



A God That Could Be Real: Spirituality, Science, and the Future of Our Planet

Nancy Ellen Abrams

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A paradigm-shifting blend of science, religion, and philosophy for agnostic, spiritual-but-not-religious, and scientifically minded readers

Many people are fed up with the way traditional religion alienates them: too easily it can perpetuate conflict, vilify science, and undermine reason. Nancy Abrams, a philosopher of science, lawyer, and lifelong atheist, is among them. And yet, when she turned to the recovery community to face a personal struggle, she found that imagining a higher power gave her a new freedom. Intellectually, this was quite surprising.

Meanwhile her husband, famed astrophysicist Joel Primack, was helping create a new theory of the universe based on dark matter and dark energy, and Abrams was collaborating with him on two books that put the new scientific picture into a social and political context. She wondered, “Could anything actually exist in this strange new universe that is worthy of the name ‘God?’”

In *A God That Could Be Real*, Abrams explores a radically new way of thinking about God. She dismantles several common assumptions about God and shows why an omniscient, omnipotent God that created the universe and plans what happens is incompatible with science—but that this doesn’t preclude a God that can comfort and empower us.

Moving away from traditional arguments for God, Abrams finds something worthy of the name “God” in the new science of emergence: just as a complex ant hill emerges from the collective behavior of individually clueless ants, and just as the global economy emerges from the interactions of billions of individuals’ choices, God, she argues, is an “emergent phenomenon” that arises from the staggering complexity of humanity’s collective aspirations and is in dialogue with every individual. This God did not create the universe—it created the meaning of the universe. It’s not universal—it’s planetary. It can’t change the world, but it helps *us* change the world. A God that could be real, Abrams shows us, is what humanity needs to inspire us to collectively cooperate to protect our warming planet and create a long-term civilization.

A God That Could Be Real: Spirituality, Science, and the Future of Our Planet Details

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From Reader Review A God That Could Be Real: Spirituality, Science, and the Future of Our Planet for online ebook

Sebastian Ku says

By far one of the more mind-blowing books I've come across in recent memory. Some of the ideas presented in the initial chapters are a little hard for me to follow, but Abrams does a fabulous job leading her readers through an intellectual journey of re-constructing theism using emerging paradigms in modern cosmology. I finished reading the book in two sittings and absolutely plan to revisit it at a slower pace to take in and understand her thesis. Highly recommended for anyone who has the slightest inkling that the model of classical theism is perhaps no longer sufficient to account for a belief in God. I came away feeling like there was a sincere and honest attempt to push boundaries and challenge dogmas, without asserting as truth what is a postulate.

Nancy says

This Book Will Challenge Your Concept of God

Nancy Abrams, after being an atheist for her whole life, set out to discover a god she could believe in. The search started because Abrams has an eating disorder. After joining a Twelve Step Program, she realized that belief in a Higher Power helped her overcome her addiction.

Abrams' husband is a well-known scientist who was part of the team that developed the concept of the universe filled with dark matter and dark energy. With this background, Abrams set out to discover a god that was compatible with science, as she understands it. Her concept is that God didn't create the universe, or the planet Earth. In fact, God didn't exist until human beings developed the capacity to think. God is an emergent property of human consciousness. This is a fascinating theory and one that no matter what your religious beliefs, or even if you're an atheist, is challenging to read and worthy of debate.

I found the first chapters of the book fascinating. Abrams does a good job of explaining the science behind the present theory of the universe. Her discussion of the evolution of our concept of God through various civilizations was equally well done. I had a harder time with the latter chapters of the book where she tackles the questions of whether there is a spiritual world, an afterlife, and whether God answers prayers. I felt she was stretching the limits of her theory.

However, this book is worth reading. It will inspire you to define your own beliefs, or perhaps to adopt hers. I recommend it if you like challenging new theories.

I reviewed this book for the Amazon Vine Program.

Geoff Glenister says

I loved this book. I loved the way Nancy Abrams challenged me to think in new ways about God. I'm not sure I fully agree with her conclusions, but that's what's so fun about this book.

Nancy's husband was instrumental in formulating and proving the "double dark theory". This theory has two postulates: 1) only "dark matter" (my oversimplified explanation: matter which cannot be directly observed as it does not interact with light) can explain what holds galaxies together (without it, there shouldn't be enough matter for them to be held together by gravity: they should fly apart) and 2) only "dark energy" can explain how the expansion of the universe is speeding up.

A few great things about the book:

- One of the two forwards is written by Desmond Tutu, and I just *love* his opening statement:

I must begin by acknowledging that I do not agree with everything that Nancy Abrams says about a scientific understanding of God. I dare say many religious believers will be deeply challenged by this book, but they will come away better for having read it, as we all do when our most cherished views are explored more deeply.

