



## “Somewhere to Stand”

“ARCHIMEDES (287-212 BC), preeminent Greek mathematician and inventor . . . was born in Syracuse, Sicily, and educated in Alexandria, Egypt. . . . In mechanics, Archimedes defined the principle of the lever . . . ”<sup>1</sup> When he realized its potential applications, Archimedes exclaimed, “Give me somewhere to stand and I shall move the earth.”<sup>2</sup> Archimedes recognized three defining aspects of reality: (1) a place for the subject (e.g., the “I” — self), (2) the object (e.g., the “other” — earth), and (3) a stable reference point (“somewhere to stand”).

In previous issues of *Outlook* we have reviewed Gnosticism and panentheism.<sup>3</sup> Both divinize man (male and female). Both assume that mankind, like God, is innately all-knowing and that this inner knowledge is self-existent. Both also assume that this “knowing” has been embedded in the mind or soul of mankind from the beginning and simply needs to be elevated to full consciousness through the divine gift of “spirit.” Such inward knowledge needs no “other.” In fact, because it is self-existent, it seeks to exclude all “otherness,” being content with the “freedom” of its own solitude from all objects and references. Thus, both Gnostics and panentheists could confidently assure Archimedes that there is no need for “somewhere to stand,” that there is no earth or “other” object that deserves to move, and that it would therefore be meaningless to invent the lever to move any “other” thing.

Various forms of Gnosticism and panentheism are rampant in today’s societies. For example, in his best-seller, *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue*, Neale Donald Walsch records inward dictations he claims to have received from God. This inner “God” tells Walsch:

Let each person . . . worry about Self — what Self is being, doing, and having; what Self is wanting, asking, giving; what Self is seeking, creating, experiencing . . .

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Let each person . . . worry not about the other, but only, only, only about Self. . . . The most loving person is the person who is Self-centered.<sup>4</sup>

From a review of Walsch's book, the publisher declares that the author is "continually touring the country, answering requests for lectures, and hosting workshops to support and spread the messages contained in

*Conversations with God.*"<sup>5</sup> In another review of the same book, David Klinghoffer states that "America is said to be in the early stages of a spiritual revival, a third Great Awakening,' but if so, 'it is proceeding in opposite directions simultaneously.' While, on the one hand, believers are getting to know the Supreme Being better, on the other, people are seeing themselves as the Supreme Being."<sup>6</sup>

## Dialogical Consciousness

Delusions such as Gnosticism (God is in the "knowing" man), pantheism (everything is God), and panentheism (everything is in God; God is in everything) have their origin in the emerging consciousness of archaic mankind. Archaic mankind (ca. 2000-1000 BCE) generally possessed a visual/auditory consciousness rather than a verbal or linguistic consciousness. This primitive consciousness consisted largely of visual images and auditory sounds attributed to the indwelling presence of God.<sup>7</sup>

Remnants of this archaic consciousness survive today in such conditions as autism. Autism is a developmental disorder defined as a "condition in which a person is morbidly self-absorbed and out-of-contact with reality."<sup>8</sup> "Estimates of the prevalence of autism range from 1 to 15 per 10,000 children; some 15 to 20 percent are able to become socially and vocationally independent."<sup>9</sup>

The gifted animal scientist, Temple Grandin, who is herself autistic, published a remarkable book on the nature of autism. In her self-description she states that consciousness for autistics is fundamentally visual rather than verbal and social. Writes Grandin:

Social interactions that come naturally to most people can be daunting for people with autism. As a child, I was like an animal that had no instincts to guide me; I just had to learn by trial and error. I was always observing, trying to work out the best way to behave, but I never fit in. . . . [T]wo years ago, . . . I took a test in which a piece of classical music evoked vivid images in my imagination. My images were similar to other people's, but I always imagined them as an observer. . . . All my life I have been an observer, and I have always felt like someone who watches from the

