



## Revolutionary Implications of Relationality and “Otherness”

THE RECENT TV series, *The Story of God with Morgan Freeman*,<sup>1</sup> recounts a fascinating scientific experiment comparing brain activity in chimpanzees with genetically similar *Homo sapiens* (humans) as each species relates to an “other” of its species and as a human relates to “god.” Notable activity in a particular area of the brain demonstrated that a human observer is not only aware of another human but is also aware that the other human is likewise aware of the observer (mutual awareness). This brain activity was unique to humans and could not be duplicated in a chimpanzee, whose awareness of an “other” apparently did not include the mutual awareness that the “other” was likewise aware of the chimp.

The unique human consciousness of reciprocal awareness in an “other” (mutual awareness) was further demonstrated when examining the brain activity of humans as they relate to “god.” A human who viewed God as similarly aware of the human exhibited the same notable brain activity previously described. However, a person who did not believe in “god,” or who viewed “god” as impersonal and thus not aware of “others,” failed to exhibit the same brain activity as a human who believed in a God who is aware of humanity. This experiment in mutual awareness has profound — even revolutionary — implications for the emerging relationality of divine and human “otherness.”

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### The Age of the Bicameral Mind

With respect to the mind, the term *bicameral* refers to the two sides of the human brain — the left (side) hemisphere and the right (side) hemisphere. In his landmark book, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral*

*Mind*,<sup>2</sup> Princeton scholar, Julian Jaynes, advances compelling evidence that, about 12,000 years ago (10,000-9000 BCE), mankind was universally endowed with a possessive “god-consciousness.” Human will and authority were represented by the *symbolic* appearance and voice of “god,” expressed by the right brain (left brain in left-handed people). Innovative actions of mankind were initiated through possessive commands and instructions from this unique god-consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

The function of the gods was chiefly the guiding and planning of action in novel situations. The gods size up problems and organize action according to an ongoing *pattern* or purpose, resulting in intricate bicameral civilizations, fitting all the disparate parts together, planting times, harvest times, the sorting out of commodities, all the vast putting together of things in a grand design, and the giving of the directions to the neurological man in the verbal analytic sanctuary in the left hemisphere.<sup>4</sup>

This authoritative god-consciousness granted mankind enormous benefits. These included protection from natural disasters and predatory attacks, direction for migration, the domestication of plants and animals, and the development of a more sedentary culture, with greater population density and closer interaction among human beings. By 4000 BCE there was extensive trade between peoples, and this was accompanied by urban settlements for central storage, exchange and control. Writing evolved because of the necessity to record transactions. Finally, god-consciousness was the predecessor of human consciousness itself.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the epochal advances in this age of the bicameral mind,

. . . possessive god-consciousness had severe limitations. It did not include the consciousness of oneself [and therefore of relational “otherness”]. It did not involve one’s own volition and free will. . . [Because] it was not relational, [it was] therefore not mutual [“I–other” and “I–thou.”]. . . [W]hile this solitary god-consciousness was God’s loving gift to man, it did not include mankind’s loving response to God. . . [Thus, although] god-consciousness was profoundly beneficial to mankind for thousands of years, . . . [it] represented only one step in God’s creative development of humanity. Ultimately, . . . God had to act to surmount this unilateral god-consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

## The Old Testament “I AM”

In a proleptic (anticipatory) event of “otherness,” the great Hebrew leader, Moses, was herding a flock in the wilderness when he observed a bush that was burning but not consumed. Naturally curious, he approached the bush, from which a voice warned him to not come any further, for he was standing on “holy ground.” When the voice identified itself as the “God of thy father,” of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses asked for its name. “And God said unto Moses, ‘I AM THAT I AM’” (Exodus 3:14) — Hebrew, “*’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*.”<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew word *’ehyeh* (hayah) is a verb with three meanings — “to be,” “to become” and “to effect.” The word *’asher* has multiple meanings such as “so that,” “for” and “whom.”<sup>8</sup> God’s statement might well be translated that he would be/become/effect for whom he would be/become/effect. To state this another way, God declared that —

- (1) he would be so that he would be (for you);
- (2) he would become so that he would become (for you);
- (3) he would effect so that he would effect (for you).

In this pivotal historical event God explicitly refers to his own self-consciousness. He further implies that self-consciousness only exists in relation to “others.” Thus, the “self” requires an “other” and does not exist apart from “others.” Simply stated, “self-consciousness” requires “other-consciousness.”