I wish all Christians would engage like this. More and more I am just so sick and tired of the way that Christians seem to typically engage with people they disagree with - an immediate hostility and attempts to defeat that quite often completely miss what the other is saying as well as one's own biases. If we could learn to treasure challenges, as Tutu does here, it would be much more healthy.

- Abrams starts out by introducing how she went from completely dismissing any idea of "God" to questioning what kind of God *could* exist in our universe, given the current understandings of science. She talks about how she suffered from an eating disorder, and joined a group that basically sounds like it reused some of the Alcoholics Anonymous ideas for eating disorders - thus, the group starts from the assumption that one must accept that there is a "higher power", and must appeal to this "higher power" in order to overcome the eating disorder. Abrams rebelled against this, initially, but then decided to go forward AS IF such a being existed, and to imagine this being, regardless of her beliefs. When she discovered that doing so seemed to help her with her eating disorder MORE than anything else she'd tried, this got her thinking along the lines of "what kind of God could exist in our universe, given what we know about science?"

- The first chapter hits the ground running, and Abrams gives a *very* nice (though brief) overview of the history of God - meaning in this case, how "theology" developed over time. She does an incredible job of summarizing this history - one of the best quick overviews of the development from polytheism to monotheism to the challenge of Copernicus (and why that challenged the current theological paradigm) I've seen. One of the best parts of this chapter is that she talks about how these earlier theological paradigms were fully coherent - given these cultures' current scientific understanding. In contrast, our modern society seems to have completely avoided the problems that modern science creates for certain understandings of God - we end up with a God that is immune to any scientific challenge because this God is completely and fully removed from the cosmos (she doesn't use this terminology, but I think "magical thinking" applies here). Thus, our modern theological systems are nothing but hearsay - we can basically play "Calvinball" with them (my words) and make up the rules as we go along.

- I *loved* her chapter on prayer. Prayer is something I struggle with - it just doesn't make sense to be presenting our wishlist to an infinite being. But her thoughts on the subject really helped me. And I appreciated how she also included some thoughts on how meditation and imagination can be forms of prayer as well.

Bryce Peterson says

A Deeply Inspired Work

The concept of emergence was mind-blowing. So much of what the author delineated were things I had danced with in my mind but hadn't yet articulated. She posits a fresh and useful outlook that encompasses the best facets of human experience and potential.

Mike Smith says

Nancy Abrams is a journalist and historian of science and has been a lawyer. She is married to a world-class physicist who is doing ground-breaking work in dark matter and dark energy. She is also an atheist. Some years ago, when acknowledging a severe food addiction, she turned to a 12-step support group. One of the techniques the group taught her was to "talk" to a "higher power". She felt foolish at first when she found herself essentially talking to herself, but she also, surprisingly, found it worked; she was able to control her urges to eat. But this *only* worked when she thought of her conversational partner as something outside herself, not just one part of herself. She wondered why this worked. The results of her study and investigation led to this book.

Abrams spends some time explaining why the traditional view of God as an independent, self-aware, cosmos-creating, all-powerful consciousness is not possible within the real universe as science currently understands it. That God was acceptable when our understanding of the universe was more limited, but our knowledge has changed, and so must our view of God. She suggests that God is an emergent phenomenon of human activity, in the way that the global economy is an emergent phenomenon of the actions of individual buyers and sellers, or in the way that an ant colony is an emergent phenomenon of the behaviour of individual ants. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We, as individuals, may have a vague sense of the existence some higher-order *something*, but because we are the sources of that something, we can't quite grasp it, except through meditation and prayer -- mindfulness, essentially.

Abrams goes on to explain her theory and what this view of God means for spirituality and our sense of our role in the universe. She ties this in with our duty to take care of planet Earth for ourselves and for all future Earthly life. Several times, Abrams says we are living in a critical era where our actions in this century will decide the fate of humanity, and if we don't get our concept of God right, if we spend our time arguing or even engaging in violence over different views of God, we may make the wrong choices.

Abrams's arguments and theories aren't exactly new; as I mentioned above, much of her suggestions on how to interact with God remind me of modern mindfulness instruction. Some of her ideas also reminded me of Scott Adams's book *God's Debris : A Thought Experiment*, which asks readers to consider the idea that God, who had never experienced death, killed himself by causing the Big Bang, and all the particles of Creation, including us, are little parts of God re-combining themselves into God once more. God is us and we are God. That said, I haven't seen these ideas combined in quite this way before.

Abrams is definitely enthusiastic about her theory, and it seems clear that this view has helped her gain control over her life. As Desmond Tutu says in the foreword, however, many people from established religions will have a hard time accepting her view of God as limited, bound to our species and our planet, and emerging from our actions. While this book is obviously sincere and heartfelt, and although it is well

written and easy to read, I don't think it has the narrative, mythical power that a new conception of God is going to need to succeed against existing traditions. And yet...

