

REFRAMING CONFLICTING WORLDVIEWS ON THE MODEL OF QUANTUM PHYSICS: PLURALISM WITH A PROVISIO, PART TWO

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At last year's meeting, I gave a paper that examined some problems of a pluralistic approach to metaphysical differences among religions. While pluralism has obvious and important advantages over either exclusivist or inclusivist approaches, its emphasis on metaphysical and epistemological diversity and difference leaves us without pancultural truths or values. It also contradicts the teachings of most religions, which claim to tell us of universal truths.

Faced with these problems, I used a story from science to suggest a way of modifying pluralism so that it might provide for metaphysical absolutes as well as, paradoxically, metaphysical differences. The story I used was the history behind today's physics of light. For almost 200 years, there were two contradictory pictures of the nature of light: the wave and particle theories. Today, we know that they are both correct. Not only light but all matter is ultimately a strange amalgam of both these accounts.¹ Extending this story to pluralism suggests that certain metaphysical differences among religions might in fact reflect different views of a shared mystery of ultimacy.

The question remains, however, as to what that mystery of ultimacy might be.

To answer this question, I propose to examine a metaphysical problem that already divides religions into three natural metaphysical categories. The question at the heart this problem is: where should human beings turn to discover what is ultimately true or real about ourselves and our cosmos? Should we turn to "universals," that is, to those things that are unchanging in space and time? Should we turn to the experiences that reveal such universals, experiences typically painted as contingent on circumstances, different one from another, and mutable? Or should we turn to both?

Historically, the question is related to the realism versus nominalism/conceptualism debates, which concern the reality of universals. Universals are the properties and relations that characterize particulars. For example, the quality of "red" that is in all red things is a universal.

¹ The two accounts of light were Christian Huygens' wave theory and Isaac Newton's "corpuscular" account. These theories were not successfully resolved until Einstein proposed that light was made up of waves composed of tiny bundles or "quanta" of energy, that is, photons. Nevertheless, the two pictures remain in Heisenberg's matrix mechanics (which begins with matter as composed of quanta) and Schrödinger's wave mechanics (which begins with matter as composed of waves).

Likewise, “Energy,” “mass,” and the speed of light in a vacuum are universals that characterize matter, as is the relationship between them in “ $E = mc^2$.” The argument is not over whether universals *appear* to exist; they do. Rather, the argument is over whether universals are discovered, in other words “real,” or are they created by the mind, in other words “unreal.” Is a car red because it is, in itself, red? Or is it red because that is how we see it?²

This dispute over the reality of universals helps clarify what a universal is and why it is a troublesome notion, but the problem I want to look at here is the slightly different one of whether or not we can discover ultimacy by examining what is universal. On this matter, religions divide into the three categories mentioned above, which I will call: 1) the essentialist approach, 2) the existentialist approach, and 3) the dualist approach.

The essentialist approach is found, for example, in much (and arguably all) of Hinduism and in all foundationalist Western philosophies — that is, any philosophy that presumes reality to be ultimately explained in terms of universals. Advaita-Vedānta (or non-dual) Hinduism presumes that everything derives from Brahman, the one unchanging Being of all that exists. Sāṅkhya-Yoga Hinduism traces all of reality back to two universal bases, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* — primal matter and pure consciousness. Likewise, most Western philosophies up until the last century traced reality back to one or several foundations: Spinoza to God, Descartes to matter and mind, Whitehead to actual entities and eternal objects, and so on.

The second approach, which I have loosely called “existential,” encompasses most Buddhist schools, as well as the postmodern and poststructural philosophies of the West. For the Buddha, universals were not foundational, they were derivative. Apart from the special case of the *dhammas*, early Buddhism presumed no mind-independent realities. Instead, there were experiences and the interdependent relationships among all moments of experience, what the Buddha called *pratīcicca-samuppāda* (Sk: *pratītya-samutpāda*), “dependent co-arising.” Likewise, in contemporary postmodern and poststructural philosophies, metaphysical universals are presumed to be derivative of cultural and linguistic circumstances. Universals are not basic. What is basic is the conditioning of moments of experience through their interplay with circumstances. Our worldviews and metaphysics are creations of that process.

Last is the “dualist” approach. Since it is an amalgam of the essentialist and existentialist approaches, before I address dualism, I want to sharpen the distinction between the first two options.

