

ANOTHER TALE OF TWO BOOKS

I thought it would be interesting to read two books that come to hugely different conclusions about God. My first read was Ursula King's *Christian Mystics, The Spiritual Heart of the Christian Tradition* (Simon & Schuster Editions, New York, 1998). Professor King is a renowned authority on Christian mysticism, and this book shows her grasp of the subject in part by providing an overview of the history of Christian mysticism, but also by grasping from that overview insights that tie the mystical revelations of this tradition into a chain that shows trends and development from before the time of Christ until the present. *King's book appeals to my intuitive-knowing side.*

The other book is profoundly atheistic in its tone and content. It is Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, (A Mariner Book/ Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 2008). Dawkins makes an impassioned case for the non-existence of God. According to the book cover, he . . . "eviscerates the arguments for religion and demonstrates the supreme improbability of the existence of a supreme being." *Of course Dawkins appeals to my intellectual-knowing side.*

So when I read these two books, did I further divide my intuitive and intellectual ways of knowing? Did I in essence begin to become Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde with two opposing answers to the same question depending on who prevails at the moment? Or did I find a point of agreement between the two sides, and partly re-unify my self? You won't know, until you have read these two reviews.

PART ONE

Ursula King: *Christian Mystics*

The one I read first was King's book. Why? Frankly it had more appeal to me, had larger print, and was well illustrated. Is that shallow? So be it.

Professor King starts out by saying that mysticism is known in all the world's religious traditions, not just Christianity (page 8):

Mystic experience lies at the very depth of human spiritual consciousness. It is one of great intensity, power, and energy matched by nothing else. All other relationships count as nothing when compared with the relationship of the soul to God, the intense consciousness of God's love and presence. Because of this, mystical experience is seen as the heart of all religion, the point of light to which all seekers are drawn.

But this is a book about "the spiritual heart of the Christian tradition," so her focus is, obviously, on the Christian mystical tradition. And within Christianity mystical experience has seen variations (pages 8-9):

Christian mystics have experienced God in countless ways—as the ultimate Godhead or Ground of Being, as God who is Father but also Mother, or as God intimately present in the humanity of Jesus, in his life, death or resurrection, or in the glory of the cosmic Christ, or in the presence and gifts of the spirit. Christian mystics share certain characteristics, but they are all very different individuals who lived in different times and places.

King classifies Christian mysticism into two classes on her page 24: The first is the negative way, the *via negativa*, of apophatic mysticism, negative referring to the denial that anything humans can say or think may be useful in coming to an understanding of a God that is totally ineffable and "other." King notes that it is sometimes criticized for its philosophical implications, and I can see that this view of God as totally other can lead to a dualistic view of the creation we see and experience being completely different from God. God is "other." This view was popular and still has adherents in both Eastern and Western Christianity. It would be quite compatible with the cosmology of the Cathars, for example, who see the creation as basically evil and God not part of it at all.

The second, or kataphatic way, the *via positiva*, is the positive way of "love mysticism." King says of this path (p. 24) that it:

. . . celebrates God in positive terms, affirming the divine perfections whereby God possesses all qualities in a sublime and limitless way. The goodness and beauty of creation, the positive attributes of all

created things, the love between human beings, can all help to seek, praise, and find God.

This is the way of Saint Francis of Assisi, of course. As I read King's book I realized that my personal fascination has been with love mysticism. I have [written about the mysticism of the Beguines, Hadewijch of Brabant, Jan van Ruysbroek and Margaret Porete](#) at some length, and it turns out these are "love mystics" in King's classification. [Rumi](#), of the Muslim tradition, also fits into this genre, especially when he observes that all love, human or divine, is part of a continuum of love, and we are one with God when we realize that we are both the Lover and the Beloved. Meaning that at our root we partake of the God nature and are, therefore, God.

I have read some of what has been written by the apophatic mystics, and I found some things coming from that approach profound. In fact one of my all-time favorites, a [Sister Catherine \(Katrei\)](#), is an account of the absolute otherness of God. This is apophatic mysticism, but there is a connection between Katrei and Meister Eckhart, who in turn is celebrated as a forerunner of "creation spirituality," which is love mysticism. So to me the dividing line is a fuzzy one, based on my readings and experience, and I won't pay much attention to it from here on.