I remember a few times in my early 20s (about 30 years ago), when I was into naked-eye astronomy, looking up at the stars and imagining myself as a speck on a rotating planet. I tried to imagine how big, how three-dimensional, space is. For a few moments, I truly felt like I understood my scale and place in the cosmos, yet at the same time I felt a part of it. That very activity is part of Abrams's instruction on how to interact with God. So I do get that there is something in what she says. I admit I haven't tried to recapture that feeling in decades. If you see me out in a field late at night with my face to the sky, just give me a few minutes.

Joy H. says

Added 8/6/16. (Published March 10th 2015 by Beacon Press)

I discovered this book when I asked a neighbor what he was reading. Then I read the sample by clicking on the word "Preview" at the book's GR page at:

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2...>

It sounds fascinating!

9/16/16 - I borrowed the book from our public library. I'm still reading it. I'm on p.70 of 163 pages. So far, I cannot relate to her definition of the "God that could be real." The author says that "God" will emerge but will not have the same characteristics of the traditional God (who is a divine "person") . It won't even be a "person". I cannot relate to her idea of this new "God".

The following is from GR review of Nancy Famolari:

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"Abrams set out to discover a god that was compatible with science, as she understands it. Her concept is that God didn't create the universe, or the planet Earth. In fact, God didn't exist until human beings developed the capacity to think. God is an emergent property of human consciousness. This is a fascinating theory and one that no matter what your religious beliefs, or even if you're an atheist, is challenging to read and worthy of debate."

SEE MORE OF Nancy Famolari's REVIEW AT: <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Nancy Famolari's profile page: <https://www.goodreads.com/author/show...>

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9/23/16 - I'm still trying to get through this collection of vague statements mixed with scientific facts or theories. I can't relate to much of what this author says (except for the actual scientific info). It's even hard to explain what she is saying. Seems like a vague theory to me. IMO, she is using the word "God" in the wrong way. It's a misnomer. What she is explaining isn't "God" to me, it's simply the unknown part of the Universe. She says that God will emerge.

Horsefeathers, hogwash, claptrap and poppycock!

To me this book is just a roundabout way of motivating people to protect our environment for the sake of the human species, for all other species, and for the sake of the Earth and the Universe itself. She's trying to

unite us by changing our perspective (or our "consciousness"). However, it seems to me that she could have done it better by not confusing the issue with the concept of "God". After all, she is an atheist (or perhaps an agnostic) (if we use the common definitions of the words).

AND THINK ABOUT THIS: So many people WANT to believe that there is a God, that they suspend disbelief. They accept what Abrams is saying, and parrot her, hoping that Abrams, in some way, has found "God" for us. No she hasn't. She has simply added more BUZZWORDS to our vocabularies, e.g., the cosmic "Uroboros" and "Midgard" (the setting of our "mental zoom lense"). Such metaphors are fun but they don't convince me.

Also see the review of Goodreads member, Casey Nicholson. He says:

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*"Abrams is clearly arguing ... that **she believes in God as a concept**. Her entire argument is that humans create God, not vice versa, but since we have created God that we now should make good use of the concept of God."*

SEE HIS ENTIRE REVIEW AT: <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

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Casey Nicholson says

This book was a pretty big let down for me.

First off, let's start with the premise: Abrams has set out to write a book that discusses how we can believe in modern and contemporary science, and yet at the same time believe in a God. This is a much-needed topic for people of faith and those who are interested in the metaphysics of a traditionally conceived (or even a non-traditionally conceived) deity, as so often contemporary science is used to argue against faith.

I read about the book via one of Abrams' blog posts which had been republished on NPR. I found the concept to be quite intriguing, and Abrams gave just enough of her argument to make the book seem very worthwhile.

However, once you get into the reading, what you'll find is that Abrams really isn't arguing for a "real" God at all, which is a shame since there were so many creative opportunities for her to go in the direction of such. Instead, what Abrams is arguing for (though she never comes right out and says it) is a utilitarian or pragmatist concept of God. In other words, we should believe in God purely because of what holding such a belief can do for us. Abrams makes her entire argument based on her own experience with food addiction, and explains that even though she never exactly latched on to believing in a traditional "higher power" as part of her twelve step program, she nevertheless came to appreciate the benefits that acting as though she had has had in her life. Essentially, Abrams is saying that God is her imaginary, but useful, friend. That's a far cry from "a God that could be real" in my view.

The other side of the argument that Abrams is clearly arguing for but never comes right out and says is that she believes in God as a concept. Her entire argument is that humans create God, not vice versa, but since we have created God that we now should make good use of the concept of God. And for Abrams this means treating God as real, even though her departure point for her entire argument is that God is a mere concept as opposed to any sort of traditionally conceived deity. This flies in the face of what most people think of when they think of the terms of either "God" or "real". The exact same argument could be used for any imaginary

being, say a unicorn or a dragon. We know that dragons aren't real, but we can imagine them, and perhaps they're quite good at scaring our kids away from playing in the woods of our summer home in the mountains, so let's imagine that dragons are real since doing so has some benefit in our lives.

