Title: More than we can say: Modern and Post-Modern in Perennialist Perspective

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MORE THAN WE CAN SAY: MODERN AND POST-MODERN IN PERENNIALIST PERSPECTIVE

Perennialists have argued long and hard against modernity’s scientism which includes the physicalist reductionism of modern scientific cosmology and presumes a correlative anthropology that denies the multi-leveled ontology of traditional perspectives. Another major contemporary current, post-modernism, criticizes many of the same modern scientistic tendencies. Perennialism has paid relatively less attention to this latter movement. This paper is intended to begin a conversation that brings Perennial Philosophy into relationship with the post-structuralist/deconstructionist/neo-pragmatic wing of post-modernism.

Perennialism I take to be a metaphysical position that takes mysticism, i.e., the esoteric dimensions of traditions, as paradigmatic for being and knowing. At the esoteric core of authentic traditions, perennialists claim, there is a “transcendental unity”. The higher one climbs while on an esoteric path, the more alike the traditional expressions about what reality is and what it is possible for human beings to become. All Being manifests in a hierarchically ordered way and, as microcosms, we too are multi-leveled beings. Another way to say it is that we find ourselves at different times in different states of consciousness. Those states have an intrinsic hierarchical order. Minimally expressed, we can be caught in subjective delusion or we can directly and intuitively know. The “higher” the state, the clearer the consciousness, the more knowledge and truth, the closer to God, the more “being” – pick your metaphor. There are levels of knowing/being, distinguished by an equator beyond which consciousness is not historically conditioned.

The human project is the realization of the higher levels which involves at least the transcendence of the egoic “self”. Those who are active in mystical paths energize the vital core of any civilization. When that core is lacking the result is that the tradition or civilization desiccates. Devolutionary or traditionalist perennialists argue that we find the most complete access to
transcendence, to truth and reality, in the revelatory origins of the great traditions and that the paths that enable the fulfillment of the human realization are to be found only within already existing traditions. Non-traditionalist perennialists say that paths to transcendence must arise in whatever condition we find ourselves in. The history of traditions is the history of the founding and continual transforming of paths to fit the transcendent needs of particular historical contingencies. Our time is no different in that respect. The human condition, thus, is perennial (1).

There is no clear definition of what distinguishes modern from post-modern. Those conversations for which the values and methods of the sciences are paradigmatic I take to be "modern". Here "truth" is a judgment made on knowledge about physical reality or on knowledge gathered by procedures which imitate those of the physical sciences. The laws of the physical world are not taken by modern scientists to be historically conditioned.

"Post-modern" is a common rubric, although misleading since post-modern critiques of modernism have continued as a continuous counterpoint rather than succeeding modernism. Post-moderns include those who reject modern scientism from non-traditional, pluralistic perspectives. Post-modernism began, in fact, as an architectural "anti-movement", and so "post-modern" has been used to characterize a vast variety of contemporary phenomena. For the purpose of this paper I will focus on post-modern thinkers, particularly deconstructionist Jacques Derrida and neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty (2). For both of them truth and knowledge, physical or otherwise, are thoroughly historically conditioned.

Perennialism and modern consciousness

In his introduction to The Writings of Frithjof Schuon, S. H. Nasr summarizes the perennialist motivation for their harshly radical critique of modernity:

Schuon criticizes the modern world not because of a lack of concern for modern man but precisely because of its concern for only a limited aspect of man who is a being born for immortality but stifled by a civilization which is contrary to his real nature and ultimate end. (3)

The modern scientific focus on the physical world has resulted in a truncated cosmology and anthropology. The denial of a multi-leveled reality—hence a multi-leveled human—which includes a spiritual dimension has disastrously concrete consequences. Says Nasr:

[Modern civilization...] reduces man to his rational and animal aspects [...] It [...] substitutes [for God] earthly and promethean man as the Divinity on earth with ultimate rights over nature, society, and even religion. The result is that debilitating secularism which has led at once to
the destruction of the inner man and the desecration of the natural environment. (4)

Modern philosophy has followed modern science. While the scientific revolution has resulted in the unprecedented technological transformation of our exterior and – through the communications media – our interior landscapes, modern philosophy has attempted to give epistemological grounding to scientific ways of knowing. In his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* Rorty tells his story about how modern philosophy came to be enraptured by the determinative self-image

*of mind as a great mirror, containing various representations – some accurate, some not – and capable of being studied by pure, non-empirical methods. Without the notion of mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself* (5).