² Perhaps out of frustration, the realism versus nominalism/conceptualism debate has been moribund for a long time. But the issue of the mind-dependence (i.e., “reality”) of objects of awareness never seems to go away entirely; it just transmutes into different forms. Today, it has emerged as the foundationalists versus anti-foundationalists debate, where the foundationalists argue that underlying universal truths of some kind do, indeed, exist, while anti-foundationalists argue that any such metaphysical foundations are always culturally or linguistically conditioned.

To do so, I begin with a thought experiment from science to clarify principally the essentialist approach. As I proceed, keep in mind not only the Brahman-saṃsāra distinction in Hinduism but also the God-creation distinction in the Abrahamic traditions. While Abrahamic monotheism generally falls into the dualist category, part of what makes it dualist is its essentialist component.

Imagine that we are taking Physics 101 and have begun to study the section on atoms. We open our textbooks and review how all atoms have a nucleus made of protons and usually neutrons. We look at diagrams and read how electrons always configure themselves in certain shells, and how each shell contains a certain number of electrons, which determine how an atom will behave chemically. We also read about the four forces that appear to govern the behavior of atoms as well as subatomic particles.

It is not, however, the details of this description that is of interest to us here, but rather the nature of the description itself. Even though we are studying atoms, our textbook does not describe each individual atom occurrence, were that even possible. It describes instead the underlying universal nature of *all* atoms. It describes the form that all atoms follow, the “atomness” or “atomhood” or atom “essence” — what we might call the “archetypal” or “paradigmatic” or “generic” atom. This atom — let’s call it the “archetypal” atom — is the composite of the orderliness of all atoms. It expresses their common, fundamental nature or essence.³

How, then, does this “archetypal” atom differ from actual, spatiotemporal instances of atoms?

1) They differ in number. There is one archetypal atom, while there are many atom instances. In our Physics 101 textbook, there is only one fundamental nature of atoms. It is one and the same for every atom instance. Atom instances, on the other hand, are many.

2) They differ in location. The archetypal atom exists throughout space-time wherever there are atoms, while each atom instance exists only at the one particular space-time.

Additionally, the entire archetypal atom exists at every space-time locus, not one part here and

³ The reason we focus on this archetypal atom is not principally to reduce our experience to a manageable level, although certainly that is important. Rather, it is because knowing each instance in isolation does us little good. On a personal and practical level, if I am crossing a street and I don’t see a truck coming, my personal view is not going to keep me alive. What I need is insight into the situation as it truly is — what it is for all. Likewise, it is to the degree I personally understand universals that I also understand the outcomes of my actions and the actions of other people and things. In fact, without understanding universals, I could accomplish nothing. I couldn’t write or speak because meanings of words are universals. I couldn’t even recognize food or who is a friend and who is not. Without universals, even my body would not be here, since the growth of this body requires the universals of chemical and biological phenomena, perhaps most obviously, the lawful behavior of DNA. We may quibble over how “universal” a universal really is; nevertheless, the efficacy of our choices and actions in life undoubtedly relies on the existence of some sort of intersubjective invariables.

another part there. The atom instance, on the other hand is made of parts, with the nucleus at one place and the shells at other places.

3) They differ in mutability and life-span. The archetypal atom is unchanging and eternal while individual atom instances are changing and transitory. We presume all atoms to have behaved the same way since the beginning of the universe, while individual atoms come into existence, evolve, and leave existence.

4) They differ in observability. The archetype is incorporeal in that it can't be directly observed; it can only be inferred from our experience with many atom instances. Atom instances, on the other hand, are corporeal. They contingently interact with each other and are observable with the aid of electron scanning microscopes. In general, we don't see a fundamental nature; we see instances of that nature.⁴ We don't see types or universals, like the "red" that is the red of all red things, or the humanness that all humans share. Instead, we see tokens or particulars — this red *here* or that human *there*.

5) They differ in agency. The archetypal atom is what we might call "lawgiving" in the sense that it determines behavior, while atom instances are "law-following." Think of Aristotle's formal cause in this respect. The archetype or form embodies the repeatable, predictable processes that characterize spatiotemporal events and thus govern behavior in these events. These processes are not just descriptive, they are also *prescriptive*. To know the archetype is to know within certain limits what an atom *will* do. It is on the basis of this logical, predictable behavior of atoms that we, for example, are able to make cell phones, computers, and other electronic accessories.

The agencies also differ in another way. Atom instances relate to one another contingently in the stimulus-response, cause-and-effect manner we usually associate with the notion of causation, and this sort of agency is very different from that found in their relationship to the atom archetype. An individual atom is not "lawgiving" in its effect on other atoms. Rather, it collides with or bonds with or weakly interacts with other atoms in the manner of Aristotle's *efficient* cause.

