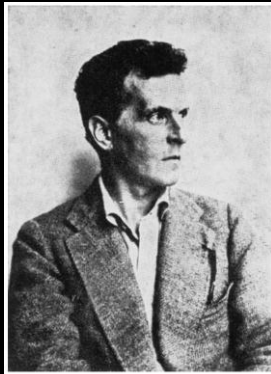


Part 1



Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951)

Was sich überhaupt sagen läßt, läßt
sich klar sagen; und wovon man
nicht reden kann, darüber muß
man schweigen.

What can be said
at all can be said
clearly; and
whereof one
cannot speak
thereof one must
be silent.

Thank you for your kind introduction! In the final talk of this conference, I want to lay the groundwork for our panel discussion, mainly doing...

*Spirituality
and
Intellectual Honesty*

Thomas Metzinger
Philosophisches Seminar
Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz
D-55099 Mainz

Frankfurt Institute for Advanced Studies
D-60438 Frankfurt am Main

metzinger@uni-mainz.de
<http://www.philosophie.uni-mainz.de/metzinger/>



... what good philosophy should always do—clarify concepts and develop a theoretical framework that can be used as a basis for future research on this topic. Such a framework can aid future research if it is flexible and can be further improved through rational arguments and new insights from empirical research. New insights from empirical research have been the topic of this conference and this raises the question of how they can be smoothly and rationally integrated into a broader framework. What is the relationship between scientific research on meditation and the metaphysical background, the religious traditions from which meditation originated? I believe there is a larger, more general question that we are all interested in in the background, namely: *Can anything like a completely secularized spirituality exist?* Or is this possibly not even a coherent thought—an idea that cannot be formed in a non-contradictory manner? This problem,—the question concerning the conditions under which a secularized spirituality is possible—is so important that we should approach it very carefully and in small steps. I want to begin by asking three simple questions:

3 Questions

- What *is* spirituality?
- What *is* intellectual honesty?
- Is there a **conceptual connection** between the two stances?

- What is spirituality?
- What is intellectual honesty?
- And is there a conceptual connection between these two stances on the world, consciousness and oneself?

This is not a technical philosophical talk; I hope that everything will be easy to understand. Nonetheless, I want to try to defend three theses and am looking forward to discussing them with you. These three theses are:

3 Theses

- The opposite of religion is not science, but **spirituality**.
- The ethical principle of **intellectual honesty** can be analyzed as a *special case* of the spiritual stance.
- In their purest forms, the scientific and the spiritual stance emerge from the same **basic normative idea**.

- First, the opposite of religion is not science, but spirituality. [Murmuring in the background].
- Second, the ethical principle of intellectual honesty can be analyzed as a special case of the spiritual stance.
- And third, the scientific and the spiritual stance in their purest forms emerge from the same basic normative idea.

As you may already suspect: In order to defend these theses, it will be necessary (exactly as good philosophy—just as good meditation—should do), to not only achieve clarity, but also alertness; and later, at this biorhythmically unfavorable time of day, I will try to provoke you through the right form of radicality. Radicality is derived from the Latin word *radix*, or root; it is an issue of getting to the roots of things, of the problems in question. What does this mean? I will begin by offering you a working definition of spirituality.

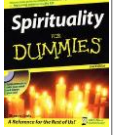
Spirituality

1

In the history of philosophy, the term *spiritualitas* has three main meanings. First, it has something like a judicial and cultural meaning—referring to the totality of *spiritualia* which is the opposite of temporal institutions, or *temporalia*; these are clerical offices, the administration of the sacraments, jurisdiction, places of worship and objects, ordained persons like clerics and persons belonging to religious orders. The second meaning is the concept of religious spirituality—which refers to different aspects of religious life and is the opposite of *carnalitas*, or carnality—and then there is a philosophical meaning of spirituality, which for centuries referred to the form of existence of and gaining knowledge about immaterial beings. Here, the opposites are *corporalitas* and *materialitas*. Before giving you an example, I want to offer you a simple working definition.

„Spirituality“: A Working Definition

- A property of **persons**:
 - an *epistemic stance*,
 - i.e.: concern with a form of *knowledge*.
- The **objects** of this form of knowledge
 - can't be clearly conceptualized,
 - but possibly correspond to the knowledge that religion and metaphysics *used to search for*.
- It is unclear whether something like a **method** of the spiritual stance exists.



Here the question is: What exactly *is* spirituality—of what is it a property? One could say that spirituality is a property of a class of conscious states, such as certain meditative states. But today, I want to view it as a property of persons. It is an epistemic stance—*episteme* is the Greek word for knowledge; epistemology is a philosophical subdiscipline concerned with the theory of knowledge.

So spirituality is an epistemic stance. Spiritual persons do not want to believe, but to know. It is obviously concerned with a form of knowledge—but from here onwards, things become more difficult. The epistemic goals, the sought-after objects of knowledge, are conceptually unclear and can't be distinctly defined. It is unclear whether there can be something like a method, but these objects possibly correspond to those that were previously sought after by religion and metaphysics.


For centuries, representatives of spiritual traditions have been debating whether there is something like a method of spiritual practice and of the attainment of spiritual knowledge.

- Is meditation such a method or does it involve letting go of all methods and goals?
- Does it require effort, or is it effortless?

There are many theories, but in practice, both are true.


**„Spirituality“:
A Working Definition**

- An *epistemic* stance of persons, where the relevant form of knowledge is
 - non-theoretical,
 - non-propositional,
 - non-cognitive, and
 - non-discursive.
- → *existential* self-knowledge.
- → *self-completion*.



Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951)
Was sich überhaupt sagen läßt, läßt sich klar sagen; und wovon man nicht reden kann, darüber muß man schweigen.

So spirituality is an epistemic stance of persons, for whom the sought-after form of knowledge is not theoretical; in other words, it is not about a theory, but a certain practice, a spiritual practice, a certain form of inner activity, which on closer inspection is revealed to be a form of attentive *inactivity*. It is non-propositional; it is not about true sentences. It is also not about cognitive insights, and the sought-after form of knowledge is not linguistically communicable, it can at best be hinted at. On the other hand, spirituality clearly does not involve a form of therapy or mental wellness, but in a strong sense is directed at self-knowledge, a radically existential form of gaining knowledge about oneself; and in many traditions it also clearly involves something like mental education, a path of practice, an inner form of virtue or self-completion. At the very beginning, it involves an epistemic aspect and a normative aspect, and this means that in a very special sense, the spiritual stance towards the world involves both knowledge and ethics.



William of Auvergne
(appr.1180/90-1249)
Bishop of Paris

→ One of the results of original sin is *brutalitas*, which subjects man to animal instincts.

→ *Brutalitas* is the exact opposite of *spiritualitas*.

. . . spirituality is the perfection by which we first of all ward off from our souls spiritual evils, which are vices and sins . . . By this [spirituality] we likewise seek for our souls spiritual goods, which are all the virtues and gifts of the graces. (*De anima* : c. 5, pars 12a)

Here, I have brought you a single first example from medieval Christian philosophy, which is closely connected to the aspect of spirituality relating to self-completion. William of Auvergne was Bishop of Paris and lived there from 1228 to 1249. The idea is that „*Spirituality is the perfection by which we first of all ward off from our souls spiritual evils, which are vices and sins . . . By this [spirituality] we likewise seek for our souls spiritual goods, which are all the virtues and gifts of the graces.*” Here, spirituality is the conceptual counterpart to *brutalitas*. *Brutalitas* is what subjects men, as a result of original sin, to animal instincts. This means that spirituality is the opposite of our animal nature; it is diametrically opposed to it, it is precisely what we do not share with any animal and what only characterizes human beings.