That said, it's not that there are not some redeeming elements to Abrams' line of thought. I found myself highlighting passages throughout the book, and even if I disagree with her overall argument she nevertheless has much to say that is insightful as we think about science and religion. The problem, though, is that the book is filled with circular reasoning that will make it unappealing to both religious folks and atheists alike--not to mention those who want to sympathize with her but simply can't get past the poor argument that the entire book is built around.

And so, I'm giving this work 2/5 stars, with thoughts of just one star. It is intriguing and well written and has some clever things to say--but it's a far cry from a good read.

Michael says

Abrams has an ambitious task of engaging traditional monotheists and Richard-Dawkins-like-Atheist types (atheists, henceforth). On the one hand, she challenges traditional monotheism arguing that historical doctrines about God cannot be true given contemporary physics. I don't think she really means that it cannot be true. Rather, I think it should probably be interpreted as claiming that God shouldn't be an entity that is merely compatible with contemporary physics, but that nature and God should be connected in a more intimate way akin to the way the Egyptians thought of the Nile as both a part of the natural world and part of the religious world. In that line of thought, the doctrines that Abrams argues must be abandoned are:

- (1) God existed before the universe.
- (2) God created the universe.
- (3) God knows everything.
- (4) God plans what happens.
- (5) God can choose to violate the laws of nature.

On the other hand, she was helped immensely by the higher-power in a particular 12-step recovery program in which she participated. She argues that the recovery program would not and did not have the same effect when she considered the higher-power merely as a better part of herself, a psychological need/crutch, or some other such non-God entity.

Abrams argues that one can have a "real" God (described above) and have a being valuable for something like a 12-step program by thinking of God as an emergent entity. Just as biology emerges from chemistry and physics but can't be reduced to them, so God emerges from human beings but cannot be reduced to them. Biology is no less real than physics. It has its own principles, regularities, and methods of study. For Abrams, God is something like economics. It is a emergent discipline/entity that arises from the complex set of interactions that we humans have with one another. It continues even when particular human beings are no more, and it is "real" just like the market is real.

Positives: I saw a great deal of value in thinking about what difference the world makes to our faith. That is, if our faith pulls us away from the world, research, learning, and each other, then we miss something integral to (at least) the Christian faith.

Historical Similarities: But I also saw Abrams' book as something like a contemporary, popular version of

Hegel's philosophy of religion. Like Hegel, she sees some value in traditional thinking but we need to go beyond it. We need a God who can be real, or actual in Hegel's language.

Possible Criticisms: This line of thinking made me wonder how Kierkegaard's relations to Hegel might be a way forward for faith. A way that faith can be united to the world in the way that Abrams describes without abandoning at least some versions of the traditional doctrines.

Steve says

It's rare for me to finish a book that I don't like, so I don't make many one-star reviews, but I read this as a favor to a friend who was interested :-)

So: Abrams rejects religion (presumably because it's not scientific), yet finds herself needing to believe in a higher power, so she invents one out of the concept of emergence - thus, what I will call Lambda because God has an established meaning, emerges from the "aspirations" of people, in the same way that new phenomena emerge from complex systems - consciousness itself, for example.

There's some interesting stuff along the way about complexity and how different theoretical models can be "true" in their own domains even if they diverge from reality in other domains, but all can be found in better books.

Leland Beaumont says

This is one of the most intriguing books I have read in some time. It shows us a way forward toward a coherence that transcends the divisive religious doctrines that deny the well-established truths of the universe and the sterile scientific models that ignore or dismiss the power of spirituality.

Throughout history concepts of God have evolved to explain the workings of the universe as it is best understood. Historically theologians did their best to make their image of God consistent with the universe as they understood it to be. Today our understanding of the universe has advanced far beyond what the gods of traditional religions explain. These obsolete gods are holding people back. This book proposes a concept of god that is up-to-date with our present understanding of the universe.

The book emerges from a dilemma faced by the author. Because her husband is Joel Primack, a prominent physicist who studies the origins of the universe, she is conversant with the most up-to-date research describing the origins of the universe and its composition including dark energy and dark matter. Based on her husband's research, she has total confidence in the accuracy of these scientific findings. She lived as an atheist most of her life. However, recently she has been able to recover from an addiction to overeating using the spiritual approach of a twelve-step program. She conceived of the higher power called for in the program as a "loving but unbullshitable witness to my thoughts."

She abandons the tired question "Does God Exist?" as a hopeless distraction and instead pursues the question "Could anything actually exist in the universe, as science understands it, that is worthy of being called God?" The price of a real God is that we have to consciously let go of what makes it unreal.