Given these distinctions, let's return to Hinduism as an example of an essentialist worldview.

In the Upani•ads, Bhagavad-gītā, and other texts, Brahman is typically described as a fundamental nature and is distinguished from the everyday world, sa•sāra, by the differences between archetype and instance I just listed. However, there is a critical difference between

⁴ There is one exception: when we use a particular observable instance as the archetype. For example, a "kilogram" is defined using a particular cylinder of platinum alloy kept at the Bureau Internationale des Poids et Mesures in France. In this case, that particular object does serve as the archetype.

Hinduism's notion of Brahman as a fundamental nature and my story's notion of the archetypal atom. Historically, Indian philosophy has played on the stage of living beings and awareness, not on the stage of merely inert objects of awareness, like matter and atoms. For the Hindus, it is this living awareness that has a fundamental nature. In other words, the quest to discover the fundamental nature of all things is not a quest to be pursued in phenomena apart from observer, but rather in subject and object combined — in the union of what Hindus call the “triple thread” of knower, known, and knowing.

Thus, the ultimate reality of all things in our cosmos according to, for example, an Advaita-Vedānta reading of the Upaniads is a fundamental nature that runs through and animates all our here-and-now moments of awareness, like a string that runs through so many mālā beads. Awareness in its real nature is not localized to this or that occasion. You and I are aware only because, and to the extent that, you and I instantiate the primal nature of awareness, a primal nature that is Brahman. And, since Brahman underlies and is the agency behind all instances of awareness, it is easy to see why Brahman is itself also thought of as aware — indeed, aware in a more real sense than each of us individually is aware. Moreover, being the basis of all knowing experiences, Brahman is also said to be all-knowing — omniscient.⁵

Similar statements can clearly be made about the Abrahamic conception of God. While God is not usually considered a fundamental nature in the Abrahamic traditions for reasons that relate to their dual foundation, God is, nevertheless, distinguished from creation by these exact same qualities. In other words, while the Abrahamic traditions are not strictly essentialist, they do possess certain of its hallmarks. God in these religions is typically distinguished from creation along roughly the same line that Hindus use to distinguish Brahman from saṁsāra.⁶

Nothing that I have said so far should strike you as new or controversial. East or West, humans distinguish between the contingent flux of present experience and the universals that

⁵ It strikes me as a reasonable question at this point whether, indeed, a fundamental nature can in fact be “aware,” even if the fundamental nature at issue is that of awareness itself. Still, turning back to our analogy with atom instances and atom archetype, there is undoubtedly *something* that spans all atom instances and holds the behavior of each instance to certain rules. In any case, for the typical Hindu, Brahman is aware in some sense that is beyond everyday comprehension.

⁶ Like an archetypal atom, God is typically characterized as one being that is omnipresent and unchanging throughout space and time, with all of God at every space-time location. Creation, on the other hand, consists of many entities including humans, each with its own space-time locus, and each spread out with its parts in different relative places. Also, God is incorporeal in that God is not observed in conventional, naturalistic ways, while creation is made of what is directly observable or what interacts in a cause-and-effect manner with what is directly observable. And, like the archetypal atom, God's agency is typically that of the ultimate lawgiver that determines the course of every event according to a hidden rationale more fundamental to the course of our universe than the laws of nature we know. Creation, on the other hand, is the realm of cause-and-affect interaction among individual entities. Finally, like Brahman in Hinduism, God is typically omniscient — all knowing.

persist from one experience to another.⁷ An essentialist metaphysics is one that turns to universals to discover what is ultimately true and real about ourselves and our universe. And typically in the case of religions, the universal of greatest interest is the fundamental nature of awareness itself, the awareness that all humans, indeed perhaps all creation, shares.