Honoring this paradigmatic social practice, those who were positivistically inclined decided that sentences would “mean” only in proportion to our capacity to “verify”, i.e., to specify procedures by which sense impressions could confirm or deny the accuracy of the representations expressed in those sentences. Naturally epistemology became of utmost concern, as philosophers examined the minds who utilized and evaluated the data to find out exactly how we “know” anything at all.

*Modern and post-modern*

When Descartes egoically deduced from his doubting that he was therefore thinking and therefore existing, he demonstrated his belief that his thinking was epistemologically prior to his being. While modern philosophers have turned their attention to subjectivity, post-modern thinkers have narrowed their focus from mind in general to language. As a result of this “linguistic turn” from questioning how we know anything to inquiring about how we say and write what we know, they argue that modern philosophers have been far too optimistic and metaphysical about knowledge. Modern thinkers did not take the slippery phenomenon of language as seriously as they should have.

The modern positivist and analytical problem was that of “correspondence”, i.e., how our sentences match our perceptions? Wittgenstein and Gadamer have argued convincingly that all consciousness is linguistically involved and so we can never directly access the world, since language can never be a transparent medium between our internal and external experience. Because our experience is already pre-shaped, given to us, by our prior linguistic understanding, we cannot use language simply to describe the “facts”. Since every word we use carries with it associations from our past usages, and all who read or hear our words contribute their own associa-
tions, we co-create our selves and other subjects, as well as our understandings of objects, the "facts". As much as language reveals, it conceals; not only is this true of our attempts to capture and to make present to ourselves our exterior world, but also our interior world, our selves. Gadamer emphasizes the world-creating function of language:

Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world, but on it depends the fact that man has a world at all. [...] Not only is the world "world" insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is re-presented in it. (6)

Rorty, looking in toward the subject, cites Peirce as he argues that what we want to substantialize as "mind" or some deeper "self" is for all practical purposes no more than our linguistic productions:

the world or sign which man uses is the man himself [...] Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought (7).

Post-modern thinkers describe the contingency of how and what we know in different ways, but all of them center on the belief in the total linguisticity of all experience. Further, language is perceived as something that inevitably separates subject from object. All our expression, all our knowledge, "scientific" or not, is ultimately description that has meaning only within the context of one or another historically contingent conversation. Thus, modern scientism is supplanted by post-modern historicism.

While Rorty argues extensively against the particular modern image that he considers to have been paradigmatic, the "mind" as "mirror", he replaces that image with another that is paradigmatically post-modern, the conversation. Culture is a collection of conversations with changing topics, changing vocabularies, and changing participants. All criteria for meaning and truth are internal to any given conversation and therefore there are no trans-conversational criteria to evaluate or commensurate one conversation in terms of another. Thus there can be no hierarchy of conversations, no conversation can be foundational to any other; there can never be a "final vocabulary". The modern point of view has been that the scientific conversation was foundational – even redemptive. Post-modern thinkers remove the scientific foundation by denying foundational value to any conversation.

This undermining of modern foundationalism is accomplished by accepting the way in which moderns reduced the question of knowing to the problem of relating an observing subject to the observed object. This way of posing the question seems to presuppose a Cartesian cosmology which more or less remains as the shared cosmology of modern and post-modern thinking. In this view consciousness remains always on the side of the subject, the human ego. Only humans can "mean" and so any meaning that there is in the external world – or in the internal world – is manufactured (8). Rorty puts it this way:
Truth cannot be out there – cannot exist independently of the human mind – because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own [...] cannot. (9)

There is no truth or meaning that we do not impose on a consciousness-less other.

The metaphysics of presence

According to the post-modern critique, modern thinkers remain tied to the fundamental belief that subject and object are bridgeable so that we can truly express what is “out there”; there is a “true” state of affairs that we can know and use. In doing so, post-moderns argue, the modern point of view never really gives up on the traditionalist “metaphysics of presence”. The pre-modern philosophy of presence put human reason in relation to revelation, testing reason against revealed truth. This is what Aquinas and others meant when they claimed that reason could find nothing in the world that contradicted the Bible. Truth was identified with what revelation “presented”. One metaphor described nature as a book to be read.