My own limited experience has been in the love-mysticism camp, but it is very light experience compared with the heavier accounts related in this book by King.

Let's sample some very small bites from this mystical apple. If this topic interests you. I recommend you read King's book.

Clement of Alexandria ©. 150- c. 215)

Pages 30 through 35 discuss Clement, whose book *Miscellanies* was one of my favorites long ago when it allowed me to look into the way earliest Christianity worked in a day-to-day fashion. He discusses knowledge (meaning the true gnosis, not the false gnosis of the Gnostics) as being connected with faith (p. 31). On page 32 King discusses Clement's notion that Christ allows us to reach toward the "ultimate unknowability and inexpressibility of God." Christ thus serves for us as "the only path we have

into the Divine Abyss.” This smacks of the *via negativa* except that Clement also describes the path to enlightenment as consisting of three steps: . . . “the perception of beauties . . . the desire of the good soul . . . the mind sees spiritual things” . . . which looks very much like the *via positiva* to me, again underscoring the flimsy divide between the two.

In Clement’s writings he spoke at times as if the lowly human could attain divine status. King says this on that topic(still on p. 32):

Clement was the first to speak extensively of human “divinization,” or “becoming like God,” as a goal of Christian perfection. Supported by Biblical texts, he held the view that God divinizes the human being through his teaching in Christ. His view is summed up in his famous sentence, “I say the Logos of God became man so that you may learn from man how man may become God.”

During my Mormon years I was thrilled, of course, by the equally enigmatic couplet from Mormon church President Lorenzo Snow who observed: “As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may become.” There are major differences in the God-concepts involved, but all in all these are remarkably similar sentiments.

Origen ©. 185 - c. 254)

A long time ago I recall shuddering with revulsion as I read about Origen castrating himself in order to make himself a “eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:12). I was pleased to see that, according to King, he “deplored such rigorous fanaticism” later in his life (page 35).

I did not know that Origen was “the first Christian interpreter” of the Song of Songs. He felt it to be a symbolic expression of the union between the soul and God. King (page 37) suggests he saw the Song of Songs as having three levels of meaning: (1) a passionate, intimate wedding poem, (2) a description of Christ’s love for his Church, and (3) an expression of “the deep yearning of the soul to be made one with the divine Word. The Song of Songs thus ultimately becomes the story of the union of the soul with God.”

Earlier King had written of Origen's belief (pages 36-37) that it included the idea of Christianity being a ladder reaching to God, a God . . .

whose essential nature is goodness and who seeks the love of his creatures, but desires a love that is freely given. The transcendent God is the source of all existence, who, through his overflowing love, created all things and thereby accepted a degree of self-limitation. God created rational and spiritual beings through the Logos, which became incarnate, living and dwelling in Jesus Christ, whose role is essential in bringing the believer to God.

Origen is said to have believed in "a kinship between the human mind and God" because the human soul is in the image of God.

On page 36 King says that his "orthodoxy was much debated." I suppose that is to be expected, since I like the way he thinks. He basically started Christian monasticism and influenced Christianity for many centuries, according to King.

We are going to skip ahead in King's book to the next place where I found words that struck me.

Gregory of Nyssa (330-95)

What struck me most in King's interesting description of Gregory's thought is on pages 52 and 53 where she indicates that he believed in the eternal progression of the soul toward Godly perfection:

Most distinctively, Gregory teaches that spiritual life continually progresses. It is not one of static perfection. . . . True perfection consists in the growth of ever more goodness by obedience to God in Christ, through whom we shall be restored to our original, divine likeness, enabling us to manifest God. Reaching into the infinity of God and entering into ever greater participation in divinity is an unending process.

Very interesting, I think. There was a time that I was personally enthused by the erroneous idea held at some time by some Mormons (me) that as we

progress toward Godhood, God was also still progressing, and we would always be inferior to God as Gregory says we will (but for a different reason). The Mormon institution put a stop to that avenue of belief by saying definitively that God is perfect, and when we, over a very long time, become as God is, we also become perfect. It is only in terms of God's ever-expanding dominions that He will continue to progress. A divine pyramid scheme. I lost interest in that vision of eternity.