Rejecting intelligence, tool making, and language as the defining characteristic of humans, she proposes that humans are unique because *we aspire to something more*. After illustrating the concept of emergence she presents the core thesis of the book: *God is endlessly emerging from the staggering complexity of all humanity's aspirations across time*. God is all that drives us forward toward what we can be and what we want to be.

Chapters 4–6 making up part II of the book are somewhat contrived. Here she attempts to accommodate spirituality, prayer, and afterlife within her reality-based concept of God. These ideas are thought-provoking and worthy of more discussion, but not yet settled in my mind.

In Chapter 7 she gives practical suggestions for renewing and reinventing religion. After describing actions to bring religion into harmony with reality, she identifies three sacred goals: 1) to protect our extraordinary jewel of a planet, 2) to do our best for future generations, and 3) to identify with humanity's story.

Chapter 8 outlines a “Planetary Morality.” Here she considers the essential question: “How can we individually expand our moral sense to care about our collective effects at size scales and timescales we are just beginning to grasp?” She presents eight high-level principles for good living informed from a global perspective.

This book is both poetic and scientific. Within a rigorous scientific framework she passionately discusses spirituality, prayer, love, identity, common bonds, heaven, and hell. “For the first time we can have a coherent picture of reality that meets our highest scientific standards, reveals unexplored terrain in ourselves, has a meaningful place for an awesome God, and frees our spirits to strike out with fervor—and not a moment too soon.”

Read this important and thought-provoking book. It is boldly conceived, well written, clearly argued, and backed by reliable evidence.

James R says

This was an extremely important book for me. It's not just her idea of what might be real enough and worthy enough to be called God in an intellectually, emotionally and spiritually coherent way, that makes it so in my mind. I'm still sorting out her idea of God. No, not just an answer to what God is, but why having a coherent concept of God is important for us as individuals and to us as a human species. Her explanations of the current understanding of the universe was fascinating enough, so that I will be reading more from her and her husband about this. Her guardedly optimistic view of a positive long term future for our earth and our progeny, if we choose to become worthy ancestors, was compelling and inspirational. I readily confess I have never had the courage to believe in nothing, but struggling to define what that vital something might be in light of modern science and philosophy has been a significant quest. Ms. Abrams has given me a lot to consider and the encouragement to continue to believe that the effort is worthwhile and important. I'm going out today to buy a print version of her book, which I only do now days to books that are particularly meaningful to me.

Frank Paris says

My review is actually 4 times longer than their maximum length allowed on this Website.

Nancy identifies her god as emerging out of the highest aspirations and creative works of art made by human beings throughout its evolutionary history. In the Whiteheadian sense, Nancy's emergent god is an individual, just as real as you or me, but it is not a person. This emergent god is capitalized by Nancy, indicating it is her God.

Nancy realizes that some will think that her limited concept of God is inadequate for those with a more traditional idea of the nature and place of God. Therefore these people will think that her emergent god is -- ugly word --idolatrous. The thought is that she's mistaking her god for the True God.

That accusation presumes a lot. Her God is a finite individual, emerging from the cumulative highest aspirations and creations of humanity since it arrived at self-consciousness. That is one mighty powerful individual. It holds tremendous sway over current shining stars of humanity. Yet, surely its power and glory are well beneath the power and glory of the True God, so these traditional worshipers believe.

People who feel that way today are probably reacting somewhat thoughtlessly. After all, Nancy's god is demonstrably real. It is a real individual that exists at the pinnacle of the greatest and most celestial creations of historical humanity. It is not the True God however.

At this point let me identify myself as someone who agrees with the wording of their belief, but who rejects the unbelievable properties of their worn out, obsolete, scientifically absurd God. Yet it remains that Nancy's god is below the true source of the universe, what many people believe is the True God, with a capital G. Nancy would say that she's unaware of the existence of any God or individual higher than her emergent god (although she would spell it with a capital G), but it seems that her entire attitude would be open to the idea that if there was scientific evidence for the existence of a higher God, she'd be willing to examine it and she might accept the existence of this higher God, and perhaps even try to communicate with it.

The trouble is, the most prevalent concepts of God in the modern world are simply not believable for anyone who has a scientific understanding of the way the world really is. In addition, it is a grievous mistake to take literally so-called "Sacred Scripture," that at least it must be reinterpreted metaphorically (I prefer to call it "mythologically," using Joseph Campbell's understanding of this word). This is the only way to recover the original spiritual insights of the sacred writings, in the light of what we know today about the way the world really works. Nancy also explains how big and how small things are in the universe, and that we're right in the middle of the possible size scales, which should make us feel special: we're at the center of things, Copernicus notwithstanding.