. . . for I maintain that **the only spirituality is the incorruptibility of the self** which is eternal, is the harmony between reason and love.

(2 August 1929; *Total Freedom*, San Francisco 1996)

In the flame of attention thought ends and with it feeling, for neither is love. (...) Out of the emptiness love is. (*Notebook*, November 6th, 1961)



Jiddu
Krishnamurti
(1895-1986)

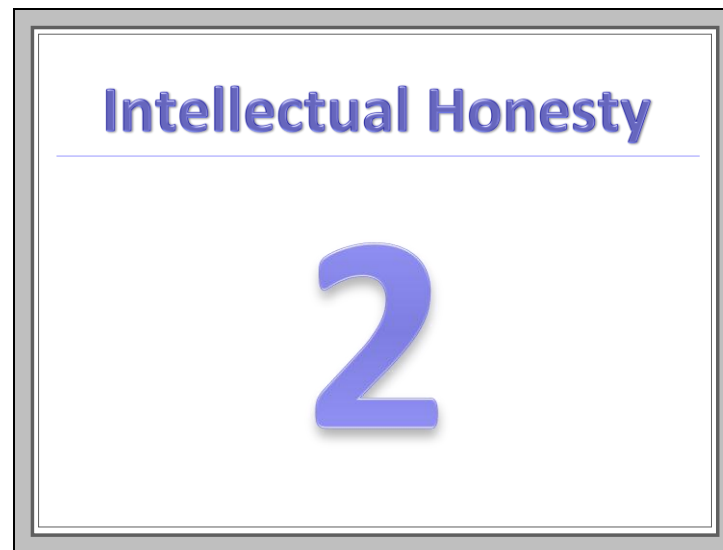
From the perspective of traditional Christian philosophy, one might today consider spirituality as saturating everyday life with the mental [*Vergeistlichung*] while at the same time remaining directed at the world. But let's move to the present to consider another single example from perhaps the most important non-academic philosopher of the past century, Jiddu Krishnamurti. If there were an academic discipline concerned with the "theory of meditation", I think he would certainly be considered a classic, one of the most important authors of that discipline. When he dissolved the "Order of the Star in the East", which was founded for him, as its main representative and world-teacher on August 2nd, 1929, he said "*... for I maintain that the only spirituality is the incorruptibility of the self which is eternal, is the harmony between reason and love,*" and this is precisely the element of the meaning of spirituality that I am concerned with today.

Incorruptibility is the semantic core of a truly *philosophical* concept of spirituality. If our goal is to elevate serious meditation research to a new level and at the same time to

investigate the possibility of a secularized, but still substantial form of spirituality, then we need incorruptibility in two different directions: towards the representatives of metaphysical systems of belief, who try to bind meditation practice to a certain type of theory, whatever it may be, but also towards forms of reductionism that strive to discredit all non-scientific forms of gaining knowledge for purely ideological reasons.

- What is this incorruptibility?
- What does it mean to be incorruptible, especially towards oneself?
- Is there a form of spirituality that is not self-congratulatory, sticky or kitsch, which does not involve intellectual suicide and losing one's dignity as a critical rational subject in more or less subtle ways?
- Is there something like an „inner sense of decency“ an inner integrity or honesty in this domain, or must one always end by resolving oneself to Ludwig Wittgenstein's dictum: Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must talk... [Murmuring in the background]. More about this later. Ahm, thereof one must be silent. [Laughter; applause]. I was so concerned with the next slide ... [Applause stops] Are there any psychoanalysts in the audience? [Laughter] What does this tell us about me? It only tells me that I had to proceed to the next slide ...

Part 2



Let's start again with a simple working definition: What is „intellectual honesty“?

Here, I have brought you many more examples from the history of philosophy.

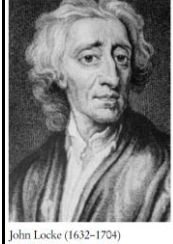
„Intellectual Honesty“:
A working definition

- A property of **persons**;
 - an **ethical stance** towards *inner action*:
 - towards what one thinks,
 - towards what one believes.
 - the sought-after form of **moral integrity**
 - refers to “doxastic autoregulation”;
 - coherence between knowledge and belief;
 - only evidence-based beliefs;
 - cognition does not serve one’s emotional needs.

Intellectual honesty means simply not being willing to lie to or fool oneself. Intellectual honesty, my esteemed ladies and gentlemen, is also exactly what representatives of organized religions and theologians of any type simply cannot have. Intellectual honesty means possessing an unconditional desire for truth and knowledge, even where self-knowledge is concerned and even where self-knowledge is not attended by pleasant feelings.

Some philosophers also consider intellectual honesty as a virtue, an intellectual virtue concerning one’s own thoughts and inner actions; an ethical stance towards what one thinks or believes. The sought-after form of moral integrity—and here is a single technical philosophical term—refers to “doxastic autoregulation”. Autoregulation not only exists for emotions, but also for one’s *beliefs*. It concerns the coherence between knowledge and belief; it involves having only evidence-based beliefs and not letting cognition serve one’s emotional needs.

Do you realize that these last two points also involve abstinence? A special form of mental asceticism? Generally, this means honestly striving for *intellectual integrity*, an important and special case of striving for moral integrity. Whoever wants to become *whole*—a person with integrity—by gradually dissolving all conflicts between her actions and her values, must also follow this principle in all of her *inner* actions; especially in her “epistemic actions”, or actions related to the acquisition of knowledge. We act “epistemically” whenever insight and knowledge, true beliefs, sincerity and authentic self-knowledge are concerned. As all meditators know, there is more than one form of inner knowledge and inner epistemic actions can’t be narrowed to thought or the intellect. Here, I have brought you four small examples from the history philosophy, as well as one somewhat deviant point.



John Locke (1632-1704)

Intellectual Honesty:
A moral obligation towards God


*An Essay
Concerning
Human
Understanding
(1872/3 [1690]).*

*Fourth Book
Ch. XVII, § 24.*

He that believes, without having any reason for believing, may be in love with his own fancies; **but neither seeks truth as he ought, nor pays the obedience due to his maker**, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep him out of mistake and error.

This is British philosopher John Locke, and for him, the desire to know itself is still a religious obligation towards God.

[Quotation] „*He that believes, without having any reason for believing, may be in love with his own fancies; but neither seeks truth as he ought, nor pays the obedience due to his maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep him out of mistake and error.*“ [End of quotation] You may recognize this thought from the time when your childhood beliefs ended; at the beginning of enlightenment, at the end of childhood belief, many of us have something like the following idea: „Well, if God is really is up there, then he can't want us to simply believe in him; he must want us to try to discover him, to come to know about him“ – and here you have, at the very beginning, the idea that intellectual honesty and striving for knowledge really still is a religious obligation towards God. But there is more.



Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)

Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings (1793/1998: 98)


Volume II (2)

Intellectual Honesty

→ The sincere intention of being honest towards oneself.