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### “Other, Other, Other”

“Holy, holy, holy” in the Hebrew Old Testament can be translated “Other, Other, Other” (Isaiah 6:3). In a remarkable breakthrough, Hebrew thought understood that God was wholly separate from his Creation. He was a divine “Other” who, while existing “for” humanity, transcended humanity. Before this, “god-conscious” bicameral mankind was fundamentally “pantheistic” (the view that god is everything/everything is god). Simply stated, for these ancients there was no conscious distinction between God (or the gods) and the created order.<sup>9</sup> But Hebrew thought perceived a separation — a conscious and thus alienating vertical gap — between the transcendent Divine and creaturely humankind. This consciousness of alienation was not limited to the Hebrews:

In the aftermath of natural catastrophe, God terminated god-consciousness (1000 BCE).<sup>10</sup> The symbolic voice and appearance of “god” no longer appeared in the mind — except in individuals with anomalies such as autism, epilepsy, schizophrenia or other brain disorders. The end of god-consciousness was almost universally mistaken as the “Fall” of mankind and estrangement from God.<sup>11</sup> In retrospect, however, it can be seen that God’s true intention was to inaugurate the “rise” of mankind to human self-consciousness. Instead of the human will’s being represented by the symbolic voice and appearance of a *possessive* god-consciousness, mankind was to exercise the gift of a personal will that could *relate* to “otherness” with purpose and responsibility.<sup>12</sup>

The epochal emergence of relational “self–other”-consciousness (ca. 1200-1000 BCE)<sup>13</sup> was evident in such leaders as the famous Israelite king, David, and the notable Eastern prophet, Zarathustra.<sup>14</sup> In his book, *The Gifts of the Jews*, author Thomas Cahill writes that

. . . it is with David that the interior journey begins. A sense of the self is notably absent in all ancient literature. *I*, as we commonly use it today to mean one’s interior self, is seldom in evidence before the humanist autobiographies of the early modern period . . . [but] the

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Psalms [of David] are filled with *I*'s: the *I* of repentance, the *I* of anger and vengeance, the *I* of self-pity and self-doubt, the *I* of despair, the *I* of delight, the *I* of ecstasy.<sup>15</sup>

## “I AM” in the New Testament

As we have noted, the science referred to by Morgan Freeman indicates that, to be humanly “other-conscious” (and thus humanly “self-conscious”), one needs to be “mutually conscious” — that is, aware that the “other” is similarly aware of its “other.” We can say that “I–other,” while vitally important, needs to become an “I–thou”<sup>16</sup> — that is, an “I” who is aware that its “thou” is likewise an “I” aware of its “thou.” As Freeman’s scientific account evidences, this mutual awareness is uniquely “human.” But this is not all that is involved in truly “human” relationality.

In the New Testament the nature of “human” relationality continues to emerge, especially with respect to divine “otherness.” For in the New Testament (or New Covenant) the transcendent separation — the alienating “Fall” or vertical gap — existing between the divine “Other” and humanity is finally addressed in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Someone has observed that if the “incarnation” of God had not occurred, it would need to be invented. But according to the Gospel of John and the apostle Paul, a unique and unrepeatable incarnational event did occur. The good news (“Gospel”) is that the Ultimate Relationality known as God acted for humanity. The One whose internal relationality embraced

“Being, Becoming and Effecting,” and whose creative external relationality was expressed in Creation, accomplished the virtually unimaginable. God the Creator, in his “becoming for us” as Jesus, irrevocably adopted creaturely humankind (*Homo sapiens*) — the representative of Creation — as his own Reality. Because of the unique Oneness of God,<sup>17</sup> and because of God’s incarnation as the bodily Jesus, God himself is now both Ultimate Internal Relationality and Ultimate External Relationality. Indeed, the One identified in the Old Testament as the “I AM” has joined humanity as Jesus Christ, for Jesus explicitly identified himself as none other than the “I AM.”<sup>18</sup> This is why Jesus’ enemies charged him with treason (a threat to the deified Caesar’s claim to be the “son of God”) and blasphemy (Jesus’ implicit claim to be equal with God). His self-identification as God enabled Jesus’ religious opposition to legally demand his crucifixion on both political and religious grounds.

Some have ridiculed the idea that Jesus could himself be God since he referred and prayed to the “Father” as an “Other.” But would it not be puzzling if Jesus — who is the fullness of both God’s Internal and External Relationality (Colossians 2:9)<sup>19</sup> — failed to exhibit the “otherness” of this Relational Reality?