But we don't have to limit ourselves with any of the current idols most of the world names "God" -- literally blaspheming, I believe -- in their worship. We don't want to worship a mere idol and call it God. The True God is part of reality and more fundamental to reality than any idol currently worshiped by human beings. The "God" of most religions in the current world have been ground down into finite idols, disconnected from Ultimate Reality.

Nancy's god is unabashedly limited. Through Nancy, her emergent god knows itself as depending on the existence of the human race for its own existence. If humanity flickers out, Nancy's god fades out of existence as well. Meanwhile, the True God lives on, the highest individual in the universe, who has existed

since the Big Bang, and before. We honor the True God by attributing the Big Bang to his generosity and curiosity, and all of the Big Bangs ever to have occurred or will occur.

The tale I'm about to tell is radically different from all the historical tales that Nancy is ridiculing because people take them literally and they were conceived before our scientific discovery of what the world is really like. With that scientific outlook, my theology recognizes that the True God has a separate existence from every other individual in the universe, but made of the same fundamental "stuff" that human beings and everything else is.

The True God is primordial, the most fundamental individual in the universe, the source of everything that the universe is made out of. Further, the True God is much more at ease with a self-conscious species at ease with the modern scientific picture of the world, than a self-conscious species hostile to the scientific picture of the world, because science is a route to understanding the way the universe really works with the True God at its foundation.

Before I can deal directly with issues raised in Nancy's book, I have to elaborate my claim that there is a way of conceiving the True God as fundamental to reality, on which all reality is built, and in terms that are supported by the findings of modern science.

My views owe a lot to Whitehead's and Hartshorne's process philosophy of religion (which I have studied for decades), except for one fundamental difference that 20th century process philosophers, especially Christian process philosophers, would deem heretical, and undoubtedly complete nonsense by Christian literalists. This is that God creates the universe out of himself.

The following are what I consider are the characteristics of the True God, which I believe any logical investigation into the matter will eventually uncover. However, we're talking about God. The only way to do that is to talk in mythological language.

?

Characteristics of the True God

1. God creates the universe in Big Bangs that spray into the world a mist of particles "made out of" God himself. This assertion is what the 20th century process philosophers will regard as heresy, and they seem to have specifically denied this in their writings. But in my theology, the world is indeed made out of God, the mist of God.
2. Each particle in the mist -- which is actually a field in the scientific sense -- has the nature of God, but is capable of only minimal reflection of God and no reflection on God. Instances of the fields in the mist of God are properly called "individuals." What I'm calling an individual, Nancy calls an entity that is the result of emergent processes. I use the word, individual, in the technical sense that Charles Hartshorne does, and I define it below in items 4 and 5.
3. The mist of God thus contains the nature of God buried in its potential, since it is made out of "God-stuff." The mist is God-stuff.
4. The particles in the mist of God are the simplest individuals in the universe. All individuals are capable of combining into hierarchical groups that receive a new central focus. That new, emergent central focus of all the subordinate individuals is itself an individual, what may be termed a "top level" individual.
5. A human being is a top level individual. So is a biological organ, cell, organelle within a cell, all molecules, atoms, and subatomic particles, namely all physical fields in the universe are individuals. An individual has a center that all of the individuals beneath it support, either directly or indirectly. A lump of coal is not an individual because it is not a hierarchically organized conglomeration of individuals: it is a random lump of them. This use of the term, individual, is straight out of Whitehead's and Hartshorne's process philosophy and is explained very clearly in Griffin's *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism*.

