believed that against every statement a contradictory statement can be advanced and justified. This Pyrrhonism was not cynical. Rather it led to a state of mind *ataraxia* (not perturbed) somewhat akin to the Buddhist state of withdrawal from the world. Indeed, Pyrrho had visited India and may have learned of Buddhist ideas.

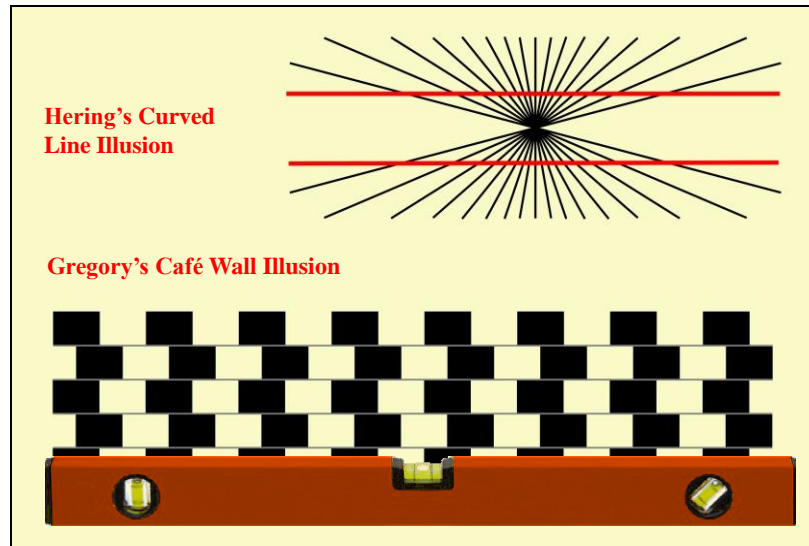
## Chuang Tzu Dreaming of Being a Butterfly



Dreams can easily make us skeptical about the real world.

During a dream we are usually unaware that our experience has no basis in the real world. At the moment of the experience, it is therefore difficult to distinguish dreams from reality. This issue has a long literary history. In the 4th century BCE, Chuang Tzu was unsure whether he was

Chuang Tzu who had just woken up from a dream of being a butterfly or whether he was a butterfly dreaming that he was Chuang Tzu. The illustration shows Ike no Taiga's representation of this story (Japan, 18<sup>th</sup> century CE).



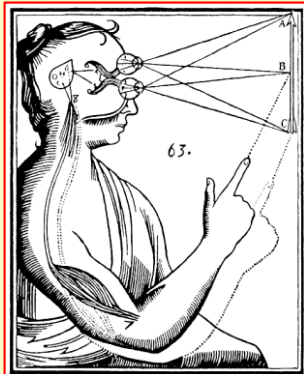
So is our idea that we have a soul an illusion?

Visual illusions are common. They help us to understand how the visual system works.

We quickly learn that things may not always look the way they are, and we often double-check our perception using a different view.

Despite the illusion of the tilting tiles in Richard Gregory's café-wall, we can prove with a spirit level that they are actually all horizontal.

We can similarly prove that the red lines in the Hering Illusion are not curved.



from *Treatise on Man*, written in 1632, withdrawn in 1633 because of Galileo's trial, finally published in 1662

### Consciousness

If we reject all of which we can entertain the smallest doubt, and even imagine that it is false, we can easily suppose that there is neither God, nor sky, nor bodies, and even that we ourselves have neither hands nor feet, nor body. Yet we cannot in the same way suppose, while we doubt of the truth of these things, that we ourselves are nothing, for there is a repugnance to conceiving that what thinks does not exist at the very time when it thinks. So "I think, therefore I am" [*cogito ergo sum*] is the first and most certain idea that occurs to anyone who philosophizes in an orderly way.

René Descartes, 1644

Illusions have bothered philosophers for many years. If we cannot be sure of what we see, how can we be sure of anything?



Descartes began to write about how the human brain worked in his *Treatise on Man*. The illustration shows the eyes being activated by visual input. This sends fluid to the pineal gland which directs the fluid to the muscles causing the arm to point to the perceived object.