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## A New Dimension in “Human” Relationality

We have noted Morgan Freeman’s account of scientific evidence that human “I–thou” relationality is uniquely “mutual.” That is, it requires both parties to not only be aware of the “other” but to be aware that each “other” is similarly aware of its “other.” We also have briefly traced the emergence and progress of “I–thou” “otherness” in the history of humanity. Finally, we have recounted the unique incarnational event when God as Jesus “became” for us (Matthew 1:23) both the “I” and the representative “Thou” of divine-human relationality.<sup>20,21</sup>

Now, in this unfathomable cosmic event, we arrive at a profoundly new and eternal dimension in “human” relationality. Speaking privately to his disciples shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus declared, “I no longer call you servants . . . Instead, I . . . [now call] you friends” (John 15:15, NIV). This marks a radical change in the “I–other” relationship between God and man. From a pre-“human,” vertical relationality between

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the transcendent Divine and creaturely humankind, God as Jesus “made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7, 8). By adopting creaturely mankind as his own reality, the Divine has inaugurated a new dimension in the relationality between God and humanity. It is now a horizontal, egalitarian, collegial relationship between fellow humans — between God as Jesus, the Representative Human, and all other humanity, who are no less than his brothers and sisters.

Furthermore, this new dimension in “human” relationality extends beyond the relationship between Jesus and his fellows to embrace the relationship between all other humans. No longer is humankind to reflect a relationality with fellow humans characterized by such vertical, hierarchical attributes as command, possession and power.<sup>22</sup> Rather, we are to “love one another, as I [Jesus] have loved you” (John 15:12). That is, we are to practice a horizontal, egalitarian relationship of love and compassion for all humanity, irrespective of locale, culture or religion. Because the Risen Christ is present with and aware of all humanity (Matthew 28:20), so we are to live for and be aware of all “others” as equally valuable members of the global human community. Moreover, we are to joyfully anticipate and live for the day when “we” and all “others” will fully manifest that awareness inaugurated by God as Jesus. Then will be realized the hastening goal of a fully “human” future.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know [only] in part; but then shall I know as also I am known. — 1 Corinthians 13:12.

## Conclusion

Can we be confident that Creation will eternally participate in such a future? The answer is an emphatic “Yes”! Because the eternal God adopted Creation in Jesus Christ,

we can be assured that Creation itself is eternally secure. Furthermore, because all humankind is included in Creation, we can be assured that humanity is likewise eternally secure. Apart from some final and irrevocable insistence, in the full light of ultimate reality, to freely opt out of human relationality (life), all are eternally safe.<sup>23</sup> No wonder Jesus so often admonished his “others” to “Fear not!” “And remember, I AM with you always,” the Risen One declared, “to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20, NRSV, emphasis supplied).

As Jesus, God irrevocably joined his eternal existence to the created order. If that which God as Jesus Christ adopted as his own reality should cease to exist, God himself would cease to exist. The reverse is also true. Because God himself is eternal, the created order that he representatively adopted as his own reality in Jesus Christ will never cease to exist. Then let us celebrate the new dimension in “human” relationality inaugurated by Jesus in his incarnation, life, death and resurrection!