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outside. . . . Even today, personal relationships are something I don't really understand. . . . I've remained celibate because doing so helps me to avoid the many complicated social situations that are too difficult for me to handle. . . . [Since] I do not read subtle emotional cues, I have had to learn by trial and error what certain gestures and facial expressions mean. . . . Fear is a universal emotion in the animal kingdom, because it provides an intense motivation to avoid predators. Fear is also a dominant emotion in autism. . . . It is very likely that animals think in pictures and memories of smell, light, and sound patterns. In fact, my visual thinking patterns probably resemble animal thinking more closely than those of verbal thinkers. . . . My experience as a visual thinker with autism makes it clear to me that thought does not have to be verbal or sequential to be real. I considered my thoughts to be real long before I learned that there was a difference between visual and verbal thinkers.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from such disorders as autism and the more common delusions of Gnosticism and panentheism, the confirmed fact is that conscious awareness for modern mankind is socially based and socially oriented. Conscious thought and reflection assume the presence of a “self” as “addresser” and an “other” as “addressee.” In consciousness, therefore,

. . . dialogue . . . [is] the concrete, psychological equivalent of the social nature of the mind, i.e., the totality of all social relations constituting the human essence. Thus, dialogue characterizes the human mind and consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

The dialogic nature of consciousness . . . [reflects] the dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium.<sup>12</sup>

. . . [T]he quality and productivity of dialogue depend upon many aspects of the other and of the relationship between the utterance and the other.<sup>13</sup>

But the consciousness of mankind is not merely “dialogic,” involving two persons — the subject (“I” or “addresser”) and the object (“other” or “addressee”).

In addition to the other who is the second person . . . whom we are addressing in any particular instance, there is . . . a third person implicit in dialogue. [This third person or] . . . superaddressee stands above the particularity of dialogue as a kind of reference and authority whose “ideally true responsive understanding assume[s] various ideological expressions (God, absolute truth, the court of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history, science, and so forth . . . ).”<sup>14</sup>

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[Thus,] . . . the third voice [involves] the other other of dialogue . . . an implicit third presence; the third party, person, or voice.<sup>15</sup>

[This] . . . third voice . . . [is] an authoritative and institutional third party upon which the first voice may draw. The sacred text, the word of the prophet, the received view of science, the democratically constituted government, the school curriculum . . . are all common enough exemplars of the third voice of . . . dialogue.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the conscious awareness of modern mankind is not an instinctual drive like that of a bee seeking honey and then returning to its hive. Nor is conscious awareness visual or otherwise possessional. That is, consciousness does not involve the body's possession of some transcendent image, nor does it involve some transcendent image's possession of mankind. Furthermore, consciousness is not an inherent aspect of an eternal self.

Then what is consciousness?

Fundamentally, consciousness involves (1) a subject that perceives, (2) an object that is perceived, and (3) a relational reference standard that exists to help interpret the "message" that is delivered. Relational reference standards operate not only at the psychological and moral/ethical levels of mankind's existence, but also at the

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biological level. For example, the Canadian scientist, Kenneth H. Norwich, has shown that sensory perceptions such as temperature, sound, light and touch all involve a perceiving subject and a perceived object together with corresponding biological reference standards.<sup>17</sup> Thus, sensory perceptions are all comparative. For example, with respect to my sensory standard, the room I am in is presently cool. However, for my wife the same room is presently warm. For me the sound on our television is too quiet. But for my wife the sound is too loud. Everyone has his or her own sensory and other biological standards.

Scientists and other scholars employ hypotheses or theories as reference standards by which to judge the falsity or truth of observed reality. In the same manner, mankind employs various and different ideological, political and religious standards or presuppositions — e.g, common law, constitution, commandments, scriptures, etc.

Consciousness therefore involves a threefold presence — a subject ("self" or "addresser"), an object ("other" or "addressee"), and a reference authority ("superaddressee"). Thus, consciousness is not a phenomenon of immediacy or of self-evidency. Rather, it is a mediated phenomenon with derivative evidency. An isolated, self-existent self is neither a "knower" nor a "known." To be a knower requires something or someone to be known and a reference for that which is known. For something or someone to be known requires a knower and a similar reference for the one who is the knower.