Galileo's condemnation by the Church in 1633 slowed down the progress of science. Fearing that the Church would not agree with his findings, Descartes decided first to provide a philosophical justification for his work – *The Discourse on the Method* (1637). He proposed a method of doubting everything until we are left with something that we cannot doubt – that we are conscious of our doubt. This led him to his famous *je pense donc je suis* or *cogito ergo sum*. The idea was first expressed in French and then in Latin in the *Principia Philosophiae* of 1644. Descartes used this irrefutable fact as a firm foundation on which to base an understanding of ourselves, the universe and God. The conscious thinking self is thus the basis of all we know.

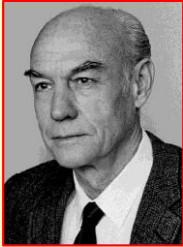
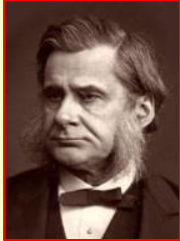
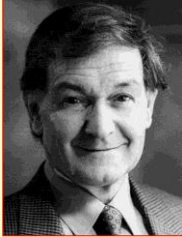
In *Les passions de l'âme* (1649), Descartes proposed that the pineal gland was *le principal siège de l'âme* (the seat of the soul).

### Mind and Brain

MIND, n. A mysterious form of matter secreted by the brain. Its chief activity consists in the endeavour to ascertain its own nature, the futility of the attempt being due to the fact that it has nothing but itself to know itself with (Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*, 1911).

 <p><b>Dualism:</b> Mind and brain are two separate kinds. God knows how they communicate. (e.g. René Descartes, 1596-1650)</p>	<p><b>Idealism:</b> All that exists are ideas. The “real” world is just an illusion (e.g. Bishop George Berkeley, 1685-1753).</p>	
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How consciousness occurs – how mind is manifest in brain – has been a matter of great philosophical debate since it was considered in the works of Descartes. Yet he basically espoused the idea of dualism – a spiritual soul/mind in a corporeal body/brain.

Mind and Brain	
 <b>Emergentism:</b> Consciousness is an emergent property of particular patterns of neuronal activity. (e.g. Roger Sperry, 1913-1994)	 <b>Materialism:</b> Consciousness is an epiphenomenon with no causal connection with matter. (e.g. Thomas Huxley, 1825-1895)
 <b>Quantum uncertainty:</b> Consciousness is a result of quantum processes in neuronal microtubules in the human brain. (e.g. Roger Penrose, 1931- )	

So which approach is true?

How should we understand our consciousness?



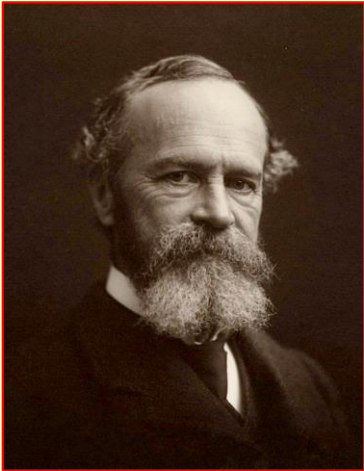
This is a clip from the movie *The Matrix*.

Keanu Reeves plays the character Neo who has come to believe that there may be more to the world than what he is being told. Laurence Fishburne plays Morpheus. He tells Neo that he can take the blue pill and accept what he is told or take the red pill and try to figure out what is really happening.

The full episode is on YouTube:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VFDIKgm\\_QI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VFDIKgm_QI)

My suggestion is that you should not accept a completely materialist or a completely idealist interpretation of reality. Bishop Berkeley and Thomas Huxley took the blue pill. I suggest that you take the red pill and, to quote Morpheus, “see how deep the rabbit-hole goes.”



