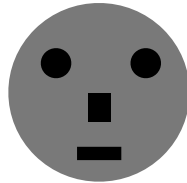


The Religion of Experience

William Call

The Religion of Experience
A Guide to Significant Living

Now you see me.



Now you don't.



Second Edition

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In memory of Helen, my wife of fifty years

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Preface

Concerning the connection between life and death we humans hold two competing beliefs: 1) that there is no connection and 2) that only through the effects of supernatural intervention is a connection possible. To these I add a new perspective based on experience: that the two are inextricably connected and that, accordingly, where the one is there the other will be also.

Religion has, up to now, been founded on belief. For thousands of years religion has been about what we humans believe. We especially focus our religious beliefs on the after-life—on what will happen to us after we die. We experience our present life. We believe in the next. We experience one world at a time. We now experience the present world. We believe that after we die we will experience the world to come.

We have purposely kept experience separate from religion because our beliefs are about things we don't experience in this life. We believe in God and in eternal life, but we believe we won't experience them "in their fullness" until we "return home." Today we believe in what we claim we will experience tomorrow.

We moderns are believers, and these are our beliefs. They are to be found in nearly all modern religions. Despite the general acceptance of such beliefs and the long, enduring traditions associated with them, they have a problem. It's a singular problem we moderns haven't thought of: the things we claim we will experience in the next world can't be experienced!

We experience our present world because that's the world that is experienceable. The reason we don't experience such things as God and eternal life is that they are beliefs only. They can be believed in but not experienced.

Why can't they be experienced? because experience is relational. The tangible world is experienced in relation to the intangible mind. Life is experienced in relation to death.

Good is experienced in relation to evil. Ideally we would experience the world apart from the mind, life apart from death, and good apart from evil. We believe in ideals in which the positive is separate from the negative, but that's not the way we experience. On the contrary, when we attempt to experience only the good, both good and evil disappear. As much as we anticipate a life in which there is no death, we experience life only in relation to death and death only in relation to life. Take away death and life goes with it.

Experience isn't what we moderns think it is. It is much, much more. We think of experience as being dependent on something apart from it. Without such facilitators of experience as the senses, nervous system, and brain, we wouldn't be able to experience. While that is true, if we were limited to such facilitators experience would not be possible. The senses make data available, but they don't experience. The nervous system transmits data, but it doesn't experience. The brain stores and configures data, but it doesn't experience.

We humans are experiencers. Within us is a capacity that cannot be accounted for solely in terms of a physical body or intangible thoughts and feelings. Without the tangible in relation to the intangible we wouldn't be able to experience, but these alone are not sufficient to make experience possible. There's something more within the individual person. I call it "the experiencer."

Each one of us has an experiencer that is uniquely ours, that survives death, that perpetuates the individual, and that ties the generations together. In the pages that follow is a discussion concerning both that which *experiences* and that which is *experienced*. These two and the significance that arises from them are the essentials of the Religion of Experience, which offers a new perspective regarding the purpose of life and a new understanding of the life/death relationship.

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An Uncertain World

We moderns have no assurances. Uncertainty abounds. Despite all our efforts to the contrary uncertainty stands unchallenged. We have set for ourselves the task of defeating it—of putting it in its place. Many of us claim we are on the way to overcoming it. We claim that time will settle the score in our favor. Such claims are ubiquitous. Some are old and some new. We have dozens from which to choose.

We are not only uncertain about our own existence, we are uncertain about existence itself. We have our theories, scientific or otherwise, concerning our personal existence and the existence of the universe, but we are uncertain as to their validity. We are in the dark as to the ultimate cause of things or even if things are ultimately caused. We are doubtful as to our future, as to the future of the world, and as to which if any path will lead us to a reasonably happy life.

No matter the insulators we have put in place, no matter our present state of good fortune, and no matter the right decisions we think we have made and are making, we are left with the realization that the good we enjoy at present could turn to naught in mere seconds. Despite our hopes for better things to come, at heart we are not naive. Our rationales notwithstanding, we know we are not immune from the risks of life. Quite to the contrary, we fully expect obstacles to arise that will sooner or later get the best of us.

We have no choice but to accept the present with all its uncertainties, but most of us have since our youth set our hearts on a future that will be different. We grow up believing that at some future time, whether in this world or in another to come, uncertainty will be replaced by certainty. Some of us put our trust in the advancements of science. Others have since their childhood believed that religion has the answers. In either case the great majority of us hold the belief that for life to be as it should uncertainty must be over-

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come. It must be conquered. It must once and for all be removed as a possibility.