→ The „idea of the moral good in its absolute purity.“

Immanuel Kant would have said the following about honesty in general: The strict obligation of honest action is to be “*reason translated into social practice*”, because this creates the conditions for a relation of mutual trust between the members of society and forms the basis of public order. But the same thing is true for inner life. I call this being committed towards oneself—it is the basis of inner order. In his book *Religion within the Boundaries of mere Reason*, published in 1793, Immanuel Kant puts the point differently, writing about „*the sincere intention of being honest towards oneself.*“ This is the central point; and now at the very latest, esteemed ladies and gentlemen, it should become clear that a very strict form of rationalism, somehow, could have a lot to with spirituality. Kant even tells us that this form of intellectual honesty is the innermost core of morality in general. It is the essence of the desire for ethical integrity. In 1793, he expressed this as follows: „*It is the idea of the moral good in its absolute purity.*“ Kant also told us what intellectual *dishonesty* is.



Intellectual Dishonesty:
The „inner lie“ as a lack of truthfulness and sincerity towards oneself:
Unconsciousness as a lack of conscientiousness

... **man's duty to himself** regarded merely as a moral being ... **is ... truthfulness.**" (page 225)

The Metaphysics of Morals (1797/1991)
II. Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue

Chapter II:
Man's Duty to Himself Merely as a Moral Being

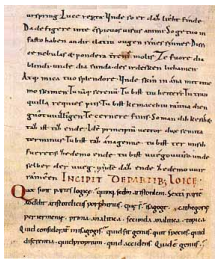
Insincerity is mere lack of conscientiousness, that is, of purity in one's professions before one's *inner* judge ... this inner lie, although it is indeed contrary to man's duty to himself, gets the name of a frailty, as when a lover's wish to find only good qualities in his beloved blinds him to her obvious faults. (p. 226)

In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he tells us „to recognize as an ethical value one's moral duty to truthfulness. Man, as a moral being, has a duty to himself towards the truth.“ What does this mean in Berlin in the year 2010? “Inner decency” ... I will refrain from making a number of cynical comments about inner decency and the fact that we are currently in the capital of Germany, about our political caste, and I also do not want say anything about the unbelievable amount of death and human suffering brought to us, for instance, by the Deutsche Bank and its employees [Applause]; I want to tell you something much more pleasant.

Do you see how Kant explains this? Kant says dishonesty is really just a lack of conscientiousness. A lack of conscientiousness in an ethical sense of inner action is a form of unconsciousness or unawareness. And I think this is a point that could be of interest for the participants of this conference, and so I want to take you on a brief excursion; I have brought you several more nice examples from the history of philosophy.

„Consciousness“ and „Conscience“

- The German term „Gewissen“, as is the English term „conscience“, is a calque derived from the Latin term *conscientia*:
 - Joint knowledge or co-awareness,
 - Consciousness,
 - **Conscience.**
- Old high German: *gewizzen*
 - **Religious-moral** awareness,
 - **inner** consciousness.



Notker teutonicus
(ca. 950-1022)

The first example is the relationship between consciousness and conscience. Why? Because meditation and spirituality clearly concern the right type of consciousness and intellectual honesty clearly concerns conscientiousness, I want to draw your attention to two points that have been almost completely forgotten, even in current academic philosophy. The German term “Gewissen”, as is the English term “conscience”, is directly derived from the Latin *conscientia*, which meant jointly knowing, knowing together with or co-awareness, but also consciousness and conscience. The first point is that throughout most of the history of philosophy, consciousness had a lot to do with conscience. Before modern times, being unconscious also meant lacking a conscience. Consciousness was related to introspective, ethical metacognition. With the Old High German term *gewizzen* you have the first appearance of religious-moral consciousness, inner consciousness. Notker Labeo, the thick lipped, was born into a family of Swiss noblemen in 950; he was the director of the convent school in St. Gallen and he first introduced this term. The date of his death is known more precisely, he died on June 29th 1022 of the plague, which the holy Roman emperor Henry II had brought to Switzerland—and here you see the first connection to the German term “Gewissen”.

**„Consciousness“ and „Conscience“
(2)**

- The Latin term *conscientia* is a translation of the Greek term συνειδησις (*syneidesis*):
 - Moral conscience,
 - „co-knowledge“ or „co-awareness“ of **one’s own** bad actions:
 - **inner** consciousness,
 - **accompanying** consciousness,
 - **disconcerting** inner consciousness (→ „purity“).
 - **normative stance**,
 - **inner witness**.



The Latin term *conscientia* is a translation of the Greek term *syneidesis*, referring to moral conscience, co-awareness of one’s own bad actions, inner consciousness, accompanying consciousness or joint knowledge, disconcerting consciousness—taking a normative stance and especially the existence of an inner witness.

I find it interesting that all of these concepts from early philosophy suddenly sound completely different when they are not read from the perspective of the later addition of the Christian metaphysics of guilt—or of Kant’s idea of the “inner judge” and permanent inner self-condemnation—but rather if one reads them in a fresh and unbiased manner from the perspective of serious meditation practice. “Witness consciousness”, for instance, can also mean something completely different than inner accusation, disconcertment and self-condemnation, as a mechanism of inner self-punishment learned through Christian education. It could even have something to do with altruism, with a non-judgmental form of compassion for oneself and not with the generation of inner conflict. I think you know what I mean.

Democritus and Epicurus already philosophized about the bad conscience and Cicero formed the unmatched term of the *morderi conscientiae*, the pangs of conscience or as we say in German, the bite of conscience, “Gewissensbiss”. Even before Christian philosophy, the idea existed that conscience is a form of inner violence, a way to persistently hurt oneself. Here are two important landmarks in the history of the term.

„Consciousness“ and „Conscience“ (3)

- **Philo of Alexandria** (15/10 B.C.- 40 A.D.)
Considered the most important thinker of Hellenistic Judaism
 - The conscience is the **witness of man's most secret plans.**
 - It was **given to him by God to improve his actions.**
 - Inner apprehension of the culprit, **inner accusation**, inner tribunal, **inner chastisement** (*conscientia consequens*)
 - **Positive governing moral authority** (*conscientia antecedens*)
- **Augustine** (354-430):
 - „Conscience calls upon the innermost of man “. (*Enarratio in Psalmos 45,3*)



Philo of Alexandria, the most important thinker of Hellenistic Judaism, for instance, said things such as [Quotation] „*The conscience is the witness of man's most secret plans. It was given to him by God to improve his actions.*“ [End of quotation] In Augustine, 354-430, you find the idea that *conscience calls upon the innermost of man*. Consciousness has a lot to do with having a conscience.

**„Consciousness“ and „Conscience“
(4)**

- *Conscientia* (as a noun first in judicial rhetoric):
 - To bear testimony to
 - a person's guilt,
 - an action.
- Later (Christian authors):
 - *Conscientia* as witness to an ideal court (→ Last Judgment);
 - **Relates** the delinquent to the offense;
 - Enables remorse, forgiveness, rehabilitation.
 - Mediates between divine and finite knowledge of actions: **the Agent shares his knowledge with the ideal observer**, whose normative judgment is unknown to him.

It means bearing witness to a person's guilt, an action, and later, for Christian authors, it also means bearing witness to an ideal court.

- Here, an interesting idea would be, for instance, that within the logic of this theology, the Last Judgment is the highest form of consciousness, of becoming aware.
- Another interesting idea shared by many of these early philosophers is that an agent shares his knowledge with an inner observer.

**„Consciousness“ and „Conscience“
(5)**

- *Conscientia*...
 - ... is part of the conscious human being, as an **inner space**, into which sensory perception cannot penetrate;
 - **is a place of retreat**, in which one can be alone with God even before death,
 - which contains **hidden knowledge** about one's own actions and
 - **private knowledge about the contents of one's own mind**,
 - and is also the **point of contact between the ideal and the actual human being**, created by bearing witness to one's own sins.