**William James (1842-1910)**

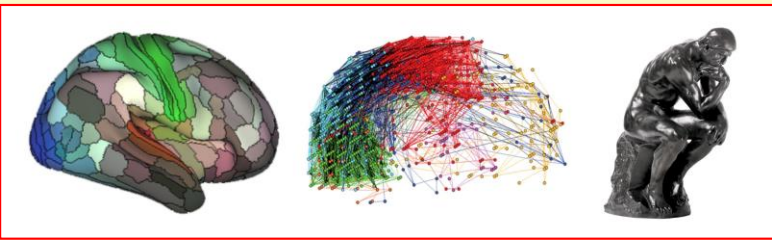
- 1) Every thought tends to be part of a personal consciousness.
- 2) Within each personal consciousness thought is always changing.
- 3) Within each personal consciousness thought is sensibly continuous.
- 4) It always appears to deal with objects independent of itself.
- 5) It is interested in some parts of these objects to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects – chooses from among them, in a word – all the while.

*The Principles of Psychology*, 1890  
Chapter IX: The Stream of Thought

Photograph 1903

Now we shall consider what is going on in the consciousness of an awake human being. William James characterized our waking consciousness – the stream of thought – as personal, changing, continuous, independent and selective. William James was the older brother of the novelist Henry James.

**Neuroscience of the Soul**

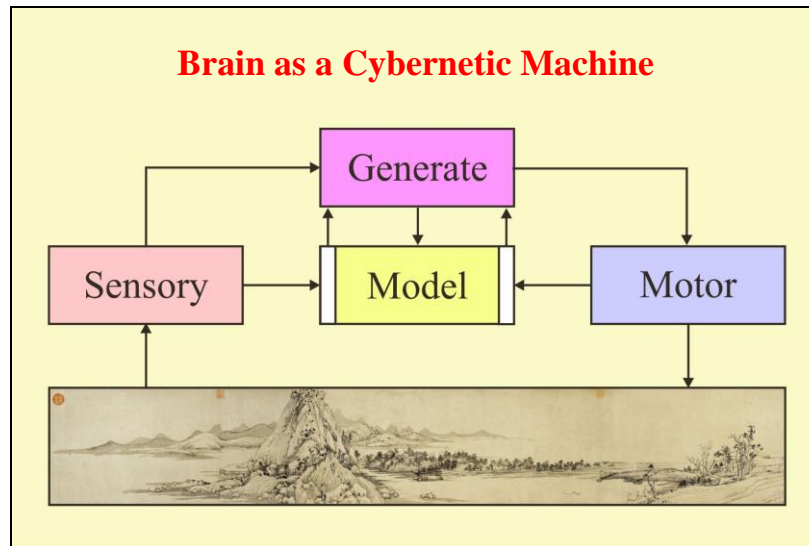


Neuroscientists are now able to study what is happening in the human brain when it is consciously processing information about the world and deciding how to respond to that world. Two basic principles underlie conscious processing:

- (i) multiple discrete areas of the brain are activated, each devoted to a specific type of processing
- (ii) these are functionally connected according to complex patterns.

This slide illustrates the idea that conscious thought occurs through the interactions between multiple areas of the brain. It contains from left to right a diagram of the different regions of the

cerebral cortex (Glasser et al., *Nature*, 536, 171-178, 2016), a figure of the interconnecting networks in the cortex (Meunier et al., *Frontiers in Neuroinformatics*, 3, 37, 2009), and a reproduction of Rodin's *Thinker* (1904).



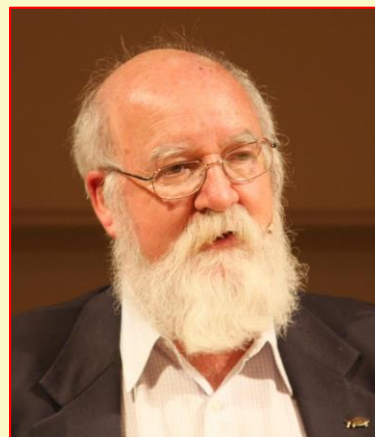
The brain contains myriads of feedback loops. The illustration shows how these feedback circuits can generate models that it then fits to incoming sensory information, and creates motor behavior that fits to a model of desired action. Consciousness is based on the model of the world that we construct. The system only works if there is a real world – here represented by a part of Huang Gongwang's scroll painting of *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (1350 CE).