King on page 54 says that Gregory believed that God and . . . "human beings could be united in most profound and intimate love." She then says this idea inspired Augustine of Hippo, not one of my favorites.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

On page 56 King describes Augustine's moment of spiritual illumination:

. . . through an act of introspection he experienced a mystical transformation, a vision or touch, which suddenly made him realize that God is light, a pure, spiritual being, and evil is darkness, as the Manicheans said. This sudden awareness of God, though momentary and fleeting, made him realize that the way to return to God must be through escape from the flesh, which for him meant primarily escape from passionate sexual entanglements.

I cited these words because they seem so Cathar-like, escape from the flesh is the path to God, and those who have become "perfect" as Cathars defined that state, must abstain from sexual intercourse. But Augustine is a Saint, not a heretic.

King acknowledges on page 57 that Augustine was focused on the sinful nature of humans, but asserts that he was also convinced that there was "an inborn relationship" between every soul and God who extended saving grace and love to all. King says that:

Augustine was a master in using the language of paradox to express the essentially inexpressible, the knowledge of the Unknowable, the incommunicable joy of divine life.

. . .

God is the supreme Good. Only in Him can the human being reach perfection. God's nature is love, and by loving God the human being can ultimately participate in divine love, in love itself, which is the empowering source for loving one another.

Now those types of thoughts I like. They mirror some of my favorite thoughts from Rumi and others that came many centuries later.

Dionysius the Areopagite, or Pseudo-Dionysius (c.500)

This Dionysius is the main inspiration for the mystics of the Middle Ages to whom I still turn for insights. On her page 60 King says of his teachings that he approaches God through both the negative and affirmative paths. OK, but what I like is this sentiment also echoed in the words of a Sister Katrei whom I cite elsewhere on this site. This is King quoting Dionysius:

. . . the mystic seeker, the soul aiming for vision of the Divine, must remove all impediments so that "ascending upwards from particular to universal conceptions we strip off all qualities in order that we may attain a naked knowledge of that Unknowing which in all existent things is enwrapped by all objects of knowledge, and that we may begin to see that super-essential Darkness which is hidden by all the light that is in existent things." God "plunges the true initiate into the Darkness of Unknowing" where he belongs "wholly to Him who is beyond all things and to no one else" and gains "a knowledge that exceeds understanding." The Godhead overflows into creation "in an unlesened stream into all things that are," but knowing these things is only a knowledge of the shadow, the echo, the reflection of Ultimate Reality, not of the undivided Godhead in itself.

On the next page, King, repeats a questions that presages declarations about the Loved and the Beloved made by Rumi a thousand years later:

Why is it, Dionysius asks, "that theologians sometimes refer to God as Yearning and Love and sometimes as the yearned-for and the Beloved?" It is because God causes, produces, and generates what

is described, and at the same time is this very thing itself.

King illustrates this point with a lengthy quote from Dionysius which leads me to envision a living universe, with every portion and component of it ever moving yet always remaining just what it is. Dionysius says that things are ever moving toward the Good, “unerringly turning, ever on the same center, ever in the same direction, always proceeding, always remaining, always being restored to itself.” This is hinting at a static God, dividing into many things that then accumulate back toward the Good to restore what once was.

Boring, and not good cosmology, but I trust in Dionysius’ judgment that when one encounters the Ultimate one is reduced “to absolute dumbness both of speech and thought.” (King, p. 60) So whatever is written, even by Dionysius, by definition, is just a faint impression of what cannot be either thought or spoken of.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

I never paid much attention to St. Bernard. On King’s page 68, she tells that he helped condemn Abelard (of Heloise and Abelard fame), which is one reason I paid no attention to him, but she says he also condemned persecution of Jews, which is good. We are all mixed bags of good and not-so-good.

I was impressed with this citation of St. Bernard by King on her page 70 (she used italics):

To lose yourself, as if you no longer existed, to cease completely to experience yourself, to reduce yourself to nothing is not a human sentiment but a divine experience . . .

It is deifying to go through such an experience.

On page 72 King suggests that St. Bernard’s exalted views of St. Mary led to his exalting feminine qualities and teaching that God can be described as having both masculine and feminine qualities, and that the feminine quality is necessary to the work of salvation. Good.

St. Francis of Assisi also referred to God as father and mother. King discusses him and several others, but because I have written about Francis' life elsewhere on this site and did not find the descriptions of the others as interesting as what had come before or came after, I am skipping ahead to the time of the Beguines, a woman's movement at its height from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries according to King (page 91).