However, there is never a convincing argument for why this ideal observation has to be conducted by a *person* or a *self*; and it may be precisely this point that - in the context of our conference - makes Buddhist philosophy superior to Christian philosophy.

In sum, one can extract the following from many early writings. Consciousness or *conscientia* is part of the conscious human being as an inner space into which sensory perception cannot penetrate; it is a place of retreat, in which one can be alone with God even before death, which contains hidden knowledge about one's own actions and private knowledge about the contents of one's own mind, and is also the point of contact between the ideal and the actual human being, created by bearing witness to one's own sins.

Ladies and gentleman, do you see the connection between *witness consciousness* and *bearing witness*? Independently of whether one agrees with this or not—and you know that I am really a completely different type of philosopher—I think that even today one can acknowledge that all of this has a deep form of beauty.

„Consciousness“ and „Conscience“ (6)

- René Descartes (1596-1650):

By the term 'thought' [*cogitatio*], I understand everything which we are aware [*consci*] of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness [*conscientia*] of it.)

(*Principia Philosophiae* 1,9)



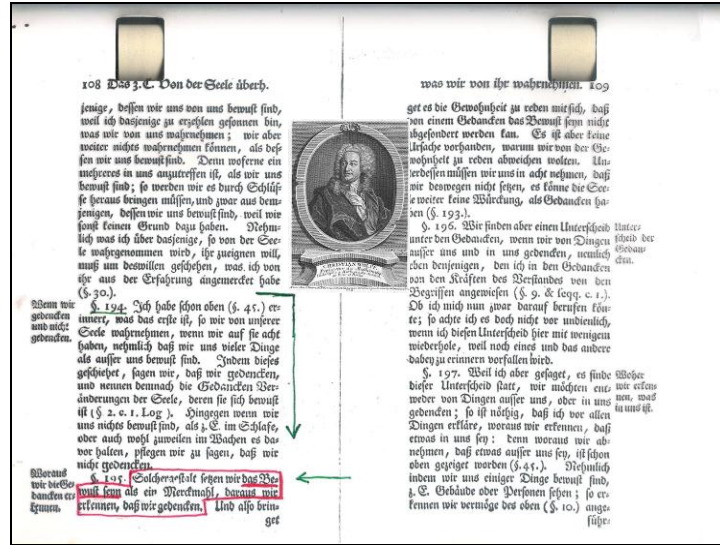
Then Descartes put an end to all of this. "By the term 'thought' [*cogitatio*], I understand everything which we are aware [*consci*] of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness [*conscientia*] of it." (p. 195)

„Consciousness“ and „Conscience“ (7)

- Descartes **constitutes the modern concept of consciousness.**
- Descartes **separates conscience and consciousness.**
- *Conscientia*
 - is only rarely mentioned by Descartes,
 - is never really defined or explained in detail,
 - but is a central and defining feature of *cogitatio*.

Descartes constituted the modern concept of consciousness and separated it from the concept of conscience. However, *conscientia* is rarely mentioned by Descartes and is never explicitly defined or explained. Nonetheless, it is a central and defining feature of *cogitatio*, or of thinking.

Now I want to introduce a second small point from the history of philosophy of mind.



Let's go to the year 1719. I want to show you the first mention of the term "consciousness" in German, which was introduced by Christian Wolff. He lived from 1679-1754 and was an influential German scholar, jurist and mathematician—one of the most important philosophers of enlightenment between Leibniz and Kant. He wrote that consciousness is the property that allows us to realize that we are thinking, [Quotation] „Solcherart setz ich die Seele als ein Merkmal, daraus wir erkennen, daß wir gedenken.“ [End of quotation] So what is consciousness? It is what allows you to realize that you are currently thinking; and from the perspective of meditation research, this can once more be read in a completely different manner. Every experienced meditator knows exactly what it means to think without realizing that you are currently thinking. May I draw your attention to a second point that will typically be overlooked by academic historians of philosophy? Wolff also wrote that the first perception we have of our soul, when we attend to it, is that we are conscious of many things as external to ourselves [Quotation] „Ich habe schon oben erinnert, was das erste ist so wir von unserer Seele wahrnehmen, wenn wir auf sie Acht haben, nämlich, dass wir uns vieler Dinge als außer uns bewusst sind.“ [End of quotation] Do you see that the essence of consciousness can only be grasped by „attending to one's soul“, as Wolff writes? Here we have the idea of attentiveness—of „attending to one's soul“—at the very beginning of German philosophy of mind, in our own philosophical tradition. I think, once again, you can see what I am getting at.



Just for fun, I brought you the title page of Christian Wolff's important work [Quotation] „*Rational Thoughts on God, the World and the Soul of Man, and on All Things Whatsoever*” [End of quotation]. Ladies and gentlemen, that's what I call a research program! [Laughter] [Quotation] “*...to be imparted to the Lovers of Truth.*” [End of quotation]


So even in the Western philosophical tradition, there is a connection between moral conscience and consciousness, and between prereflexive mindfulness and consciousness. We now end our short excursion and return to intellectual honesty, but will remain with German philosophy in all of its incomparable grandeur.

The „intellectual conscience“:

The unconditional will to truth
and the „conscience behind the conscience“

Where my honesty ceases I am blind and also want to be blind. But where I want to know, I also want to be honest, namely venomous, rigorous, vigorous, cruel and inexorable.

→ Intellectual honesty is the culmination and the „last virtue“ of the Greek-Christian history of ideas, because it leads to the self-transcendence [*Selbstaufhebung*] of the religious-moral interpretation of the will to truth.



Thus spoke
Zarathustra
(1838)

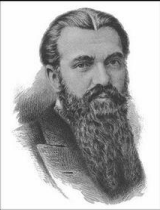
KSA: 312 (p. 202)

What is the logical connection between consciousness and intellectual honesty? For Friedrich Nietzsche it is the “conscience behind the conscience”. [Quotation] *“Where my honesty ceases I am blind and also want to be blind. But where I want to know, I also want to be honest, namely venomous, rigorous, vigorous, cruel and inexorable.”* [End of quotation; p. 202) Nietzsche was one of the first philosophers to really write about inner honesty, about the “conscientiousness of the mind” as an ethics of cognitive action.

And here is an early version of the core idea of my talk, and it is important to me that it be comprehensible to everyone: All of this involves a certain form of letting go, namely a certain form of asceticism. For Nietzsche, intellectual honesty is the “culmination and ‘last virtue’” of the Greek-Christian history of ideas, because it leads to the self-transcendence [*Selbstaufhebung*] of the religious-moral interpretation of the desire for truth.

In its highest form, this will to truthfulness has a consequence for spirituality, namely that one can admit to oneself that there is no empirical evidence of God’s existence, and that in the course of four thousand years of the history of philosophy there was no ultimately convincing argument for the existence of God. In its highest form, the will to truthfulness allows us to relinquish our search for emotional security and pleasant feelings, which has been hard-wired into us in the course of evolution, and to face the fact that we are radically mortal beings. Truthfulness towards ourselves allows us discover the delusional element and the systematic denial of finiteness in our self-model.

The philosophical debate in Anglo-Saxon culture was more profound, and, most of all, analytically more clear and substantial. Today, the technical debate is conducted under the title of *“The Ethics of Belief”*.