The word “cybernetic” – deriving from the Greek word *kybernao*, to steer or govern – was coined by Norbert Wiener in 1948 to describe the process whereby feedback-systems could control behavior.

### Multiple Drafts

Daniel Dennett has proposed that consciousness involves the brain making multiple interpretations of the information that is available to it. As more information arrives, the brain may discard inappropriate interpretations. The contents of consciousness are under “continual editorial revision.”

At higher levels, the brain constructs a personal narrative to link together the events of our lives. This is also continually revised. We are all “virtuoso novelists.”



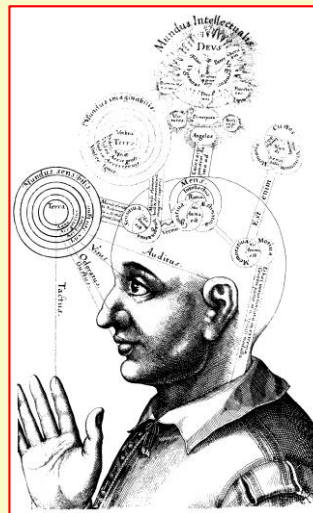
Daniel Dennett, 2008

Conscious perception actively interprets what is happening in the world to cause our sensations. We try to make the best sense out of what we experience. Dan Dennett has proposed that consciousness involves an ongoing interpretation of what is happening. We make multiple drafts to explain our experience. What we are conscious of at any one time is our best attempt to explain the information that we are receiving through the senses – the current draft.

### Hic Anima Est

Consciousness is a particular pattern of neuronal activity. This pattern occurs when the cerebral cortex has been activated by brainstem and thalamic reticular systems to process information in a manner that relates present experience to past memory and makes predictions for the future. The pattern is necessarily distributed across multiple areas of cortex and characterized by intense communication between these areas. Feedback loops fit mental models to incoming information and prepare action models for planned behavior.

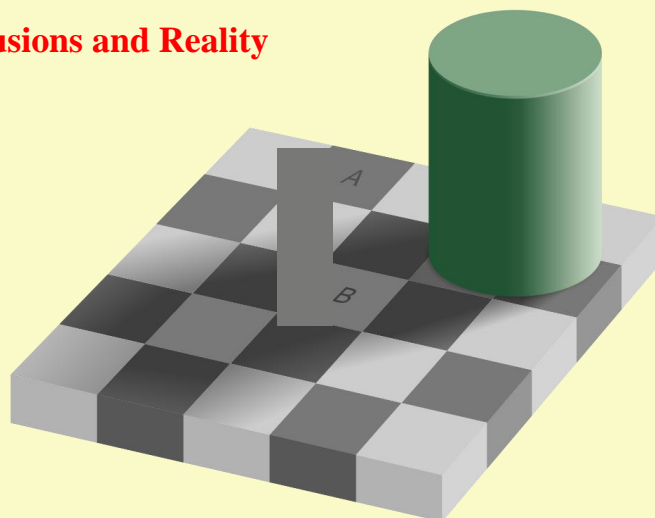
Robert Fludd  
1619



Consciousness is a special kind of cerebral activity that compares what is happening to what we predict should be happening on the basis of what we have learned so far. It is based upon a complex, widespread, intense interaction between many cerebral neurons.

The diagram is from Robert Fludd (not the quotation – that is pure Picton ☺). It shows various processes in the brain – sensation, imagination, reason, memory. The soul is located in all of these processes – *hic anima est*.

### Illusions and Reality



This is our final slide in the discussion of the soul, consciousness, illusion and reality. This illustration demonstrates how our perception is an active and creative process. We construct the best possible interpretation of the information that we receive from our senses.

The square labeled A appears much darker than the square labeled B. In actuality (as shown when they are linked together by the rectangle) they have the same shade of grey. This is considered an illusion. In actual fact it is not. The real checkerboard is composed of dark and light squares and our visual system is correctly perceiving this, despite the shadow cast by the cylinder.