Beguines

King on her page 93 says this of the mystical among the Beguines:

Among the Beguines were many mystics and visionaries, who wrote stirring mystical poetry about their love of God . . . The Beguines preferred vernacular language to Latin, and adopted the courtly love lyric for their mystical poetry. Rather than just writing about God, they described the relationship of the soul to God in autobiographical form and used highly charged, erotic images to convey their own relationship with God. Many of the expressions of their mystical experiences and insights influenced the much better-known male Rhineland mystics. Because of the lyrical love mysticism, expressed in songs and poetry, these female mystics have been called "women troubadours of God."

[King describes their dwelling in "Beguinages" and mentions the one in Brussels which has a page devoted to it on this website.](#) [My article on the Beguine movement as a genuine women's movement](#) is the most-often-viewed/downloaded article on this website, so I am very interested when [next King samples some of their mystical writings.](#) [My favorite Beguinage to visit is the one in Brugge, Belgium.](#)

St. Mechtild of Magdeburg ©. 1210-97)

On her page 93 King notes that Mechtild may have influenced Dante's Divine Comedy in several specific instances. On page 95 King also mentions that clerical antagonism is what may have caused her to move from a Beguine residence into a Cistercian convent in her old age. Since I have written about Mechtild elsewhere on this website, I'll only quote King's explanation of Mechtild's motivation:

Mechtild's work is motivated by the deep desire that the soul return to its original being in God. It is her true nature to live in the flowing light of the Godhead, She has emanated from the heart of God where she must return, but she discovers her utter nakedness before and in God: "Lord, now I am a naked soul!"

King then quotes a love poem to God and continues to discuss her imagery and influences. King calls her St. Mechtild, but she was never canonized, declared a saint, as far as I could determine. I think this is simply an error in King's otherwise flawless book.

Hadewijch of Brabant (13th century)

Hadewijch, according to King (p. 97) expands on the "theology of Love" by radicalizing it:

Love is her spouse, her companion, her Lady Mistress, her God. Love is a person to whom one can speak, a lady, a queen whose strength and richness are praised. But love is above all Divine Love whose gifts inebriate and whose strength makes her experience all the rage and fury, the suffering of love when love becomes inaccessible. . . . The storms and fury of love bring moments of despair as well as rapture and delight. . . . "The soul is a bottomless abyss in which God suffices to Himself and ever finds His plenitude in her, just as the soul ever does in Him. The soul is a free way for the passage of God from His profound depths; again, God is a way for the passage of the soul into her freedom, that is to say, into the abyss of the Divine Being, which can be touched only by the abyss of the soul." God is the illumination of the soul, and once so illumined, the soul can follow God's will in a perfect manner and do everything "in accordance with the truth of Love's laws."

King suggests this imagery from Hadewijch was in turn expanded on by the famous German Rhineland mystic Meister Eckhart. Hadewijch is also discussed further on this website.

Marguerite Porete (d. 1310)

I was surprised and very pleased to see King add her to her sampling of Beguine mystics. Marguerite Porete is featured elsewhere on this website in words and pictures of places important to her life, so I will not cite King's [descriptions of her work and life except her summary of Marguerite \[who was burnt at the stake in Paris, the first woman to have fallen to the Inquisition in that place\]](#) and the other Beguines (page 100):

Marguerite praises those who love without question. Without denying the role of doctrines and the practice of virtues, she preaches the essential freedom of the soul, and it is this freedom which was a real threat to the authority of the learned and the power of established religious institutions. In 1311-12, the Council of Vienne condemned the teachings of her *Mirror*, together with other aspects of northern mysticism, so that eventually the movement of Beguines declined in the Church. Yet these medieval women mystics broke free from established scholarly and literary conventions in praising the powers of the human heart and celebrating the love of God in the popular tongues of their time. They spoke with great spiritual authority to their contemporaries. Centuries have passed and much has changed since then, but the freshness and lyrical beauty of their works still speaks to us today, as do some of the values they lived and died for.

The Rhineland Mystics

Of course I was taken with the list of Rhineland mystics King says she is going to explore: Meister Eckhart, Henry Suso, Johannes Tauler, and Jan van Ruysbroec. Hildegard of Bingen was also a Rhineland mystic, of course, and King devotes several pages to her in a previous section of her book, but I did not call attention to her and several others as I moved forward to the Beguines.