The downside of such beliefs is, of course, that they are themselves uncertain. The trouble with the theory that the uncertainty of today will be supplanted by the certainty of tomorrow is that the theory itself is uncertain. For uncertainty to rule at any time under any circumstances puts certainty into question. If certainty can't overcome uncertainty in the present why should it be able to do so in the future? If one is looking for a testimonial questioning the supremacy of certainty all one need do is look at the world in its present state.

What is uncertainty and how does it differ from certainty? One aspect of uncertainty is not knowing in advance that something is going to happen, as compared to certainty in which the future is known before it occurs. Certainty and uncertainty have to do with our predictive powers or lack of them. We humans have achieved some success in attempting to acquire such powers.

We refer to the rise of science in the 17th century as a "revolution" and for good reason. For the first time in history we humans developed a reliable means of prediction. People were stunned by science's predictive powers. If a person wanted to know the future location of the planet Mars the principles of Newtonian physics provided the answer. Engineers designing bridges and buildings could by applying Newton's theories know in advance the size of beams to use to hold the structure securely in place.

Later developments saw the rise of medical science, the development of vaccines, the work of Louis Pasteur in germ theory, and so on. As doctors and hospitals began to develop new practices the incidence of infection was reduced dramatically. Many diseases formerly known to kill were brought under control, and the human lifespan began to lengthen accordingly.

But people soon learned that along with an increased means of preserving human health and wellbeing came the

ability to destroy it. Applying principles developed from the 17th to the 20th centuries, scientists multiplied the power to destroy life many times over. In the American War of Independence the ratio between the death of a soldier and the lead from a musket was one to one. In 1945 with the explosion of the atomic bomb, the ratio between the killing of human beings and the firing of a single destructive device was ninety thousand to one.

What seemed at first to be a means of decreasing uncertainty became during the cold war between the Americans and the Russians a nightmarish and potentially catastrophic method of increasing it a thousand times over. People soon learned that science is power but its powers are of no effect when it comes to determining in advance what humans will do when more and more power is placed in their hands. Whether and to what extent science has either increased or decreased the amount of uncertainty we humans must face is itself a question with an uncertain answer. One thing is for sure, with or without modern science human uncertainty still abounds.

Whatever the future may bring, there is something psychologically compelling about the turn of a new millennium. It is a time when newness takes its place at the forefront. The newness of the future looks especially inviting at the "dawn of a new age." We shall for the next one thousand years enumerate each new year with a 2 rather than a 1 as a designator. This numerical change, trivial as it may seem, is a catalyst for change. As we enter this new era, we look out further. We see beyond what our forebears saw. We venture into new, uncharted territory. We stand at the edge of new frontiers ready to explore what is on the other side.

A question we now ask that our fathers did not think to ask is whether uncertainty is essential. *Must* there be uncertainty? Is existence somehow dependent on it? Is uncertainty something more than a mere happenstance or fluke? Could existence just as likely have been certain or is it the case that without uncertainty existence itself would be in

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jeopardy? Which is the fundamental on which existence is founded, certainty or uncertainty? Which of the two is it that makes existence possible?

These are questions modernity hasn't ask. It hasn't ask them because to have asked would have put what it stood for in question. To have raised the possibility of the necessity of uncertainty would have put "progress" in doubt. It would have challenged the fundamental on which modernity was structured. But now after so many attempts and so many failures to accomplish what modernity claimed it would accomplish, we, the turn-of-the-millennium children of modernity, can no longer ignore the question of the necessity of uncertainty. We can no longer set it aside. We must face it head on.

This question, with this new dawning, is *our* question. It is a question for *our* times. It points ahead to a new future and to a new attitude concerning the future. We must make our way without assuming what our fathers assumed or believing what they believed. To take up the new we must lay aside the old. We must question not only the beliefs of our fathers but belief itself. Modernity is founded on theories, which because they are inherently doubtful are uncertain. They have served to confirm the uncertainty they were meant to overcome. We must make a different turn and travel a different road. Beliefs with their inherent uncertainty leave the question of the necessity of uncertainty unaddressed. To address it we must turn not to belief but to experience.

But first we must refresh our minds as to the fundamentals of modern beliefs. By so doing we will be better prepared to contrast belief and experience and to more substantively judge from which of the two comes the greater or lesser degree of either certainty or uncertainty.