In marked contrast to the essentialist account is the existentialist account. As mentioned earlier, the Buddha explicitly argued against ultimacy being characterized by fundamental natures or essences. He taught that existence was impermanent (*anicca*) and that there were no enduring selves or souls (*anatta*). The agency of our reality is not a fundamental nature like Brahman, but *pratītya-samutpāda*, dependent co-arising, which stresses efficient cause among contingent, interrelated phenomena. To make his point, the Buddha begins with here-and-now direct experience. He does not begin with either the universals or the particulars of the universal-particular dyad of my thought experiment, but rather with the simple here-and-now or “present” nature of awareness — what a particular is when it is considered apart from essence or universals.⁸

The fact that all words and concepts we use in thinking and speaking are universals makes it hard to conceive of an ultimacy that is not a universal, but that is what the Buddha points to. Over the years, the Buddha’s successors developed new concepts or modified old ones to help describe Buddhism’s ultimacy and the subtlety of that ultimacy. *Tathatā*, usually translated as “thusness” or “suchness,” is the Mahāyāna term for the simple “presence” of a thing — the basic nature of something as a bare object of experience, empty of any attribute or quality, essence, or fundamental nature. Instead of asking us to find the essence of, for example, a chair in terms of some chair essence, we are asked to find it in terms of a presence stripped conceptually of any essential attributes so that all that remains is the bare presence of the chair. Another Mahāyāna notion is *śūnyatā*, “emptiness” or “voidness.” Like *tathatā*, it describes the basic nature of things, here, emphasizing their lack of any underlying substance or essence. One of the examples used by the early teachers of this notion, the *śūnyavādins*, was that of an empty

⁷ For studies of universals in India, see Frits Staal, *Universals: Studies in Indian Logic and Linguistics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998; or Raja Ram Dravid, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972.

⁸ “Presence” as the foundation for existential metaphysics is very similar in meaning to “existence”, except it is not a property; not even a second order property (not a property of properties). It is not something that an object has independently of its spatiotemporal circumstances; it is the having of spatiotemporal circumstances in itself. Presence is actual here-and-now existence; not the existence one may posit of something in a logical argument (which one may do even when something does not actually exist: e.g., “lets assume that there exists a cow such that the cow is brown with white spots”). Presence is rather that on the basis of which existence is presumed to be a second order property. It is why actual, in fact, existence (i.e., presence) is not captured by the property of existence. Making a property out of presence turns presence into an idea, when presence means specifically what is not an idea. If I could design a book so that when you turned to the next page, a jack-in-the-box would jump out and slap you in the face, that moment of pre-cognition impact, before reason turned it into an idea; that’s presence.

vessel. For their predecessors, so they declared, phenomena were like empty vessels, whereas these teachers claimed that even the vessels themselves were composed of emptiness.⁹ Later, as if to drive home the point further, the great Buddhist teacher, Nāgārjuna, taught the emptiness of emptiness — that even *sūnyata* was empty.¹⁰

In sum, Hinduism and Buddhism, taken very generally, illustrate two metaphysical options that divide over whether metaphysics should be grounded on essence or on presence. Clearly, both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses; Hindus and Buddhists debated their philosophies for centuries, pointing out the inadequacies of each other's approach. That debate has not ended. Today both views continue to have wide followings, and their metaphysical differences seem as intractable as ever.

With this essentialist-existentialist debate in mind and both views seeming equally valid, let's return to dualism, where ultimate reality entails both essence and existential presence. As an example of this approach, let's look at Abrahamic monotheism. The religious traditions that make up this category typically distinguish between Creator and creation, on account of which they are usually thought of as having a dual ontology — two different types of being or existence. The dualism I propose here, however, is not of this kind. What I mean by "dual" is that reality itself entails two ingredients. For anything to be real, it must possess both essence and presence.

Thus, on the creation side of the Creator-creation divide, the realities of this world are not merely universals culled from everyday particulars nor merely existential presence isolated from universals. They are mixtures of both, much as we conventionally experience them.¹¹ An atom or

⁹ *Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion*, ed. Stephan Schuhmacher and Gert Woerner, Boston: Shambhala, 1989: 330

¹⁰ It is this tendency of existential presence to not reveal itself in universals that Derrida exploits in his method of deconstruction. Madan Sarup, in his *Introductory Guide to Poststructuralism and Postmodernism* (2nd. ed. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1993), writes that "Derrida argues that all the conceptual oppositions of metaphysics have for ultimate reference the presence of a present. (He often uses the word 'metaphysics' as shorthand for 'being as presence'" (Sarup: 37). First principles can always be deconstructed because the being of presence never reveals itself in the form of a universal. Any effort to access the "presence of a present" necessarily discloses at best only a fragment, the foreground to a necessarily hidden background. Derrida speaks of this issue in the context of the "différences" that are for him the carriers of universals. Différance' for Derrida carries not only the sense of a universal — différence as a "difference," what relies on more than one presence — but also the sense of a deferred presence — an absence (Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982: 7-9). Derrida's "différance" thus emphasizes this failure of universals to be directly present.