King contrasts the Rhineland mysticism with the Beguine mysticism on page 103:

The mysticism of the Rhineland is known in German as "*Wesensmystik*," a mysticism of being or essence, whereas the mysticism of the Beguines is called "*Liebesmystik*," or love mysticism. Mysticism of being is concerned with the ultimate ground of all things,

with God in Himself or the Godhead. Ideas central to this Rhenish mysticism are the ground of the soul, the path of self stripping and the process of detachment, whereby the mystic advances to the knowledge of an imageless and formless God, a *Deus nudus*. Not all these ideas found easy acceptance; some, particularly the teachings of Meister Eckhart, were even condemned as heretical.

I found King's descriptions of the lives and teachings of the four gentlemen she intended to address in this section worth reading, and written in an understandable way which is more than I can say about some of Meister Eckhart's treatises. Tauler was a student of Eckhart but put love and compassion at the head of the list of outcomes from the practice of mystical seeking it seems (King's page 109):

The desired union with God produces in the soul greater love and charity as well as strength to lead a life of suffering and self-sacrifice.

King quotes Tauler on the nature of God, and I will quote King in part (page 109):

God is pure Being, . . . He is hidden from all our senses. He is far above every outward thing and every thought, and is found only where thou hidest thyself in the secret place of thy heart, in the quiet solitude where no word is spoken, where is neither creature nor image nor fancy. This is the quiet Desert of the Godhead, the Divine Darkness—dark from His own surpassing brightness, as the shining of the sun is darkness to weak eyes,

My favorite among these four men mystics is Jan van Ruisbroec (also spelled Ruusbroec and Ruisbroeck and Ruysbroeck), to whom I devote a number of pages on this website. As King describes on her page 113, he believes in the potential for humans to become deified by becoming dissolved into and thus part of the Godhead. She describes Ruisbroec's stages of mystical awareness and describes the last stage:

At the highest, contemplative stage, a "God-seeing life" is reached where the human being is drawn up through love into the inner flux

and rhythms of the Trinity itself and loses itself in the abyss of God's love: "There we shall flow forth and flow out of ourselves into the uncomprehended abundance of God's riches and goodness. There we will melt and be dissolved, eternally taken up in the maelstrom of God's glory."

On her page 116, King cites Ruisbroec's description of the mystical union from which I will cite a few lines:

But if we look deep within ourselves, there we shall feel God's Spirit driving and urging us on in the impatience of love; and if we look high above ourselves, there we shall feel God's Spirit drawing us out of ourselves and bringing us to nothing in the essence of God, that is, in the essential love in which we are one with Him, the love which we possess deeper and wider than every other thing.

King makes sure we know there is more to Ruisbroec's teachings, and suggests that the Rhineland mystics were unequaled for several centuries in terms of their passion and joy.

I found several noteworthy citations in the remainder of King's book, and marked about twenty pages as of particular interest to me, especially in the English Mystics and Early Modern Period sections of the book. However, I feel that with these citations from my friend Jab van Ruisbroec, I have achieved my aim of teasing out of King's book the traces of the mysticism of the High Middle Ages (a period in history to which I have devoted much time and attention) back through time to the mysticism of the earlier Christians.

So I will stop my review of King's book at this point and just simply recommend you obtain the book and continue reading for yourself. Mysticism is alive and well in our own time, as King points out in her final chapter.

PART TWO

Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*

Flipping through this book for some random samples of Dawkins' style and

arguments made me think I was really going to like this book. So I bought it. Read almost all of it, and decided I did not like it.

At what point did I decide I did not like it? On pages 112 and 113 where he enters into a debunking of the pro-God, pro-religion arguments based on personal experience. Dawkins cites a rather heartfelt but trivial case of personal experience, and then cites Sam Harris' *The End of Faith* with admiration for that man's forthrightness in denouncing belief in one's own religious experience or in the religious experiences of others as madness. I [also did not like Sam Harris' books, as you can see by my review\(s\) on this site.](#)

He then launches into a discussion of the brain's ability to make up stuff, to create illusions based on our expectations to make a long story short, thus helping us delude ourselves. Not untrue, but also not a complete story. In my mind I referred back to the mystics whom I have just reviewed, and see that Dawkins has a point: they taught themselves through their traditions what to expect, and experienced what they desired to experience in some way or other (even though the path to vision may have been very painful).