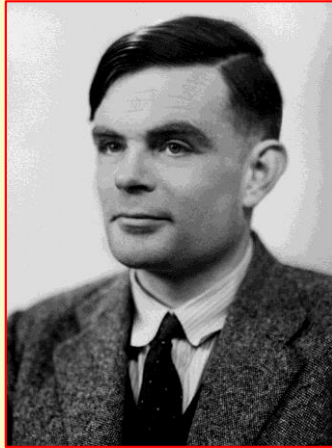
Interestingly, the diagram shows an improper perspective – a square checkerboard should show an apparent decrease in width as it recedes in depth. Our eyes tell us that something is wrong – this is a diagram and not real.

### Artificial Intelligence

In 1950, Turing suggested that computers would soon intelligent behavior. He proposed a test: a human interrogator (or jury) would not be able to distinguish the computer from another human being, after a brief conversation.

In 1991, Hugh Loebner, an American inventor, established prizes for the first computers to pass the Turing test. None has yet won the silver (text only) or gold (audio and visual) prize.

Many computers now use programs based on neural principles (neural nets) to perform intelligently.



Alan Turing (1912-1954)

We have discussed human consciousness and wondered about the human soul. Computers can do many things much better than human beings. They cannot yet act sufficiently like a human being that we cannot recognize the difference. Yet they may in the future become more like us.

Can they become conscious? Can they have a soul?

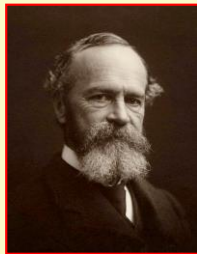


This clip is from the episode entitled *The Measure of a Man* of the TV series *Star Trek the Next Generation* (2<sup>nd</sup> Season). In this episode a commander from Star Fleet wishes to disassemble the android Data (played by Brent Spiner) so that he might learn what makes him special with the goal of creating many more androids like him. Data does not wish this to happen and a hearing is set up to determine whether he has the right to refuse. Captain Picard (Patrick Stewart) is assigned as Data's representative and Commander Riker (Johnathan Frakes) is given the task of presenting Star Fleet's position that Data is just a machine.

A similar clip is on YouTube:

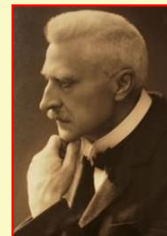
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjuQRCG\\_sUw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjuQRCG_sUw)

### Descriptions of the Numinous



It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective **presence**, a perception of what we may call 'something there,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particular 'senses' by which current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed. (William James, 1902).

I propose to call it '**creature-consciousness**' or creature-feeling. It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures. (Rudolf Otto, 1917).



Having considered consciousness and the soul, we now turn to a particular kind of consciousness – the sense of the numinous. This awareness of something greater than ourselves is the basic religious experience.

The word “numinous” comes from the Greek *neuein* for nodding – perhaps the barely perceptible nodding of a divine idol when it approves of being worshipped or grants a wish.

William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), in the chapter *The Reality of the Unseen* described a feeling of being in the presence of something beyond the grasp of our normal five senses.

In *The Idea of the Holy* (1917), Rudolf Otto used the term numinous to describe the relationship between creature and creator.


You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking – a sense of **inadequacy** to cope with such a visitant and of prostration before it – an emotion which might be expressed in Shakespeare’s words “Under it my genius is rebuked.” This feeling may be described as awe, and the object which excites it as the *Numinous*. (C. S. Lewis, 1947)




The literature of religious experience abounds in references to the pains and terrors overwhelming those who have come, too suddenly, face to face with some manifestation of the **mysterium tremendum**. In theological language, this fear is due to the in-compatibility between man's egotism and the divine purity, between man's self-aggravated separateness and the infinity of God. (Aldous Huxley, 1954)


C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* (1947) used the idea of the numinous to explain how one can believe in God when the existence of suffering makes the concept of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God illogical.

Aldous Huxley discussed the *mysterium tremendum* when reporting his hallucinogenic experiences with mescaline in *The Doors of Perception* (1954).