The Ethics of Belief

- *It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.*
- *At any time, at any place and for every person it is equally wrong to ignore or carelessly reject the relevant evidence for one's own beliefs.*

William Kingdon Clifford
(1845-1879)

The Ethics of Belief
(1877)

(P1) We have an **epistemic obligation** to possess sufficient evidence for all of our beliefs;
(P2) We have a **moral obligation** to uphold our epistemic obligations;
(C) Thus, we have a moral obligation to possess sufficient evidence for all of our beliefs.



When is it permissible from an ethical and moral perspective to believe in something specific, or to adopt a certain belief “as one’s own”?

The British philosopher and mathematician William Kingdon Clifford was the founding father of this question, which is central to the distinction between religion and spirituality. The two main principles are that [Quotation] *“It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.”* [End of quotation] And correspondingly, *“At any time, at any place and for every person it is wrong to ignore or carelessly reject the relevant evidence for one’s own beliefs.”* About those who do not act according to the second principle, he said the following: [Quotation] *„If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call in question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it—the life of that man is one long sin against mankind.”* [End of quotation]

Interestingly, most philosophers agree on this point and the standard position is the fundamental moral position of „evidentialism“. This means only believing in things for which one actually has arguments and evidence. The philosophical counterpart is fideism. This is the position of faith, of pure belief. Here, the philosophical thesis is that it is legitimate to hold on to a belief that not only lacks any positive arguments or evidence in its favor, but even in the face of strong counterarguments and strong empirical evidence against one’s own beliefs.

Here are two further basic concepts from my discipline:

- „Dogmatism“ is the thesis that *„It is legitimate to hold on to a belief just because one already has it.“* [Laughter] A very simple definition!
- In philosophy, „fideism“ is the thesis that it is completely legitimate to hold on to a belief when there are no good reasons or evidence in its favor, even despite existing counterarguments.

What is interesting, however, is that fideism can be described as *the refusal to take any ethical stance on one’s inner actions at all*. And this is the classical standpoint of organized religion, as opposed to spirituality. If one were to interpret these two epistemological positions from a purely psychological perspective, one could say that fideism involves deliberate self-deception, systematic wishful thinking or even paranoia; whereas the psychological goal of the ethics of belief consists in a certain form of mental health. I call this form of mental health “intellectual integrity”.

Fideism and dogmatism can also be seen from a different perspective: If you allow yourself to hold on to a certain belief in


the absence of positive theoretical or practical evidence, then you have already given up on the whole idea of an ethics of inner actions. You reject the project of intellectual honesty, and on the level of your own mind you reject not only rationality, but also morality. And this is what I meant at the beginning of this talk when I said that “Intellectual honesty is what theologians and representatives of organized religions of any kind just cannot have.”

Unfortunately, this is the end of the uplifting part of my lecture and the little pleasant little nap that many of you—comprehensibly—have secretly been trying to take since lunch is now over.

**Meditation and intellectual honesty:
Three examples**

- What **exactly** does „intellectual honesty“ mean in 2010?

- Example 1: *Religion*
- Example 2: *Life after death*
- Example 3: *Enlightenment*



In order to understand more exactly what the connection between spirituality and intellectual honesty is, let us look at three concrete examples, and let us remember William Kingdon Clifford's second principle, according to which it is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone, to ignore or carelessly reject the relevant evidence for one's own beliefs. The three examples are: Religion, life after death and enlightenment.

Religion

■ **Conceptually:**

Even after 2500 years, there is **no convincing argument for God's existence** in the history of Western philosophy.

- Proofs of God's existence fail.
- Agnosticism (withholding judgment) is probably not an option, because the burden of proof is on the side of theism.

Conceptually, there is not a single ultimately convincing argument for God's existence in 2500 years of the history of Western philosophy. All known proofs of God's existence fail. And retreating to agnosticism—as many of us prefer—and saying “I won't say anything about this, I withhold judgment!” is not an easy option. This position is problematic, because the entire burden of proof is on the side of the theists. If all evidence and empirical data point to the fact that the Easter Bunny does not exist, it is also not intellectually honest to say “I am agnostic regarding the existence of the Easter Bunny; I consider this to be an open question!” [Laughter]. From the point of view of informal logic and critical thinking it may well be that agnosticism, too, is not really an option.

Religion

■ **Empirically:**

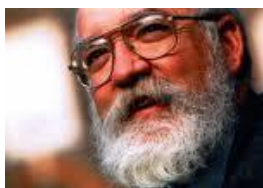
There is **no empirical evidence for the existence of God.**

- There is an increasing number of convincing theories on the **evolution of religiousness.**
- Evolutionary psychology is providing very first models of the **development of metaphysical belief systems.**
- Religion is being „naturalized“.

It is trivial to say that there is no empirical evidence for God's existence, but there is an increasing number of convincing theories on the evolution of religious belief. Evolutionary psychology is providing the first models for the development of metaphysical belief systems. And there is a movement aiming to „naturalize“ religion.

BEHAVIORAL AND BRAIN SCIENCES (2009) 32, 493–561
doi:10.1017/S0140525X09990975

The evolution of misbelief



Ryan T. McKay

Institute for Empirical Research in Economics, University of Zurich, Zurich 8006, Switzerland; and Centre for Anthropology and Mind, University of Oxford, Oxford OX2 6PE, United Kingdom

ryantmckay@mac.com

<http://homepage.mac.com/ryantmckay/>

Daniel C. Dennett

The Center for Cognitive Studies, Tufts University, Medford, MA 02155-7059

ddennett@tufts.edu

<http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/incbios/dennettd/dennettd.htm>

Abstract: From an evolutionary standpoint, a default presumption is that true beliefs are adaptive and misbeliefs maladaptive. But if humans are biologically engineered to appraise the world accurately and to form true beliefs, how are we to explain the routine exceptions to this rule? **How can we account for mistaken beliefs, bizarre delusions, and instances of self-deception?** We explore this question in some detail. We begin by articulating a distinction between two general types of misbelief: those resulting from a breakdown in the normal functioning of the belief formation system (e.g., delusions) and those arising in the normal course of that system's operations (e.g., beliefs based on incomplete or inaccurate information). The former are instances of biological dysfunction or pathology, reflecting "culpable" limitations of evolutionary design. Although the latter category includes undesirable (but tolerable) by-products of "forgivably" limited design, our quarry is a contentious subclass of this category: **misbeliefs best conceived as design features**. Such **misbeliefs**, unlike occasional lucky falsehoods, **would have been systematically adaptive in the evolutionary past**. Such misbeliefs, furthermore, would not be reducible to judicious – but doxastically¹ noncommittal – action policies. Finally, such misbeliefs would have been adaptive in themselves, constituting more than mere by-products of adaptively biased misbelief-producing systems. We explore a range of potential candidates for **evolved misbelief**, and conclude that, of those surveyed, only *positive illusions* meet our criteria.

Keywords: adaptive; belief; delusions; design; evolution; misbelief; positive illusions; religion; self-deception

I brought you two examples: The first is from Daniel Dennett, who is possibly the most famous contemporary philosopher of consciousness, and Ryan McKay. Like many researchers, they are trying to understand the evolutionary development of false beliefs: delusional systems, positive illusions and systematic deception.