But is there not a possibility of there being a glimmer of truth in what they experienced, in the ineffable encounters they relate, with experiences and knowledge imparted to them of such an ineffable nature they were unable to relate them back to their companions?

Sure. Mystics contradicted each other, sometimes in non-trivial ways, but still, is there no possibility that at the edges of human nature where they brought themselves they actually experienced something reflecting, ever so faintly, reality? I expected a thoughtfulness in this book that was not there.

Was there a point where I really liked this book? Perhaps when I reached page 52 where Dawkins sets up the hypotheses for which he is arguing, with what we know from sciences of every flavor and persuasion (the italics are his):

. . . I shall define the God Hypothesis more defensibly: *There exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us.* This book will

advocate an alternative view: *any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as an end product of an extended product of extended evolution.* Creative intelligences, being evolved, necessarily arrive late in the universe, and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it. God, in the sense defined, is a delusion; and, as later chapters will show, a pernicious delusion.

Dawkins enthused me here because I fully agree with him that the first God Hypothesis is untenable. After reading it several times I saw that his alternative hypothesis actually had some merit. Meir in the sense of agreeing with some of the mystical vision I reviewed in King's book. Some of them spoke of the God nature being the source of our souls, of our souls being part of God, of us being parts of God, and some went to the extreme of suggesting we are God, and God is all creation. Dawkins neatly describes such a condition in time: a sufficiently evolved intelligence that can create is resident in the evolved intelligences of creation. They are God in the mystical sense of the driving intelligence governing the universe.

Where Dawkins instantly failed to satisfy me is when he then went off to discuss religious God concepts that are rather easily dismissed (including personal Gods and polytheistic god-notions). OK fine. But let's assume an eternity of universes coming and going in and out of existence, and this happening of sentience back in some distant universe, creating a creative intelligence among its hive of sentients, one that then promotes the development of sentience in subsequent universes (assuming that as some die a cold death this intelligence can migrate to newer systems). Then, making an observation in this point in time, realizing eternity stretches in both directions from where we exist today, the mystical experience of the abyss and light/darkness called God by us may be very real.

All of Dawkins' criticisms of religions still hold, of course, but let's preserve a little wonder in our hearts and minds by owning up to the idea that there may well be a reality in this universe that we are completely unable to experience or recognize except perhaps through the body and mind bending spiritual calisthenics of these medieval (especially) mystics.

Dawkins later goes through great lengths to show how modern physics

presents a picture of the universe our “Middle World” intuition and thought just can’t comprehend. Dawkins develops this Middle World thought on page 412, and it is a rather sobering description with which I find no fault: our intuition grew up in a world of solid matter moving rather slowly, not in the interstellar world of object moving at extreme speeds over extreme distances, not in the subatomic world where nuclei and electrons have more space between them than our intuition says they ought to have if they make up such things as lead or iron which are so very solid! His argument is that we cannot cope with some of the implications coming from some of our science and thus assume that our intuitive understanding of how things are is reality. That is clearly not so from an ultimate reality perspective. But it is a good enough working hypothesis for everyday life.

Dawkins is trying to show that our perceptions and feelings about what is true may be delusions to some extent, working delusions. Dawkins says on page 217 that these delusions are a working model of the reality we have to deal with daily, and they are thus useful, even necessary. Dawkins is approaching the end of his book with this argument, likening the narrow slit of reality through which we perceive the world to the eye-slit of a woman’s burka. To end his book he says (page 420):

Could we, by training and practice, emancipate ourselves from Middle World, tear off our black burka, and achieve some sort of intuitive – as well as just mathematical – understanding of the very small, the very large, and the very fast? I genuinely don’t know the answer, but I am thrilled to be alive at a time when humanity is pushing the limits of understanding. Even better, we may eventually discover that there are no limits.

This is one of the passages I read that convinced me to buy the book. I share that delight at finding myself alive and aware in this time of continuing discovery. But, naively I thought that the title of his last chapter, in which these physics-laden words appear, which title is “a much needed gap?”- referred to the approximately 28 orders of magnitude between the smallest particle we have detected and the absolutely smallest possible dimension at which, perhaps, something forever undetectable by our current techniques may exist.