— PUBLISHING EDITOR WITH THE EDITOR

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## Endnotes

1. *The Story of God with Morgan Freeman* is an American television documentary series that premiered on the National Geographic Channel on April 3, 2016. The six-part series features actor Morgan Freeman, who explores various cultures and religions and their understanding of religion-related topics, particularly about their belief in a god or a higher power. Freeman seems to view “god” as simply a product of brain activity. However, if there is indeed a personal God who is in the relational business of communicating with and revealing his existence to conscious creatures (humanity), would this not involve brain activity in those creatures? This is not to imply that man’s perception of God is inerrant — even when responding positively to God’s activity and presence. This is evident in various religious documents, including Jewish, Christian and Muslim. Rather, history evidences an evolving, progressive, but often seriously flawed perception of the Divine. The apostle Paul — a chief New Testament author who is highly regarded by Christians — affirmed that he himself saw “through a glass, darkly” and knew only “in part” (1 Corinthians 13:12). The idea of “inerrant” or “infallible” religious documents, often espoused by sincere religious fundamentalists, represents a serious mishandling of those documents. Moreover, the resulting alienation among humans is wholly contrary to the best and truest spirit behind the attempts to document divine activity and the corresponding human response. In the Christian community this is often evidenced by a failure to distinguish between the written “word” (letter) and the Living “Word” (Spirit) (cf. 2 Corinthians 3).
2. See Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976). “At the heart of this book is the revolutionary idea that human consciousness did not begin far back in animal evolution but is a *learned* process brought into being out of an earlier hallucinatory mentality by cataclysm and catastrophe only 3000 years ago and still developing. The implications of this new scientific paradigm extend into virtually every aspect of our psychology, our history and culture, our religion — and indeed, our future. In the words of one reviewer, it is ‘a humbling text, the kind that reminds most of us who make our livings through thinking, how much thinking there is left to do.’” (back cover). However, Jaynes’ book, while making such a revolutionary contribution, fails to understand the role of the Christ event in the ultimate development of human consciousness.
3. See *ibid.*, pp. 144, 145.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 117, 118, emphasis supplied.
5. See “The Dawn of Self-Consciousness,” *Outlook* (October 2001); “The Divine Resolution III: Creation by Possession,” *Outlook* (July/August 2005).
6. “The Divine Resolution III: Creation by Possession,” *Outlook* (July/August 2005).
7. See Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1960), p. 49.

8. See “*asher*,” Robert Young’s *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005).
9. See Jaynes, *Origin of Consciousness*, p. 202. Interestingly, this pre-“human” perception with its pantheistic sentiments is carried over into various religions, including elements of Christianity, particularly “Gnosticism” — from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge” (see Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992]; “Out of Egypt VI: The Final Appearance,” *Outlook* [June 2011]). Gnosticism is a belief system where the so-called “spiritual” believer — a “man [or woman] of the spirit” — “knows” his or her own divinity or godhood and in this sense is not only a prophet, reformer or apostle but another incarnational “Jesus.” Likewise, autism — which has great difficulty with human “otherness” and, in fact, symptomatically views other humans as various animals — can easily revert to a Gnostic or pantheistic worldview. Even a discussion of relationality and “otherness” can seem like “gobbledygook” to a seriously autistic person. Interestingly, it seems that autism can be evidenced by unusual brilliance, with a savant-like ability to “pattern” (to “see” patterns in various observations) (cf. note 4: Jaynes, *Origin of Consciousness*, pp. 117, 118). In this respect, perhaps autism is a partial reversion to the “pantheistic” mind of the ancients, whom we now know could evidence unusual brilliance in their activities. After the dawning of “self–other”-consciousness, when mankind began to perceive the “otherness” of God with the consequent sense of separation and alienation (the “Fall”), the savant-like ability to “see” patterns apparently persisted in a few — such as “seers,” prophets, priests, kings and emperors (see “The Dawn of Self-Consciousness,” *Outlook* [October 2001]; “The Origin of Consciousness,” *Outlook* [July/August 2012]); cf. Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010); cf. Jaynes, *Origin of Consciousness*, p. 95: “[One who today symptomatically hears voices] . . . sometimes . . . feels he has been honored by this gift, singled out by divine forces, elected and glorified . . . He is somehow face to face with elemental auditory powers, more real than wind or rain or fire, . . . powers that he cannot step back from and see objectively.” This is not to deny the valuable role of the right brain (left brain in left-handed people) in “patterning.” The problem notably arises when, by genetics or injury, this role reverts to a symptomatic, unilateral, controlling expression that compromises the function of the left brain (right brain in left-handed people) in governing human relationality and “otherness.” Unfortunately, it can be virtually impossible for those seriously afflicted with this disorder to rationally acknowledge their condition in this life (cf. Jaynes, *ibid.*)
10. See Jaynes, *Origin of Consciousness*, p. 294.
11. See *ibid.*, pp. 299, 444.
12. See “The Dawn of Self-Consciousness,” *Outlook* (October 2001).
13. See Jaynes, *Origin of Consciousness*; Cf.: “[Julian] Jaynes’s third hypothesis is dating the development of consciousness to around 1200 B.C. in areas such as Mesopotamia and Egypt . . .” — Marcel Kuijsten, *Reflections on the Dawn of Consciousness: Julian Jaynes’s Bicameral Mind Theory Revisited* (Henderson, NV: Julian Jaynes Society, 2006), p. 106.
14. See “Origins of Human Destiny,” *Outlook* (September/October 2003).
15. Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 199.
16. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (A New Translation with a Prologue, “I and You,” and Notes), tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970).
17. Originally, God as a Trinity (Three in One) did not denote God as three Persons. Rather, the Church Father, Tertullian, described God as having three *persona* — using the metaphor of three masks an actor might wear. However, over time the idea of three *persona* was corrupted in popular thought to mean three “persons.” It is no wonder that Christianity is often charged with being polytheistic, having three gods. Jehovah’s Witnesses use this Christian tritheistic distortion to charge Christianity with apostasy from one God, although they themselves are ditheistic, worshiping two Gods — the Father (Jehovah) and Jesus (a kind of demigod). In this they have created a confused “harmony” between Ebionite (earliest Christian) thought, which viewed Jesus as a great prophet (cf. the Muslim religion with its Ebionite roots), and the more developed thought in Lazarus’ Gospel of John, where Jesus is viewed as the “I AM” (see “The Historical Jesus XVI: The Gospel of John: Authorship,” *Outlook* [September 2007]; “The Historical Jesus XVII: The Gospel of John: Jesus as the New ‘I AM,’” *Outlook* [October 2007]; cf. note 18), and in the apostle Paul, where Jesus is viewed as “the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