## The Dialogical Gift of the Gospel

The “bottom line” to all this is that you and I are conscious selves only in the relational presence of each other and of a reference other Other. And this brings us to the ultimate truth of all history, all reality, all the universe. God, the final Knower, created the universe that it might be known. Moreover, he graciously created the universe that it might representatively

know him as the Knower. To achieve this conscious reality, God did not merely act through some implanted instinct. Nor did God act through direct possession or absorption to eliminate “otherness.” Rather, God acted “dialogically.” In his manifestation as the Human One, God has variously introduced himself as the embodiment of “addresser,” “addressee” and “superaddressee.”

As Jesus Christ, God became our Friend and Brother. We are no longer his servants (John 15:15). He has given us the gift of mutual dialogical consciousness. As friends, he intends to dialogue with us, for us to dialogue with him, and for us to dialogue with each other. Our self-consciousness is not the confirmation of some animal instinct or of some deified possession. Rather, our self-consciousness is the confirmation of Jesus’ dialogical presence. He can be the “Addresser” — as Subject, he can communicate with us as the object. He also can be the “Addressee” — as subject, we can communicate with him as the objective “Other.” Furthermore, he is the “Superaddressee” — prepared to stand as the Author-itative Reference and Author-ity. He is our Author, our Creator, our Sustainer. He has walked in all our footsteps. He has conquered self-existence with its deception and violence. And he has inaugurated a new created reality of relational and creative coexistence for us and with us, in all the universe for all eternity.

## Conclusion

How long will it take us to abandon the self-deceptions that, on one hand, our consciousness is simply an instinct or that, on the other hand, our consciousness is God himself/herself or God’s expression in us? Since our obsession with self-existence seeks to

exclude and ultimately eliminate the “other,” will it take uncontrolled and uncontrollable violence to bring us to a realization of the truth? Or will some representative group of mankind finally acknowledge that the gift of consciousness is intended to involve my “self,” the “other,” and the invitational presence of the “Referent Authority” — the Risen One? If we will, as an act of consciousness, accept the Risen One as our “Superaddressee,” mankind will

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*If we will, as an act of consciousness, accept the Risen One as our “Superaddressee,” mankind will finally have “somewhere to stand.”*

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finally have “somewhere to stand.” Then — and only then — shall we together “move the earth.”

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## Endnotes

1. *Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Archimedes.”
2. John Carroll, *Humanism: The Wreck of Western Culture* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), p. 2.
3. See “A Summary of *The American Religion*,” *Outlook* (Prequel 1998.7); “A Summary of *Tomorrow’s Catholic*,” *Outlook* (Prequel 1998.8).
4. Neale Donald Walsch, *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue*, book 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995), p. 124.
5. *Ibid.*, book cover.
6. David Klinghoffer, “New Age Pantheism Takes Heaven into the Nineties: The Christian Revival Confronts a Spooky Rival,” *Australian Financial Review*, 29 May 1998, p. 4.
7. See Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990).
8. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “autism.”
9. *Britannica Online* (early edition), s.v. “Autism.”
10. Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures: And Other Reports from My Life with Autism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), back cover, pp. 132, 133, 135, 144, 160, 164.
11. L. A. Radzikhovskii (1991), quoted in J. Allan Cheyne and Donato Tarulli, “Dialogue, Difference, and the ‘Third Voice’ in the Zone of Proximal Development” (University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 1998), p. 2.
12. M. M. Bakhtin (1984b), quoted in Cheyne and Tarulli, “Dialogue, Difference, and the ‘Third Voice,’” p. 293. See *ibid.*, p. 3.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
14. M. M. Bakhtin (1986), quoted in *ibid.*, p. 126. See *ibid.*, p. 10.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
17. Kenneth H. Norwich, Institute of Biomedical Engineering, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, personal communication.