BEHAVIORAL AND BRAIN SCIENCES (2011) 34, 1–56
doi:10.1017/S0140525X10001354

The evolution and psychology of self-deception



William von Hippel

School of Psychology, University of Queensland, St Lucia, QLD 4072, Australia
billvh@psy.uq.edu.au
<http://www.psy.uq.edu.au/directory/index.html?id=1159>

Robert Trivers

Department of Anthropology, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
trivers@rci.rutgers.edu
http://anthro.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=102&Itemid=136



Abstract: In this article we argue that self-deception evolved to facilitate interpersonal deception by allowing people to avoid the cues to conscious deception that might reveal deceptive intent. Self-deception has two additional advantages: It eliminates the costly cognitive load that is typically associated with deceiving, and it can minimize retribution if the deception is discovered. Beyond its role in specific acts of deception, self-deceptive self-enhancement also allows people to display more confidence than is warranted, which has a host of social advantages. The question then arises of how the self can be both deceiver and deceived. We propose that this is achieved through dissociations of mental processes, including conscious versus unconscious memories, conscious versus unconscious attitudes, and automatic versus controlled processes. Given the variety of methods for deceiving others, it should come as no surprise that self-deception manifests itself in a number of different psychological processes, and we discuss various types of self-deception. We then discuss the interpersonal versus intrapersonal nature of self-deception before considering the levels of consciousness at which the self can be deceived. Finally, we contrast our evolutionary approach to self-deception with current theories and debates in psychology and consider some of the costs associated with self-deception.

Keywords: deception; evolutionary psychology; motivated cognition; self-deception; social psychology

I don't want to go into the scientific findings, but, as an example, I do want to point out the work of Robert Trivers and Bill von Hippel. There will be a big target paper in BBS—in case you are interested in the science—in which they explain the evolution and psychology of self-deception. The bottom line is that it is now completely clear...


[I]f (as Dawkins argues) deceit is fundamental in animal communication and this ought, in turn, to select for a degree of self-deception, rendering some facts and motives unconscious so as not to betray – by the subtle signs of self-knowledge – the deception being practiced. Thus, the conventional view that natural selection favors nervous systems which produce ever more accurate images of the world must be a very naïve view of mental evolution. (Trivers 2006, p. xx; see also Alexander 1979; 1987; Lockard 1978; 1980; Lockard & Paulhus 1988; Trivers 1985; 2000)



- New research shows that in many cases, there was an evolution of *systematic mental misrepresentations of reality*.
- There is an *evolution of self-deception*.
- In many cases, positive illusions, mechanisms of denial and repression and delusional models of reality enhanced the *reproductive success* of our biological ancestors.
- The central problem for *our* species is our *explicit and consciously experienced insight into our own mortality*.

.. that there is an evolution of self-deception. The conventional view that natural selection favored nervous systems producing ever more exact images of themselves and of reality, this view really has been falsified.

Recent research shows that in many cases, evolution developed *systematic misrepresentations* of reality. There is an evolution of self-deception. In many cases, positive illusions, mechanisms of suppression and delusional models of reality enhanced the reproductive success of our biological ancestors. [Laughter] The new main problem for *our* species is our explicit and consciously experienced insight into our own mortality. In this context, I have coined the concept of “adaptive delusional systems”. Dr. Schnabel from the ZEIT [the most important German weekly newspaper] always says I shouldn’t say things like that, because then nobody will like me any more [Laughter]. Instead, I should speak of “reality models”, as I used to in the past. But I am seriously interested in this aspect of mental health and illness: The interesting new insight seems to be that evolution developed successful forms of mental illness.



Adaptive delusional systems:

- Cohesion of large groups.
- Stabilization of internal hierarchies.
- **Functionally adequate forms of self-deception.**

Evolution of religion:


- Burial rites, burial objects, ancestor cult.
- **Denial of mortality.**

The representatives of these two delusional systems [Laughter]... are importantly different: One of these delusional systems has survived for 2000 years; the Thousand Year Empire disappeared after twelve years.

Adaptive delusional systems increase group cohesion and stabilize internal hierarchies, for instance existing structures of power and systems of exploitation. This means that they are functionally adequate forms of self-deception, enabling a group to assert itself against other groups under certain conditions. The evolution of religion developed from rites of burial, including burial objects and ancestor cults, that is, from systematic forms of denying our own mortality—coping strategies for dealing with our own finiteness. Being intellectually honest does not mean that one cannot believe anything different! It only means acknowledging the current situation and what intelligent people have to say about it, that is all.

Life after death

- **Conceptually:**
In current philosophy of mind, practically nobody endorses the position of **substance dualism**.
- Approximately nine different models for solving the mind-body problem exist.
- Even **property dualists** and **anti-reductionists** do *not* argue for personal survival after death.



What about life after death? Conceptually, substance dualism is no longer regarded as a tenable position in current philosophy of mind. You can read the details in the second volume of my *Grundkurs Philosophie des Geistes* [three volumes containing the most important philosophical articles on phenomenal consciousness, the mind-body problem and intentionality, with introductions and additional literature].

Approximately nine different models for solving the mind-body problem have been proposed, but none of them assumes that there could be something like personal survival after death. Even anti-reductionists and property dualists do not argue for personal survival after death.

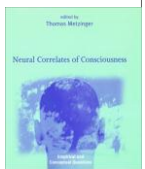

There are different forms of death denial. For the theory of meditation and for philosophers, Buddhist philosophy obviously is the most interesting. Here, death denial takes a slightly more subtle form, but is nonetheless easy to detect: „We do not want to be reborn. We want to free ourselves from the cycle of death and rebirth. But unfortunately, if something goes wrong with enlightenment, we have to come back.“ [Laughter] So, the alternative is either life after death or enlightenment—all in all, not a bad situation! [Laughter]

Life after death

■ **Empirically:**

In current **consciousness research**, nobody assumes that life after death is a real possibility.


- A functioning brain is a **necessary condition** for phenomenal states to arise.
- Upward determination.
- Research homes in on the **neural correlate of consciousness (NCC)**.



No one in current empirical consciousness research—organized in an association of which I am the president [Laughter], the „*Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness*“ – ...so I can speak here with simple personal authority: In this community of people searching for the neural correlate of consciousness, no one believes in life after death. A functioning brain is a necessary condition for phenomenal states to arise. Even if conceptual reduction is impossible, it is obvious that everything is determined from the bottom up, and serious research aims to find the „neural correlate of consciousness“. And, of course, the idea is that even advanced meditative states will have a neural correlate without which they cannot arise.

Again, it is essential to understand the following point: One does not *have to* believe that all these theories are true! All of this could be false. Intellectual honesty involves being honest toward oneself and simply acknowledging the fact that this is the current state of affairs in science and philosophy. In fact, if we want to act responsibly and with integrity, we never have anything but the Now - and this includes the Now of empirical consciousness research.

Enlightenment



- **Conceptually:**

From a philosophical perspective, there are no good arguments for saying that

 - a single,
 - well-defined,
 - culturally invariant,
 - theory- and
 - **description-independent** state of consciousness exists that can be identified with „the“ enlightenment.

What about enlightenment?

This is Robert Sharf, the *Director of Buddhist Studies* at the *University of California in Berkeley*. He once invited me to lunch and made the following point clear to me: From a philosophical perspective, there are no good arguments for saying that a single, well-defined, culturally invariant, theory- and description-independent state of consciousness exists that can be identified with „enlightenment“. This man lived in Burma for a long time, also in monasteries, he knows all of the writings in their original languages, and he made this very clear to me: In no period of history did Buddhist philosophers agree about what enlightenment is.