One can expose only that which at a certain moment can become present, manifest, that which can be shown, presented as something present, a being-present in its truth, in the truth of a present or the presence of the present. Now if différence (and I also cross out the "is") what makes possible the presentation of the being-present, it is never presented as such. It [différance] is never offered to the present. Or to anyone. (Derrida: 5-6)

¹¹ Regardless of a religion's worldview or whether the fact is explicated acknowledged, in everyday life we encounter a world that is, on the face of it, composed of particulars, and a particular is a mix of existential presence with universals. Therefore, the question that separates the dualist from the other two options is not whether these two

a cat is described both by its existential presence and by its essential properties. Likewise, humans are not just presences or essences, but both; we are presences characterized by essential properties that distinguish us and make up our identity.¹²

On the Creator side of the divide, as I mentioned before, God may have all the characteristics of a fundamental nature of all things, similar to Brahman, but God is typically not viewed in these traditions as a fundamental nature. The reason is that reality in this paradigm entails both ingredients. For God to be real, God, like creation, must also have presence, although, I hasten to add, not necessarily of a conventional variety. Thus, on the one hand, God has all the features of a fundamental nature. On the other hand, in order for God to actually exist and not be an disembodied abstraction, God must be a presence distinct from other presences, which, indeed, we find expressed in the Creator-creation divide.¹³

A question now arises: if the dualist approach to ultimacy does, indeed, embrace both presence and essence, why should we not prefer it over the existentialist or essentialist accounts? The answer is that, by making God also a presence and thus distinct from creation, one ends up with a metaphysical paradigm that is as logically difficult as either of the other two. To begin with, it is certainly difficult to understand how there might in fact exist a supra-human, aware being that has all the characteristics of the fundamental nature of all creation. Then one faces all the monotheism 101 paradoxes that are ultimately rooted in this divide between the agency of

components describe the nature of everyday reality, the “physics”; all these options agree on this point. The question is rather whether they describe the “*meta*-physics,” what lies beyond (or perhaps in front of) the physics. For the Hindu and the Buddhist, everyday, unenlightened reality — *saṃsāra* — is not the ultimate truth. And it is not so because one of its two ingredients — either the existential presence or the underlying, universal basis — is not taken as a mark of ultimacy. (Perhaps it is more accurate to say that Indian philosophy does not take both poles of this dyad as ultimate at the *beginning* of one’s quest for higher truth. There is much evidence that the bracketed pole does come back into play as one nears enlightenment. See F. Samuel Brainard, *Reality and Mystical Experience*, Penn State Press, 2000, pp. 175,264.) Dualism, on the other hand, takes reality at face value, as we experience and think about it in our everyday lives. In these religions, everything that is ultimately real typically contains both existential presence and universals.

¹² Christian medieval philosophy was not just a philosophy of essence. Duns Scotus’ developed the notion of *haecceity*, roughly, “thisness,” which was for him and those following a principal of individuation. For Duns Scotus, this notion was explicitly *not* a universal or form (although Leibniz later transformed the notion into exactly that). Rather, it applied only to the being of contingent entities in the actual world. That is, it was grounded in the contingency of here-and-now direct experience. Haecceity was not the “matter” of the future Descartes; it was not a substance that made up all the things of the world. Rather, it was what explained particularity *apart* from any essence or substance. See, e.g., Dale Jacquette, “Haecceity,” *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Audi, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 359-60.

¹³ In this context, think of the ontological argument for the existence of God. Anselm argued that God must exist in reality and not just in the mind (i.e., must have presence) because otherwise God would not be “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” In other words, ultimate “greatness” implies something more than the universals which we know in the mind, something called “existence” that is added to universals to make reality (which is here called presence). Of interest also is the subsequent history of the ontological argument, with its refutations by such as Kant and Russell, which further supports Buddhism’s claim that presence cannot be captured in a universal.

fundamental nature, God, the agencies of existential particulars, including humans. If God is, indeed, all-powerful and all-knowing, how can we have free will? If God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and good, why do people suffer and do evil things to each other?

In sum, we have three conflicting metaphysical paradigms, each with philosophical strengths and weaknesses (or rather three in an ideal sense, since real religions mix up the alternatives in many ways). Nevertheless, in a manner very similar to quantum mechanics, the metaphysical differences between them can be traced to a single paradoxical ultimacy that permits a variety of what seem to be equally viable explanations.