18. Cf. John 6:35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 23, 28; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5; 18:6, 8, 37; Revelation 1:8, 11, 17, 18; 21:6; 22:13 with Exodus 3:14.
19. The apostle Paul explicitly identifies Jesus as “the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). How clear a description of One who is the fullness of both God’s internal relationality and God’s external relationality, both God’s “I” and God’s representative “Thou”! As the representative “Thou,” Jesus is like a second or “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45) — the representative Head of the human race — and the rest of humanity are his sons and daughters.
20. In a pre-scientific age the metaphor of “virgin birth” was useful in communicating the unique reality of Jesus Christ. However, since science has now moved beyond the primacy of Grecian “substance and essence” to an advanced understanding of fundamental reality as “relationality,” it is not necessary to contend for the traditional view of “virgin birth” in order to maintain the unique relationality manifested in God’s incarnation as Jesus Christ (see note 21). The same could be said for arguments over the “Lord’s Supper.” Transubstantiation (a matter of substance and essence) reflects a pre-scientific worldview. Today we are in the process of understanding the primacy of relationality — for example, Einstein’s “theory of relativity” (relationality) and, later, the dawning of quantum physics with its revolutionary understanding of the primacy of relationality rather than substance and essence. For example, we now understand that observable or “particulate” entities emerge from relationality rather than observable entities creating relationality. To use a metaphor, this is like two tennis players (observable entities) who cease to exist if the exchange of the tennis ball (relationality) ceases. In this, quantum or relational reality (truth) is not self-evident but is, in fact, counterintuitive; yet it is still fundamental reality (truth). Here the American founding fathers, with their “self-evident” truth, needed a future update. Interestingly, “Some epistemologists deny that any proposition can be self-evident. For most others, the [non-relational] belief that oneself is conscious is offered as an example of self-evidence. However, one’s belief that someone else is conscious [relationality] is not epistemically self-evident” (Art. “Self-evidence,” in *Wikipedia*, at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-evidence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-evidence)). In light of relationality as evidenced by quantum physics and relational or human “otherness,” “relationally evident” or “humanly evident” rather than “self-evident” is an appropriate update for ultimate reality (truth).
21. “The biblical *betulah* . . . usually rendered ‘virgin,’ is in fact an ambiguous term which in nonlegal contexts may denote an age of life rather than a physical state. Cognate Akkadian *batultu* . . . refer[s] to ‘an adolescent girl.’ . . . [T]he woman who is so-called need not necessarily be a *virgo intacta*. . . . [T]he word *betulah* interchanges with the somewhat synonymous age term *almah* . . . , which also describes a young woman . . . *Almah*, despite a two-millennium misunderstanding of Isaiah 7:14, ‘Behold a young woman [LXX: . . . “virgin”] shall conceive and bear a son,’ indicates nothing concerning the chastity of the woman in question.” — *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM ed. (1997), s.v. Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, “Virgin”; also “Betulah: Maiden Terminology.”
22. See “The Gospel for the Postmodern World III: The ‘Other Side’ of God,” *Outlook* (January 2008); “The Divine Struggle for ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ III: Command,” *Outlook* (December 2009); “The Divine Struggle for ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ IV: Possession,” *Outlook* (January 2010); “The Divine Struggle for ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ VI: Empowerment,” *Outlook* (March 2010).
23. See “*Love Wins*: A Book Review,” *Outlook* (September/October 2015).