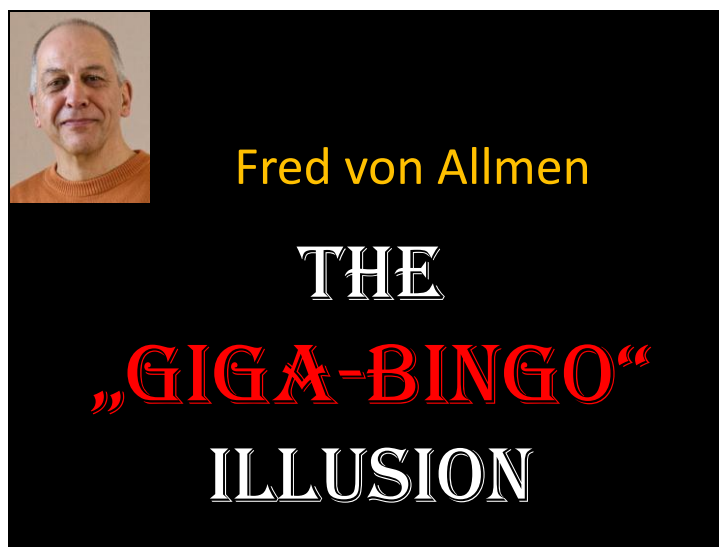
We only know what enlightenment is in the West, where we satisfy our emotional needs in New Age book shops and in doing so, exploit other cultures. This is a problem and one has to face this fact.

Enlightenment

- **Empirically:**
 - Does meditation research *show* that
 - a **single**,
 - **well-defined**,
 - **culturally invariant**,
 - **theory-** and
 - **description-independent** state of consciousness exists that can be identified with „the“ enlightenment?
 - *Can* it even show this?

Empirically – I simply want to ask you:

- Does empirical meditation research show that a single, well-defined, culturally invariant, theory- and description-independent state of consciousness exists that can be identified with „the“ enlightenment?
- *Can* empirical research even show this?



Probably the best meditation teacher I have ever met is Fred von Allmen from Beatenberg, Switzerland. As you may have noticed, as an analytical philosopher, I love precise technical terms that can simply and concisely grasp the core of a problem. Here is one of my favorite technical terms, which I learned from Fred von Allmen.

It is the „Giga-Bingo“-Illusion [Laughter], the illusion of being completely confused, and then being able to sit under a Bodhi-tree until one time suddenly something happens - the first prize, Giga-Bingo - and from then on, everything is different.

Part 3



I am already approaching the end of my talk.

3 Questions

- What is spirituality?
- What is intellectual honesty?
- Is there a **conceptual connection** between the two stances?

Here are the three questions we asked at the beginning of this talk. I briefly sketched what spirituality might be, and also what intellectual honesty is. And I think now something like the following picture is emerging: Historically, religion was obviously there first: belief systems shared by ever larger groups of people, which alleviated people's fear of death and considerably strengthened group cohesion—both internally and externally, by stabilizing existing structures of exploitation and also in the fight against other groups. These fideist-dogmatic reality models historically developed from burial rites, ancestor cults and shamanism.

3 Theses

- The opposite of religion is not science, but **spirituality**.
- The ethical principle of **intellectual honesty** can be analyzed as a *special case* of the spiritual stance.
- In their purest forms, the scientific and the spiritual stance emerge from the same **basic normative idea**.

And here are, once more, the three theses. Historically—in our own history—what came last was the ideal of intellectual honesty, self-critical rationalism and enlightenment. The ideal of intellectual honesty in this sense is something completely new that is only rudimentarily beginning to realize itself in very few places on our planet, in very few cultures.

What made intellectual honesty possible, however, were the originally religious ideals of unconditional truthfulness and honesty towards God. In the reflexive turn toward man himself, these ideals turned into the two ethical ideals of unconditional truthfulness and honesty, of relentless candidness toward oneself. The unconditional avowal of epistemic progress itself. What most people fail to see clearly, however, is this: there is more than one form of epistemic progress.

3 Theses

- The opposite of religion is not science, but **spirituality**.
- The ethical principle of **intellectual honesty** can be analyzed as a *special case* of the spiritual stance.
- In their purest forms, the scientific and the spiritual stance emerge from the same **basic normative idea**.

Now, allow me to briefly compare religion and spirituality.

Religion as the <i>opposite</i> of spirituality	
Religion	Spirituality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Fideism</u>: Cultivation of a delusional system.• Maximizes emotional profit.• Sacrifices rationality for the emotional coherence of the self-model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Epistemic stance</u>: Aims at insight.• Searches for direct experience.• Dissolves the phenomenal self.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Dogmatism</u>: Intellectually dishonest.• Organizes itself.• Evangelizes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Ideal of truthfulness</u>: Open for rational arguments.• Radically individual.• <i>Typically</i>: Quiet.

Religion would then be: the cultivation of a delusional, fideist system. Spirituality would be the epistemic stance interested in insight and knowledge. Religion maximizes emotional profit—pleasant feelings of security. Spirituality aims at direct experience. Religion sacrifices rationality for the emotional coherence of the self-model. Spirituality dissolves the phenomenal self-model. Religion is dogmatic and therefore intellectually dishonest. Spiritual people will always be open to rational argumentation. Religion organizes itself. Spirituality is something radically individual.

Before briefly offering you an interesting comparison, I want to remind you of the two epistemological concepts that characterize what I mean by religion in the actual sense, namely of being a genuine stance of belief.

- „Dogmatism“ is the thesis that it is perfectly legitimate to hold onto a belief just because one already has it. That is, independently of empirical evidence or rational reasons.
- „Fideism“ is the standpoint of pure belief. In philosophy, „fideism“ is the thesis that it is not only completely legitimate to hold on to a belief when there is no evidence or any good reasons for this opinion, but also when there are arbitrarily many good reasons or evidence *against* it.

Religion evangelizes. Spiritual people tend to be quiet.

3 Theses

- The opposite of religion is not science, but **spirituality**.
- The ethical principle of **intellectual honesty** can be analyzed as a *special case* of the spiritual stance.
- In their purest forms, the scientific and the spiritual stance emerge from the same **basic normative idea**.

What about the ethical principle of intellectual honesty as a special case of the spiritual stance?

Spirituality and Science:
Intellectual honesty as a special case of the spiritual stance

Spirituality	Science
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Epistemic stance:</u> Aimed at insight. Unconditional will to knowledge.• Search for direct experience.• Dissolves the phenomenal self. • <u>Ideal of truthfulness:</u> Open for rational arguments.• Radically individual.• <i>Typically:</i> Quiet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Rational methodology:</u> Systematically <i>maximizes</i> epistemic progress.• Search for empirical evidence; is strictly data-driven.• Allows theories to fail in the face of reality. • <u>Principle of parsimony:</u> <i>Minimizes</i> ontological assumptions.• Organizes itself.• Disseminates knowledge.

We have seen that spirituality is an epistemic stance, the unconditional desire for knowledge. In science, there is a rational methodology that systematically maximizes epistemic progress. On the one hand, there is the search for direct experience. On the other hand, there is data collection, strictly data-driven procedures. On the one hand, the dissolution of the phenomenal self, on the other hand, the idea that theories should be allowed to fail in the face of reality, again and again. On the level of spirituality, there is a strong ideal of truthfulness and veracity, and in science, the principle of parsimony—of minimizing assumptions. Spirituality is radically individual and science is also an organized undertaking, involved in the dissemination of knowledge. And here is a final example of the spiritual stance in philosophy of science.

→ At exactly those moments in which our theories fail in the face of reality, we are in contact with reality.