6. God himself is a field in the universe that has always filled the universe, something like the Higgs Field, only potentially rich without limits. This field is Ultimate Reality. (It is realized that this doctrine will be regarded as one of those "kooky" tales one raises one's eyebrows about, but unfortunately, it is pivotal to my central vision of the True God. And of course it is outrageous religious heresy (but that concept is suspect these days).
7. The field of God is attracted to and concentrates growing divine energy on each individual emerging in the world from the mist of God. These energized points in the field of God may be called "the peaks of God." Highlights of God are distributed around the universe in randomly emerging peaks engulfing pyramids of individuals composed of the mist of God.
8. God is a natural individual in the universe. So his field is a natural feature of the universe. (Of course we humans can't see this field of God with any of our current scientific instruments, anymore than we can see dark matter.) The peaks of God being natural features of the universe, God's vision from his peaks is limited by the speed of light. So one peak of God does not know about other peaks of God beyond their event horizon. This point is another one of those laughable heresies I'm asking the reader to stick and have patience with, as well as the previous one I started with in the first item.
9. The peak of God enveloping the individual attempts to lure the finest potential out of the emerging individual. But the divine lure comes into conflict with the urgings arising naturally within the emerging individual. God cannot coerce an individual. (That would make the whole universe meaningless, if the truth be told.) He can only lure an individual in a certain direction in the individual's decision making process, in competition with all the other lures affecting the individual. These other lures come from within the individual itself, as well as from the environment in which the individual finds itself.
10. The complexities in the universe are created through the consolidation of the divine mists of God.
11. Immortality and the topic of consciousness. The field of God, which is part of reality itself along with all the physical objects and individuals in the universe, is the seat of all consciousness. All consciousness is the consciousness of God. This is why the "end" of our consciousness in death does not one iota affect that consciousness we had while we were alive. That consciousness is immortal: it is the one and only consciousness of God. Our consciousness now, at this moment as you are reading this? It's the consciousness of God.
12. My take on Nancy's discussion on human immortality. This consciousness which lives on after we die does not by any means entirely fade back into the fathomless depths of God. While alive, your consciousness continuously swims in your memories. Some of this consciousness lives on in the intricate net and memories among the living that we created while we lived. That "memorial" consciousness actually continues to evolve in all the connections it makes as its human environment moves into the future. So don't sweat death.
13. The treasury of the consciousness of God increases with the complexity of the component individuals at any given point in his field. Here, God's attention lights up and the complexity of the required divine attention sets the intensity of the divine energy peak rising out of the field of God.
14. The field of God itself has unlimited potential at every point, but it takes the draw of an individual at a point to concentrate the divine attention on that individual. The attention is complete and exhaustive on the top-level individual at that point, as well as complete and exhaustive on the complete hierarchy of individuals forming the pyramid of the top-level. The top-level individual is thus enveloped by the peak of God, which intimately intermingles with the detailed structure of the hierarchy of individuals making up that top level individual.
15. God has perfect visibility into every individual at all levels of complexity and sees the connections that every individual has with other individuals in his own pyramid and in his environment.
16. Minor point: The environment however of an individual embedded deeply in the hierarchy of a top-level individual might be more closed off from the rest of the universe than a "freer" individual "in the open air" so to speak, such as a human being, or a parrot for that matter.
17. When God is concentrated in a peak in the field of God, God has a local focus of consciousness which is an exhaustive knowledge of the structure of every individual in the pyramid of individual levels out of which the top-level individual is constructed. But God's knowledge and what God exhaustively sees also includes

connections with the other individuals in the world that have connections with the individual at the top of the hierarchy that God is enveloping and shining his light on. Thus from any peak in the mist of God, God's knowledge extends out into the world as far as there are connections with other individuals. This distance of course is limited by the speed of light defining our event horizon.

18. God's wish is to maximize the self-actualization of every individual, taking into consideration its environment and its ability to recognize the lures (temptations) of God. This is a description of the Love of God.

19. The Love of God floods over every individual, even when individuals come into conflict with each other. God "rooting" for both sides and influencing the individuals as much as possible, given the inherent freedom of every individual to choose promptings from everything in its environment including its own nature, results in the unfolding and evolution of biological life in the midst of the Perfect Love of God.

20. This Perfect Love of God for all individuals eventually invades and increases the heights of consciousness until it erupts into self-consciousness.

21. The human species finds itself near the beginning of its awakening into self-consciousness. The arrival of self-consciousness only happened in the last few tens of thousands of years, the mere beginning of where it might lead in a billion years or so, which will probably happen if Earth with humanity's help can survive its current environmental crises.

22. God has a perfect understanding of all of the aspirations of all individuals striving for their future. But the future is available to God's visibility only as a series of probabilities of future events, realizing that all individuals have degrees of freedom independent from God in deciding what to do from moment to moment.

23. Why are the fields of the mist of God independent from God? Because that's what God did when he sprayed out his mist in the Big Bang. He made them rudimentary individuals! This very act of God can only result in individuals who are unresponsive to the lure of God, simply because they are not conscious enough. This makes them independent from God, even though they are made out of him, in spraying a mist of himself composed of individuals so simple that each has only one quantum of consciousness, the smallest amount possible. This natural independence from God is then left to its own devices and the individuals are completely free just to be themselves. But they all have the nature of God. When they form groups that themselves are individuals, consciousness gradually emerges.

24. In fact, that's the whole point of doing Big Bangs in the first place. God wants to see his own Self constructed from practically nothing, namely the individuals unreceptive to consciousness that were the original members of the mist of God. For God, watching individuals emerge as more and more conscious from his virtually unconscious mist, that is an unlimited adventure whose paths of development are entirely unpredictable by God or anything else.

25. This is how God sets up the rules of the game, rules that bring about his greatest enjoyment. He pulverizes himself into a mist so fine that even though each individual field/particle in the mist has the nature of God, the level of consciousness of each field in the mist is as close to zero as you can get. But particles in the mist of God can join together and when they do, higher level individuals emerge, up to the Fullness of God.