Modern scientistic thinking makes empirical-analytical reasoning the sole “reveler” of the truth of the world. What is true, then, is what is present to the correctly inquiring mind. Those who followed the Kantian program, including the structuralists (e.g., Levi Strauss) and the phenomenologists (e.g., Husserl), believed that the subject could be “present” to itself, that we could reveal our own ways of thinking to ourselves, we can “know” ourselves:

In the history of this treatment [of the metaphor of nature written as a book], the most decisive separation appears at the moment when, at the same time as the science of nature, the determination of absolute presence [in pre-modern tradition, the world as “God’s book’’] is constituted [in its modern form] as self-presence, as subjectivity. (10)

The perspective of the traditional metaphysician of presence, however, was transcendent; our intellect comes from the same source as that all creation comes from. This metaphysical reality is the root of the adequation of thinking to what is thought. However, when scientism empties the world of God and the universe of any other consciousness, the modern epistemological Angst becomes highly motivated. For if we are the only ones who can know, then the nature of the link between knower and known becomes crucial. This issue Derrida poses in the language of linguistics. The question is that of the relationship between sign and signified, which says Derrida, is quite unreliable. Focusing on the very shifty, historically conditioned lin-
kage of sign and signified, Derrida and Rorty both claim that we don’t have the access to “reality” which modern thinkers presume.

To deny the accessibility of a signified (an object) to the one signifying is also to call into question the nature and function of the sign. In this view, no symbol truly points beyond itself, either in the direction of the symbolizer or the symbolized. Indeed, what each symbols points to is the absence of what it symbolizes. For each symbol, each sign, each word, has as a primordial message – “I am not what I say”. Everything we assert in writing, verbal or on the page, says Derrida, can be erased, crossed out, or – even more diabolical – quoted. Derrida writes that in writing there is

the possibility of its functioning being cut off, at a certain point, from its “original” desire-to-say-what-one-means and from its participation in a saturable and constraining context. Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written [...], in a small or large unit, can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable (11).

In disconnecting language from its object, deconstruction also disconnects language from its subject, its source, its origin. The person is lost behind the unending web of descriptions. There is no “self”, no center which holds us, organizes us. Rorty claims that our descriptions are our minds – there is no “self” or “mind” having these thoughts, making these descriptions, generating these signs. That means that we cannot even use language to get to the mind of the subject, i.e., the persons writing and speaking. Rorty says we are “centerless webs of beliefs and desires” (12). The spider metaphor should not be ignored, for Rorty and Derrida and post-modernism in general believe that we spin ourselves out, that what patterns there are we are in at the moment we spin them. We are texts and inter-texts, books with no proper beginnings or ends, with no logical progression, no dependable references.

It is not surprising, then that Derrida describes language as self-creative rather than representative of what this or that ego is “thinking”. As we write, we find that words generate words almost mechanically, without conscious intention, through puns, misspellings, homonyms from other languages. The writing process itself is always adding a surplus to the author and to the reader. Every reader becomes an author in that sense, every author a reader. Not only can we not say what we see or taste or touch; we cannot even say what we think.

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From the Perennialist/mystical perspective, this view of thinking is familiar. All mystical traditions teach about subjectivity, the normal “monkey mind”: the grasping, constructivist mind caught in delusion, largely by language. The ego is contingent. The contingency of the relationship between signifier and signified, however, is for Perennialists part of the contingency of all manifestation. It is true that in our ordinary states of consciousness we filter our experience according to associative patterns, many of which are socially conditioned, all of which result from our past experience. In that sense Kant was right about the constructive nature of our minds. And Rorty is right about the “contingency” of our language which results in the contingency of what mystics would call our “egoic” selves – since he sees our egos as constructed from our language. And Derrida is right that our linguistic maps are not freeze-dried experience that can be reconstituted. We often like to believe that when we speak and write our language is precise and transparent, pointing directly to what we are talking about. In fact our speaking, describing, and analyzing are always framing and re-framing, provoking associations which draw us along from thought to thought. So our describing keeps drawing our attention away from what we intend.