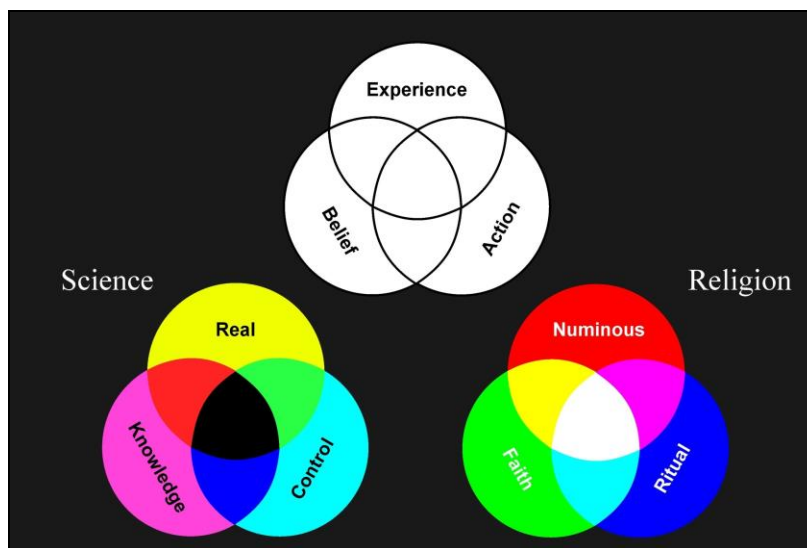
[A]we involves being in the presence of something powerful, along with associated feelings of submission. Awe also involves a difficulty in comprehension, along with associated feelings of confusion, surprise, and wonder. (Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt, 2003)





At such moments it is not only as if we were suddenly perceiving something in reality we had not perceived before, but as if we ourselves were **being perceived**. (Christopher Wiman, 2013)

Cognitive Psychology has considered the numinous under the rubric of “awe” and finds that it combines cognitive uncertainty and intense emotion. This description comes from a 2003 review paper appropriately published in the journal *Cognition and Emotion*. Another aspect of the numinous is the sense that one is being perceived as much as perceiving. The quotation is from Christian Wiman, a poet, in a book called *My Bright Abyss* (2013).



The experience of the numinous parallels the experience of the real world. In general we experience something, derive from that experience a set of beliefs, and then act according to those beliefs in order to gain more experience. When dealing with the real world we create knowledge that then allows us to act within that world. The experience of the numinous leads to faith and faith lead to practices that bring about further interaction with the numinous. For example, revelations can lead to conversion to a faith that promotes prayer and meditation to enhance the experience of the numinous.

### Benefits and Costs of Religion

Religion promotes morality, charity, peace and forgiveness.

Religion encourages intolerance, violence and war.

Religion provides comfort in times of death and bereavement.

Religion fosters depression by accentuating sin and mortality.

Religion supports the poor and downtrodden.

Religion reinforces unfair social orders, misogyny, and prejudice.

Religion teaches us how to handle aspect of life that cannot be understood by science.

Religion resists science and cultivates an irrational approach to truth

Religion maintains a cadre of priests who can counsel and teach.

Religion supports an idle class of priests who contribute nothing

Is religion helpful? Would it be worthwhile for Data to believe in his own soul? As we come to the end of this session, we shall consider some of the costs and benefits of religion – is religion good for the soul?

There is no time to cover all these aspects of religion. I shall briefly touch on the ideas of religion and violence, the comfort of religion in times of death and whether irrational faith can ever be justified.



Paolo Veronese *Wedding Feast at Cana* 1563, Louvre

Feasts are essential to the story of Christ. The illustration shows the wedding feast at Cana, wherein Jesus turned water into wine. This occurred at the beginning of his public ministry. A

banquet at the house of Simon, wherein a woman anointed Jesus with oil, occurred just before he entered Jerusalem for the last time. The Last Supper is the culmination of his ministry.

Many of the parables of Jesus mention celebratory feasts. One parable tells the story of the great man who prepared a banquet for the wedding of his son, but all who were invited provided some excuse. The lord invited in the poor and the lame, but there were still empty seats.

And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled (Luke 14:23).

This verse is used to promote the evangelism of the church and even the forced conversion of those who do not believe in the Christian gospel.