Moreover, the nature of this troublesome ultimacy should be clearer. Metaphysical variety appears to be generated, at least in part, by two intimately connected foundations that do not seem to coexist at all comfortably. While our day-to-day life inarguably combines both universals¹⁴ and the experiential presences that reveal them, metaphysical accounts differ dramatically according to whether they begin with universals, presence, or both.¹⁵

If, indeed, certain of our most stubborn metaphysical disputes can be traced to the two mutually exclusive foundations of essence and presence, then the essentialist, existentialist, and dualist accounts of ultimacy are equally viable. They contradict each other not because one is right while the others are wrong about ultimacy or because there is no pancultural ultimacy for them to be right or wrong about, but rather because they teach of a shared ultimacy that transcends any one accounting.

Also if this is so, we are no longer left with no way to judge among metaphysical paradigms. Because ultimacy is shared, different accounts need to complement each other. The cosmologies of the religious traditions I used as illustrations have very different pictures of

¹⁴ The sort of “universal” that I intend here is not one that is true for *all* occasions but rather true for a *certain given set* of occasions (which could, indeed, be all occasions). In this regard, I don’t find either “essence” or “universal” to be a particularly good word to use here. I do not mean an essence of a thing in the conventional sense of what is genuinely universal. Rather, I mean the quality of being the same or “public” over a given collection of presences. Thus my preferred term, the one I have used elsewhere, is “public” or “publicity.”

¹⁵ Essence-presence mutual exclusion is not just metaphysical esoterica, but basic to human experience. In everyday life, a presence seems never to entirely reveal itself in universals, and a universal seems never to be entirely present. In the first case, a presence is fundamentally more than, or other than, the attributes used to characterize it, and any effort to convey the essence of a presence must ultimately fail. No description of, for example, the Grand Canyon or the attributes we might use to recognize it can give the Grand Canyon in its spatiotemporal uniqueness as it is originally created in each moment of its existence. Think just a moment of trying to convey — to make public — one’s own direct experience of the canyon. In the second case, universals may be instantiated in presences — e.g., “redness” may be an attribute of the cup in front of me — but a universal like “redness” is never revealed entirely in one presentation. It is based on what is the same over multiple presences, not on the particular red of this particular cup, or of any other cup in isolation. In other words, not only is a presence fundamentally more than, or other than, the universals used to designate and characterize it, a universal is also fundamentally more than or other than any of its instantiations in presences.

reality, yet, in the context of the shared mystery of ultimacy looked at here, these pictures illuminate and complete each other. Essentialist approaches like those of Hinduism and much of Western philosophy and science teach us about the universals that underlie human existence; yet, the presence, aliveness, and awareness of the moment seems to escape any such accounting. Existentialist approaches like those of Buddhism and recent continental philosophy teach us about the here-and-now, serendipitous, ineffable nature of lived experience; yet, we humans are not just beings-of-the-moment but also enduring beings with shared realities and truths, and these, too, are critical to understanding our selves and world. And from dualism we learn how both approaches might (or might not) be put together into a single paradigm.

Then, too, because ultimacy transcends any one accounting, any metaphysics that would be comprehensive must include mystery. The practical requirements of day-to-day life require metaphysical coherence and clarity, but that clarity is won at the expense of comprehensiveness. To be adequate, a metaphysics must incorporate its own occultation. And this, too, we find illustrated in the religions looked at here, typically by characterizing ultimacy — God, Brahmā, nirvāṇa, or any other — as in some way paradoxical or mysterious.¹⁶

¹⁶ There remains the question of how awareness fits into this picture, especially since the essentialist and dualist accounts portray Brahman/God as in some sense aware. While the nature of awareness is beyond the scope of this paper, perhaps a brief remark will suffice here. The nature of consciousness remains today an enormous problem in philosophy principally because no one has been able to reconcile two competing views. The first view describes consciousness in terms of what it is for the individual as seen from the inside, what is usually called the “first-person” view. The second describes consciousness from the outside as a generalized feature of all conscious beings, what is usually called the “third-person” view (see, e.g., Daniel C. Dennett, “Consciousness,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, ed. Richard L. Gregory with the assistance of O. L. Zangwill, New York: Oxford University Press: 1987, p. 161; or Güven Güzeldere, “Introduction: The Many Faces of Consciousness: A Field Guide,” in *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, ed. Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997, p. 24). It is not difficult to show how these two views reflect the same presence-essence divide that I have talked about today. And, if this is so, then it is appropriate to place awareness center-stage in any account of ultimacy, as typically do religions.