However, Derrida and Rorty, although they very clearly see the contingency of linguistically conditioned “self” and linguistically conditioned “reality”, also believe that that is as far as their vision can go. From the Perennialist/mystical perspective, this awareness, although it can be final for some, is a beginning for others. A major difference has to do with the cosmology and anthropology presumed. The awareness of the contingency, or what Buddhism calls the “co-dependent origination” of our linguistically involved experiencing is common among the traditions, so that in no way requires the denial of a multi-leveled reality. But only in relationship to a Perennialist perspective which includes an apophaticism based on the ultimacy of unmanifest being, can we see the foundationalism of Rorty and Derrida – a foundationalism they deny. This becomes clear when we compare the deconstructive view of language with Indian mantra and the meditation with letters utilized by Abraham Abulafia, a medieval Jewish mystic.

Some traditional views of language

In the first creation story in Genesis, God creates the world through language, a view appropriate to a priestly, literate elite. As God speaks, so it happens. John’s Gospel echoes, “In the beginning was the word”. In Bereshit Rabbah, a Rabbinic Midrash on Genesis, we hear that among those
things that were created before the world was the Torah itself, which God then used as an instruction book for His creative acts. In the beginning, then, was the Sefer, the Text – a metaphor shared with deconstruction, except that this sacred text was taken as transcendentally authored. In the rabbinic re-framing which has the text precede what it contains, description becomes pre-scription, as one might expect from these holy legislators.

During the rabbinic period a mystical text appeared, the Book of Formation, *Sefer Yetzirah*, which was to be revered in Jewish and Christian Kabbalah. It tells how the world is constantly being created by the on-going re-arrangement of the primordial Hebrew letters. The letters are viewed as some kind of archetypal DNA/RNA, without whose movement there would be nothing. This mystical myth already constitutes a movement toward the source of being and meaning by deconstructing the Biblical and rabbinic linguistic cosmogony. It is not the meaning or even structure of the language, but the letters themselves, which mediate the Divine creative power.

Abraham Abulafia, the great Spanish ecstatic Kabbalist of the late thirteenth century, continues this movement through the letters toward mystical union with God by prescribing meditations on the letters of God’s name, shifting the positions of vowel points and of the letters themselves. We are taken further and further away from any sense of text and context, of meaning residing in context, of meaning inhering in words. God’s creative power transcends words, and human consciousness through meditations that focus on the form and sounds of the letters rather than the semantics and syntax of the language can also transcend all distinctions, including the mental.

A constant of Perennialist logic is that less cannot come from more. The miracle of human consciousness could never arise simply from other human consciousness (socially constructed) – and, of course, never from unconscious matter (evolution or the equation of mind with brain). Jewish creation storytellers make this point by having pre-existent Divine language call human consciousness into being, by birthing divine Unmanifest Being into manifestation. In an ontologically hierarchical universe, human consciousness and intelligence must result from a process already conscious and intelligent. To Abulafia’s goal of return to the source, the path is through the deconstruction of the linguistically constructed mind.

**Mantra**

This movement has its counterpart in Indian *mantra*, the usually repetitive utterance of Sanskrit syllables which may or may not have semantic meaning. Mantras have been used as magical formulas, vocalized accompaniments to sacrifices and other ritual acts, and in meditation for the transfor-
Mantras are India's "paradigmatic form of religious utterance". They are real, palpable, mental artifacts to be revered and mastered, to be used or misused (13).

This correlates with the Perennialist understanding that words, even syllables with no lexical significance such as OM, are real and have power to transform. Some Indians understand that mantras originate from a supra-mental reality. In this understanding Sanskrit is composed of seed syllables which, in their primordial manifestation, sound the vibrations that constitute all that is. They are thus taken to be primordial in a way parallel to Sefer Yetzirah's and Abulafia's understanding of the nature and function of the Hebrew letters. It is also the case that practitioners of mantra share with Abulafia and his disciples the view that the universe is fundamentally absolute consciousness vibrating at different levels of density.

As with Abulafia's system, the constituents of language are "creative" of meaning and reality in that they mediate the Absolute to lower levels of knowing and being. And so the transcendence of language involves a metaphysical transformation of consciousness. Consider the following description of the stages and results of mantramic practice in Kashmir Shaivism:

[The] essence of Mantra is an experience entirely free of objective relations. It is the pure power of awareness directed at its own nature and thus free of objectivity and eternal. It frees us of the desire to attend to things temporal by redirecting attention to the heart of consciousness which thus assimilates thought back into itself and stills the agitation [...] occasioned by object-centered awareness. [...] The yogi who repeats his Mantra undistractedly archieves the power to understand the ultimate significance of the formula he is repeating. Thus understood, it awakens in him a state of contemplative absorption at the Empowered [...] level in which he experiences the pulsing power of consciousness that emits from itself, in progressively grosser stages, thoughts and articulated words along with their meaning. (14)