26. What an adventure, one that lasts for hundreds of billions of years! Although the actual path of this emergence is not known to God beforehand and so therefore is an adventure for God, like a good Hollywood script, with certainty, everything turns out ok in the end. Over the hundreds of billions of years of emergence, individuals that are perfect reflections of God will be coming out of the woodwork. God will have been constructed and realized in individuals separate from himself, and the full potential of the unconscious mist of God will have been realized. We will literally have Christs walking the Earth and even traipsing through the galaxy.

27. The laws of nature in the universe are a direct emanation from both the One True God (at every point in the universe) and the mist of God. Neither the mist nor the One True God can violate the laws of nature, as this would be a violation of the divine nature itself. The supernatural (whatever that is) cannot counteract or violate the natural, and that is perfectly all right, because nature is just following the nature of God.

28. Wherever there is the birth of a highly conscious and rational individual, there will be an "outbreak" of God penetrating into the depths of the individual and understanding it completely. Thus it makes sense to admit you had the feeling that the True God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Often, the individual has no idea that it has been lured by God in an especially fine decision that it has made. This should not be surprising. Individuals often don't know why they make a decision, whether it was from a divine lure, from urges within his own body, or from suggestions from the environment.
29. Matter is sacred. It is made out of the consolidation of the mists of God. Spirit is thus a natural emanation from matter.
30. According to Nancy, her god emerges out of the achievements and highest aspirations appearing on Earth. Her god is a top level individual with as much reality as the individual human beings and their creative works making up her god.
31. It perhaps goes without saying that Nancy's god, as with any individual in the universe, is embraced by one of the peaks of the field of God that always fills the universe and embraces individuals that are hierarchies of the mist of God. Nancy's god is sensitive to the promptings from the divine peak that embraces it, but her god is still molded by the individuals within its pyramid of individuals (which includes humanity, with all its religious vagaries and conflicts).
32. Insofar as it is within its power (which varies, depending on the degree of enlightenment in humanity) Nancy's god is 100% dedicated to helping every individual within its hierarchy of individuals. Its very existence depends on the existence of humanity. If humanity fades away, so will Nancy's god, up to the tragic but (currently) unnecessary point where they're both gone.
33. If humanity does not cut the mustard in its current monumental crisis, humanity will fade out, Nancy's god will fade out and the peak of God enveloping Nancy's god will melt down to its background level, into its unexcited state. Memory of that divine blip will permanently flicker out of existence, if planet Earth has no self-conscious extraterrestrial connections.
34. The True God is as much God in the isolation of its peaks within the field of God as it needs to be to have full knowledge of the world this individual is and that this peak embraces. It's no big deal that an eruption of God's consciousness in its field is ignorant of the indefinite number of eruptions beyond its event horizon. All being God, each peak is equal to the task of enveloping the high level civilizations within its grasp and of understanding them exhaustively.
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Cassie Sands says

I had several issues with this book. It seemed that the author couldn't make up her mind about if the god she was discussing were real, or a collective narrative. She also, in a roundabout way, seemed to be saying that we should hold this belief because it is useful to us as a species. I don't have an issue with that idea, but it was never explicit enough in the writing and I would like to see her fully own that idea if that is the intent. Overall, I found the first two parts to be a confusing mix of personal experiences, side narratives about specific scientific breakthroughs, and the constant insistence that whatever it is she is working towards has to be called god.

I really enjoyed most of the last part of the book, as well as the proposed iconography of the cosmic oroborous. The last part, which is essentially about creating a global set of moral principles, I think could have stood on its own and would have been more focused. This book is worth a read if you are interested in the idea of a common human morality. There are some good ideas but the book should be much more concise and clear.

Bill Mattingly says

Thought Provoking. Evangelical Christians commune with God via the Holy Spirit part of the Trinity. Ms. Abrams has found how to do that in a secular manner, rationalizing "science ". She advocates a new religion, or belief of a God hidden or created in humanity. This religion is not Scientology, or secular Judaism, but most closely seems to resemble Gaia worship? It's noble goal is in part to protect humanity, that part living now and in the future, by protecting the earth. She believes humanity's course is not sustainable as now directed. A troubling aspect is that she bases the new religion on the immutable laws that govern the universe, discovered and forever proven by science. She claims that the limits of the universe are now known, invoking such terms as dark matter, dark energy, Planks constant or measure. It is above my pay grade to know if those things are true, but it seems she takes those limits as a matter of faith. Reality is as she understands it in the language of science.

Few of us with our own beliefs will abandon them on that basis. Other faiths can protect humanity and the earth without worshipping "science" as we all know scientific theories can be disproved and discoveries explained by new evidence. I do think her new religion would be preferable to the present worship of climate science which is so close minded!

copyeditcat says

Abrams gives readers a science-based creation story that places God firmly in reality and expands human consciousness to a cosmic level. The result is a sense of deep personal meaning despite the way Abrams' ideas transcend personal concepts of time and space. Loved it!