It has for some time been my fantasy, my delusion, that when the true mystic feels his soul merging into the abyss that they feel is God, a God of which a part of themselves is a part, he or she is feeling a connection with some undefined matter (the substance of spirit? –the carrier of the collective unconscious of Carl Jung?) at that infinitesimal size, a physically (instrumentally) undetectable layer of existence that may well be able to penetrate universes and spread the tug toward sentience just as subatomic particles impart the tug in matter that we call gravity.

In other words, I refuse to give up my own version of the God delusion. I just reject, as does Dawkins, every description of a physical, judgmental, intervening and interfering God. I intuit that there is something weighty hidden in these words that Dawkins uses on his page 408, taken from an address by the biologist J.B.S. Haldane:

Now, my own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose . . . I suspect there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of, or can be dreamed of, in any philosophy.

This is just the sort of thought that puts me in a mind to not automatically dismiss all things spoken by mystics while in an ecstatic state. The very fact that mystics of many beliefs and backgrounds see this abyss in their visions, and call it God, and assure us that except for the emotion called love there is no other descriptive word that can legitimately be used to describe this ineffable reality they have experienced. And in every case worthy of note they have at some level experienced this indescribable divine presence in themselves.

Dawkins' book is a well argued statement of disbelief in religions of every stripe and their Gods. But to me it fails to come to grips with the possibility that even his enlightened view failed to take account of things in heaven and earth that cannot be dreamed of in any philosophy, even his.

So have I now become a believer in God? No. Dawkins makes a big point of the cowardice represented by the declaration of being agnostic in his Chapter 2. He describes it on page 70 as a failure to consider the evidence, but in many words:

. . . some scientists and other intellectuals are convinced – too eagerly in my view – that the question of God’s existence belongs in the forever inaccessible . . . category. From this, as we shall see, they often make the illogical deduction that the hypothesis of God’s existence, and the hypothesis of his non-existence, have exactly equal probability of being right. The view that I shall defend is very different: Either he exists or he doesn’t. It is a scientific question; one day we may know the answer, and meanwhile we can say something pretty strong about the probability.

I agree with Dawkins if he is talking about a physical God-being. However, somewhere in those 28 orders of magnitude below our current scientific detection capabilities, perhaps there lurks an impersonal and incorporeal ‘God’ force, Love, such as described in by of my favorite mystics: Sister Katrei, who became “one” with God and reported back to her confessor with this description ([see my discussion on this website for the reference](#)):

You should know that all that is put into words and presented to people with images is nothing but a stimulus to God. Know that in God there is nothing but God. Know that no soul can enter into God unless it first becomes God just as it was before it was created. You should know, that whoever contents himself with what can be put into words -God is a word, the kingdom of heaven is also a word- whoever does not want to go further with the faculties of the soul, with knowledge and love, than ever became word, ought rightfully to be called an unbeliever. What can be put into words is grasped with the lower faculties of the soul, but the higher faculties of the soul are not content with this; they press on, further and further, until they come before the source from which the soul flowed. . . .

Dawkins says rightly that we also live in “Micro World,” the world of atoms and electrons, and it is that world that provides us our functionality in Middle World (pages 414-415). Then on page 419 he suggests that:

Science flings open the narrow window through which we are accustomed to viewing the spectrum of possibilities. We are liberated

by calculation and reason to visit regions of possibility that had once seemed out of bounds or inhabited by dragons.

He refers then to his discussions earlier in the book of the compelling evidence for evolution, and to the strangeness of the multiple universe theory of physics. If I were writing Dawkins' book, I would turn away from long times and vast distances into the other unknown direction: the direction of currently unobservably small dimensions in what may be called the Mini-Micro World, and acknowledge that there may yet be surprises in that direction too.

And one of these surprises may be the queerer than imaginable God of Katrei. The God mystics describe as ultimate abyss, total darkness in brilliant light, total absence of words and knowing, all the while melting and penetrating all that is with existence, light, life and love, may well have some form at that currently un-discernible level of material existence.

Until science flings open and exposes those levels of matter and energy's existence, I will maintain my hope on my 'intuitive' side, and my agnosticism on my 'knowing' side.