This attainment has cosmic significance, for the yogi is absorbed into and absorbs the center and source of all being. Similarly, meditation on letters leads Abulafia to absorption in God, the transcending of all limitations – including language and the mind – which enables the mystic to unite with the Divine Intellect. And from that perspective, creative process as a devolution, a stage by stage limitation and becoming grosser results in "thoughts and articulated words along with their meaning".
For Rorty, all we can do is describe and re-describe and never go to what it is we are describing. Whatever value there is lies in coming up with a new description that works, that gets agreement. Invention is also self-creation, “for persons and cultures are, for us [ironists], incarnated vocabularies” (97). What the ironist wants is autonomy:

text

all any ironist can measure success against is the past – not by living up to it, but by redescribing it in his terms, thereby becoming able to say, “Thus I willed it”.

What Derrida and Rorty reject is the possibility of coming up with any final statement, or any final vocabulary. But write they must, describing and redescribing, continually deconstructing, re-reading, re-framing, never getting stuck in the belief that “this is the one”.

The apophatic silence is also deconstructive, but ultimately leads to the abandonment of language. As mantra leads the practitioner away from semantic sense, it ends by leading her back to the originary silence:

For mantras, the idea that the highest level of speech is pure consciousness is surely one of the reasons for the superiority, in mantric practice, of silence over speech, of the unsaid over the said. The brahman also, in Vedic times, was the silent but necessary witness of the ritual. [...] Indeed, when one looks at how a mantra is put into practice by an adept, one may well ask oneself whether the real nature of mantra is not consciousness rather than speech, the answer perhaps being that mantra is speech, but that speech, for India, is ultimately consciousness. (15)

There is a trajectory shared by Abulafia and mystical practitioners of mantra who use the contents of intellect, especially language in its non-representational graphic and phonic forms, to transcend the mental contents. Thus the widespread emphasis on silence; all the words and chanting and visualizations having the intention of stilling the mind to make possible a direct knowing, one without subtitles. Yes, the egoic self is contingent and all language is contingent linguistic expressions. But he never suggests that we make the experiment of the apophatic path, the via negativa.

Derrida, on the other hand, wants to distinguish deconstruction from negative theology. Such theologies, he says,

are always concerned with disengaging a superessentiality beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, always hastening to recall that God is refused the predicate of existence, only in order to acknowledge his superior, inconceivable and ineffable mode of being (16).

This view misunderstands the function of “negative theology”, as if such theologies were intended to be convincing. From a mystical perspective we
should rather read such theologies as instructions for meditation, not as assertions intended to convince anyone of the rightness of any description. Meditatively it functions like the Indian "neti-neti" (not this, not that) – with everything that comes into our purview we dis-identify – not this, not that. And in fact Caputo in his discussion of Derrida and Meister Eckhart argues that even Eckhart did not intend his sermons to be "understood", but rather to induce his listeners to become what he is talking about.

At least one mystical use of language is to break consciousness from attachment to language. This is made very clear in Buddhism. Nagarjuna, who explicitly applies a very sophisticated dialectical form of the "neti-neti" to all metaphysical views in as complete a way as can be imagined, expresses his gratitude to the Buddha:

For him, expressing compassion, who taught the real dharma, for the destruction of all views – to him, I humbly offer reverence... (17)

The difference lies in Buddhist liberation as compared with Rorty’s ironic autonomy. Freedom for Rorty is the freedom to move from description to description, not to be stuck in any one. Since there can be no final vocabulary, there can be no resting place for the flow of descriptions, and so no essential self.

When the Buddha is asked whether there is a God or an essential self, he deconstructs the very question, the very language in which the question is posed, drawing attention away from the narcotizing mental stream of consciousness that keeps our attention on the finger, rather than freeing us to see the finger as a gesture pointing away from itself – but not to still another finger, another signifier. Buddhist dialectics as well as apophatic theologies recognize the limitations of language. But that is not the end of the matter, for the realization of the "emptiness" of our language-producing process does not result automatically from stating it. The experience of that emptiness requires a long, intense meditative training whose result is precisely trans-verbal.