The illustration showing a battle between Crusaders and Saracens is from a medieval book.

There were four main Crusades to the Holy Land. Their goal was to free the city of Jerusalem from the Muslim invaders. They resulted in much bloodshed. A Christian kingdom of Jerusalem was established twice (1099-1187 and 1192-1291), but it was finally ceded to the Muslim powers.



The Albigensian Crusade (1209–1229) was a campaign to eliminate the Cathares from Southern France. They believed that the world was inherently imperfect. Everything is characterized by a good-evil or light-dark dualism. The goodness of man is imprisoned in a body from which it can only be freed by death. The Cathares were gentle and peaceful people. They called themselves *les bons hommes* – the good people. Most of them were captured and burned at the stake.

The Cathares built their castles high in the mountains. The illustration shows Peyrepertuse. This particular one withstood the crusade and was only relinquished later.



Islam promotes *jihad*. This can be interpreted as the striving toward goodness, the conversion of others to the true faith or religious war.

The illustration shows a soldier of ISIS – the Islamic State in Syria. This group believes in violent jihad.

The upper part of the flag is the beginning of the shahada (testimony, creed) of Islam

There is no god but Allah. (“lâ ilâha illa Allâh”)

The script within the circle completes the shahada – the format makes it appear as the seal of the prophet

Mohammed is the messenger of God. (“Mohammedan rasûlu Allâh”)

In professing the faith these two statements are prefaced by the words “Ash hadu an” (I testify that)

For a devout Muslim seeing the shahada on the flag of ISIS must be devastating.



Religion may serve to comfort those who are about to die and those who await the loss of a loved one. The promise of heaven – we shall meet again on the other side – attenuates the grief.

In 1908, Valentine Godé-Darel became the mistress and model of the Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler. In October 1913, she gave birth to their daughter Paulette. During the pregnancy she developed abdominal cancer. Operations to halt its progression in February and May of 1914 were unsuccessful. For over a year, she lived in pain, finally dying on January 25, 1915. In the final months of her illness, Hodler kept her company, creating several hundred sketches and paintings that document the long drawn-out process of her dying. This is one of the early sketches. Note the roses at the foot of the bed and the clock on the wall.

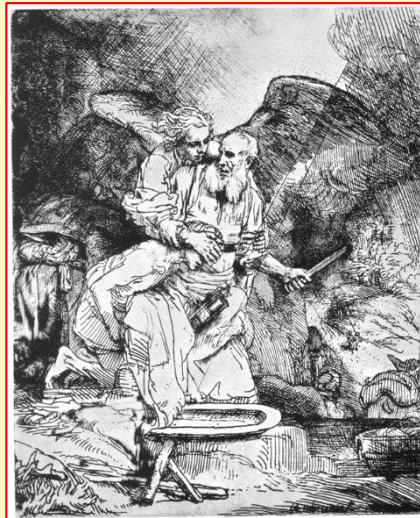
Anyone who has attended the deathbed of a loved one knows how much easier it is to promise immortality than to predict oblivion. However, religion may also share part of the blame for our fear of death. This fear is worse if we believe that we could be immortal, and think that we may be condemned to hell.

### The Akedah

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

(Genesis 22: 1-2)



The session concludes with some thoughts of the story of the Akedah as told in *Genesis 22*. Does this story teach us about faith or warn us of the irrational?

<sup>1</sup> And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

<sup>2</sup> And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

<sup>3</sup> And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

<sup>4</sup> Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

<sup>5</sup> And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

<sup>6</sup> And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.

<sup>7</sup> And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

<sup>8</sup> And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

<sup>9</sup> And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

<sup>10</sup> And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

<sup>11</sup> And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

<sup>12</sup> And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

<sup>13</sup> And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

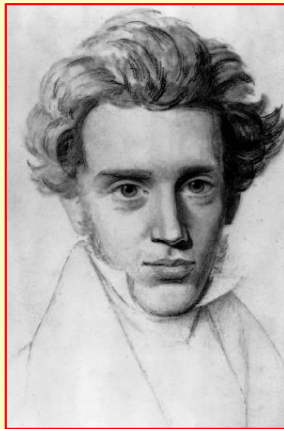
<sup>14</sup> And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.