Karl R. Popper (1902-1994)

Critical Rationalism: “I am not prepared to accept anything that cannot be defended by means of argument or experience” (...) Now it is easy to see that this principle of an uncritical rationalism is inconsistent; for since it cannot, in its turn, be supported by argument or by experience, it implies that it should itself be discarded.

The Open Society and its Enemies, (1945; vol. II: 217)

The philosopher Karl Popper said that we are always in contact with reality at exactly those moments in which we falsify a hypothesis—this is the moment of contact.

But he also said the following: [Quotation] *“I am not prepared to accept anything that cannot be defended by means of argument or experience” . . . Now it is easy to see that this principle of an uncritical rationalism is inconsistent; for since it cannot, in its turn, be supported by argument or by experience, it implies that it should itself be discarded.* [End of quotation] This is the idea of critical rationalism, from the year 1945.

3 Theses

- The opposite of religion is not science, but **spirituality**.
- The ethical principle of **intellectual honesty** can be analyzed as a *special case* of the spiritual stance.
- In their purest forms, the scientific and the spiritual stance emerge from the same **basic normative idea**.

In this sense, intellectual honesty is a *special case of spirituality*: it came into being long before science, but after religion, and it is an inner practice that is independent of adaptive delusional systems. And I think everyone who knows real scientists can confirm that they are often very spiritual, though they would not describe themselves this way.

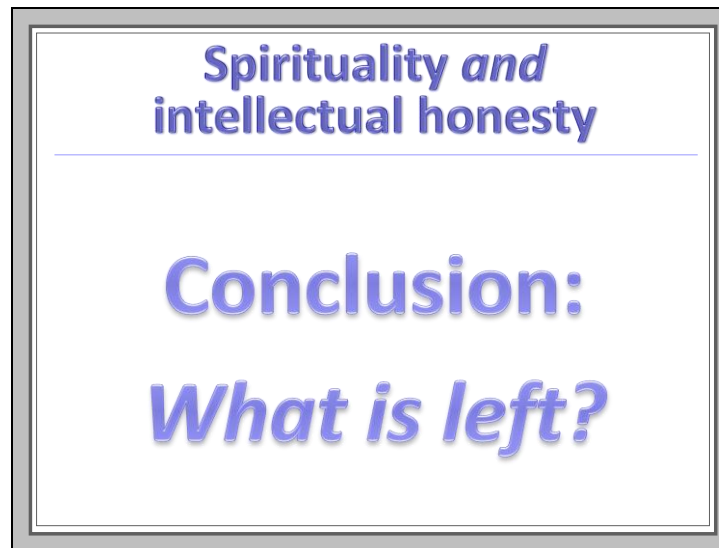
What does it mean that science and religion emerged from the same basic normative idea? That was my third thesis.

2 Aspects

- The unconditional **will to truth**:
 - The goal is insight, not belief.
 - Normative ideal of absolute **truthfulness**.
- The **reflexive turn**:
 - The unconditional will to **truthfulness towards oneself**:
 - Spirituality
(→ self-dissolution of fideist-dogmatic religion);
 - Scientific method (→ self-critical rationalism).

This basic normative stance has two aspects: the unconditional will to truth—whose goal is insight, not belief—and the normative ideal of absolute truthfulness. The normative ideal of unconditional sincerity towards God originates in religion. The reflexive turn inward, turning the desire for truthfulness towards oneself, gives rise to spirituality, the spiritual stance, and this in turn gives rise to intellectual honesty, which is the core of scientific method, of self-critical rationalism.

- Do you remember *conscientia*, in the sense of higher-order knowledge? Consciousness is the moment at which the process of insight itself becomes reflexive.
- Do you remember Immanuel Kant's quotation from "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason"? The sincerity of the intention of being honest towards oneself, he says, is the „*idea of the moral good in its absolute purity*." As we know, however, this is not about an abstract idea, but a process in the real world.




To conclude my talk, I want to ask: What is left if things stand the way I have sketched them? What remains?

I hope it has now become clear that there is a connection between spirituality and science: the latter originates in the former, and they are both forms of epistemic practice, of acting for insight, for the sake of knowledge.

The unity of mental virtues

- The **ethics of inner action**:
 - in *spiritual* practice
 - and in the ideal of *intellectual honesty*.
- Two basic forms of epistemic action:
 - **subsymbolic**: → attention, mindfulness.
 - **cognitive**: → scientific rationality.
- **What is left?**



Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951)
Was sich überhaupt sagen läßt, läßt
sich klar sagen; und wovon man
nicht reden kann, darüber muß
man schweigen.

But does one really have to choose between these two forms of knowing? There is an ethics of inner action in spiritual practice and in the scientific ideal of intellectual honesty. There are two basic forms of epistemic action: subsymbolic—namely through attention; and cognitive—on the level of scientific rationality. We have now seen that both forms of action are based on the same normative ideal, and, by the way, there is an old-fashioned philosophical term for the ability and inner stance allowing one to do what one has recognized as good with inner inclination and pleasure. And this old-fashioned term is “virtue”. So one can also say that honesty in this sense is an *intellectual virtue* that can be cultivated over time, just as the inner virtues of mindfulness and empathy are mental abilities that can be gradually improved.

But lest we now turn into self-satisfied, romantic paragons of virtue, we should face the facts. On the one hand, it is clear that meditative experience cannot be reduced to the aspect of

wellness and that it is not simply an additional instrument in the tool kit of psychotherapy. On the other hand, I think it is still an open question whether a secular, intellectually honest form of spirituality can exist, and I am looking forward to our discussion after the coffee break. Nonetheless: If it is true that no empirical evidence and no rational arguments for the existence of God or life after death exist, and if we are really honest to ourselves and admit that nobody really knows whether anything like “enlightenment” exists—what is left? What remains?

I think we can admit this much: at the current stage of the history of science and philosophy, in the era of neuroscience and evolutionary psychology, it *is* emotionally difficult to face the facts. Intellectual honesty does not come easily. What can one *do* in this situation? I think the answer is obvious: Our future is open—and this is another fact that one should not suppress—and we simply do not *know* where these internal and external processes of expanding insight will take us. The desire to know more is the only option we have if we do not want to give up our dignity and self-respect. For this reason, we have to hold on to epistemic action, but on both levels at the same time and not only on one of these two levels. So what is left? I think what is left is meditation and science.

Thank you for your attention. [Applause]



This is the unedited transcript of a lecture given in Berlin on the 27th of November 2010, at a conference on “Meditation und Wissenschaft”.

A video (in 6 parts) can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1MBG7FaZKM>

I wish to thank Dr. Michael Madary, Jennifer M. Windt, and Prof. Kenneth Williford for help with the English translation.

References for English translations of quoted material:

- **Slide 1:** Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* C. K. Ogden, trans. Dover Publications, 1998.
- **Slide 8:** William of Auvergne *The Soul* R.J. Teske, S. J., trans. Marquette University Press, 2000. (p. 222)
- **Slide 13:** Kant, I. *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason And Other Writings* A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni, trans. and ed. Cambridge University Press, 1998. (page 98)
- **Slide 14:** Kant, I. *The Metaphysics of Morals* M. Gregor trans. Cambridge University Press, 1991. (page 225 /226)
- **Slide 20:** Descartes, R. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Vol. 1* J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, trans. Cambridge University Press, 1985. (page 195)
- **Slide 24:** Nietzsche, F. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* A. Del Caro, trans. Cambridge University Press, 2006. (page 202)