In a recent interview, Lucien Stryk, a fine translator of Zen poetry and himself a Zennist, addresses the distinction between the Buddhist meditative deconstruction of experience and the post-modern deconstruction of all thinking and writing:

One cannot reduce the intuition of "non-self" to a linguistic or formal matter. And if one adopts the view that language is all pervasive – impenetrable [...] – then one can easily get caught-up in the repetitious exercise of the "imitative fallacy", where "non-self" is mimicked through all sorts of disjunctions and fragments. Takahashi's poems [a modern Zen poet] go far beyond being mere critiques of standard ways of perceiving life; they are that, but they are also profoundly assertive of realms beyond the linguistic. They are, we might say, studies of the "non-self", of the oneness of sunyata (nothingness) and tathata (suchness) [...] (18)
In contrast, a Buddhist might describe the result of language for Derrida and Rorty as *samsara* disconnected from *nirvana*! Schuon might describe it as the Infinite with no Absolute.

Takehashi talks of his shame in writing words, for he is a Zennist, which asks total commitment to a meditative system that uses language—stories, koans, etc.—to shock the mental so its emptiness can be witnessed. That requires detaching consciousness from identifications with its verbal production. Nagarjuna’s dialectic seems to have been designed to function in the same way—slowly unfolding into a very thorough, systematic illumination of the paradoxes that result when one tries linguistically to grasp what is beyond. Abulafia’s letter meditations go in the same direction, unraveling language from its particular semantic uses pointing us to the letters and then to the Source of the letters (19). They all point to the fact that we characteristically actively “think” reality and so we can’t listen.

And so the world of *mantra* leads to silence, Kashmir Shaivism tells us. The visualization of swirling letters detaches the mental tendency to impose structures. Nevertheless mystics speak, not only to give spiritual road directions, but also to express, no matter how inadequately, what they have learned. They speak from the level where consciousness is awakened, having realized its trans-verbal, trans-conceptual possibilities. Plato talks about the problem of coming back into the cave, the same problem that Takehashi addresses when he points to his “shame” about breaking silence. They know that as we speak we are removed from what we are speaking about. But that does not imply the equivalence of all expressions. It is possible to be wrong—mystics don’t say just anything—so it is possible to be relatively right. When the Buddha *says* that he is not saying one way or the other—he still *says* that. And when he silently points to a flower, and a disciple indicates his comprehension, he still gestures. Derrida points us directly to the “fissures” in language that guarantee that any text, any mental operation, will reveal its seams, its difference from what is being written about. The Buddha says, “Quiet! Look! Listen!” Derrida is so into the mechanics of just how language differs from what is being languaged, that he can’t listen (20).

And yet we can see an enormous gain in the analysis of subjectivity, of *samsara*, consciousness-attached. In that respect deconstruction and neo-pragmatism are important moves in the conservations that constitute our culture. The idolatry of scientistic reasoning is revealed. The danger in post-modernism lies in the fact that those very instruments that expose the archeology of our inter-subjectivities have themselves become idolized. The perennialist perspective keeps us focused on the dangers of absolutizing relatives.

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NOTES

(1) Perennialists include Frithjof Schuon, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Huston Smith, but we also consult the mystical texts to which they refer. Non-traditionalist perennialists or esoterics including G. I. Gurdjieff, Sri Aurobindo, Ken Wilber and Oscar Ichazo. Gurdjieff and Ichazo both designed mystical schools to serve those not rooted in any existing tradition.

(2) Perennialist Huston Smith recently published with process theologian David Ray Griffin Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1989). In this book the two go toe-to-toe arguing their respective positions. Process philosophy and theology qualify as “post-modern”, but the deconstructionist/neopragmatic wing of post-modernism that provides the most radical challenge to Perennialism and modernity would characterize process theology and perennialism as overly metaphysical. Still the most helpful introduction to the deconstructionist maze is Jonathan Culler’s On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (Ithaca: Cornell U. P., 1982).


(4) Ibid., 47.


(8) I do not ignore Descartes’ use of “God” to underwrite the correspondence of an external reality to the internal flow of ideas, but this divine function – used in modified form by Kant and others – fell away across time.


(12) Contingency, 88.


(19) We must remember that Abulafia dis-members language in a culture that was what Jacob Neusner calls “Torah-centric”. The cultural heroes had for their main occupation the study of texts and the offering of words in prayer.

(20) The whole question of “bare awareness” deserves extensive discussion in this context, but that will have to wait.