<sup>15</sup> And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,

<sup>16</sup> And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

<sup>17</sup> That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

<sup>18</sup> And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.



Søren Kierkegaard  
(1813-1855)

When Isaac again saw Abraham's face it was changed, his glance was wild, his form was horror. He seized Isaac by the throat, threw him to the ground, and said, "Stupid boy, dost thou then suppose that I am thy father? I am an idolater. Dost thou suppose that this is God's bidding? No, it is my desire." Then Isaac trembled and cried out in his terror, "O God in heaven, have compassion upon me. God of Abraham, have compassion upon me. If I have no father upon earth, be Thou my father!" But Abraham in a low voice said to himself, "O Lord in heaven, I thank Thee. After all it is better for him to believe that I am a monster, rather than that he should lose faith in Thee. (*Fear and Trembling*, 1843)

This quotation is from a series of re-imaginings of the Akedah story at the beginning of *Fear and Trembling*.

The portrait (~ 1840) was made by Kierkegaard's cousin Niels Christian Kierkegaard.

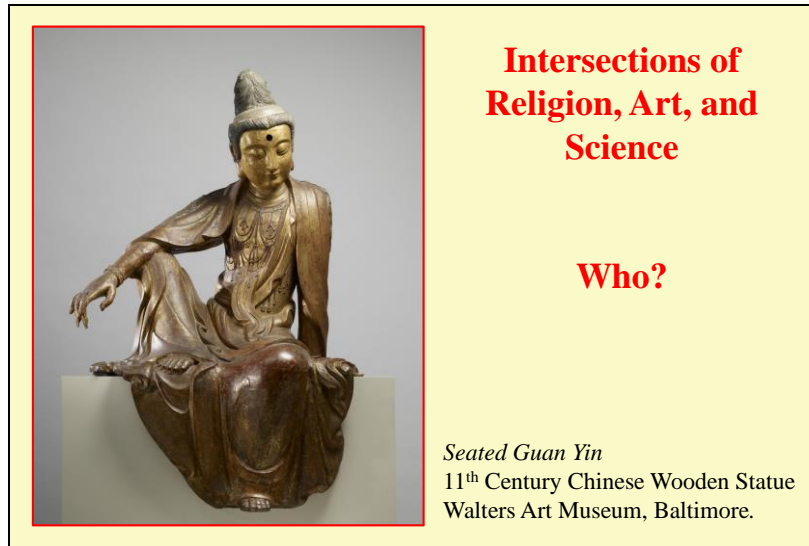


The 1997 movie *Behind the Lines* was based on Pat Barker's novel *Regeneration*. This deals with the experience of several shell-shocked soldiers who were treated at the Craiglockhart hospital in Scotland. This clip shows the death of Wilfred Owen (Stuart Bunce) and the response of Dr. Rivers (played by Jonathan Pryce) to the letter from Siegfried Sassoon (James Wilby) informing him of the death of Owen after he had returned to France. The poem *The Parable of the Old Man and the Young* is one of the last poems that Owen wrote before returning to France, where he died one week before the war ended.

### **The Parable of the Old Man and the Young**

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,  
And took the fire with him, and a knife.  
And as they sojourned both of them together,  
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,  
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,  
But where the lamb for this burnt offering?  
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,  
And builded parapets and trenches there,  
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.  
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,  
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,  
Neither do anything to him. Behold,  
A ram, caught in the thicket by its horns;  
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.  
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,  
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

The old men justified the death of the young on the basis of the greater good. Yet their understanding of the greater good was wrong.



Guan Yin is the most popular deity of China and Southeast Asia. She derives from *Avalokitesvara* – “the one who regards the cries of the world.” The god (or goddess) who has attained the supreme consciousness of compassion. The relaxed and self-assured pose with her right arm resting upon the raised knee is called *lalitasana* (royal ease).

Full consciousness is compassion. Compassion is the goal of human morality. This is the segue to the next session of the course.