

# Putting the Puzzle Together

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# P R E F A C E

The fact that sometimes life can be puzzling has most of us looking for the right pieces that fit together to reveal a clearer picture. There is a mirror we need to hold up to ourselves; not “to see ourselves as others see us,” but to see ourselves as we are. To come to grips with a better understanding of exactly what kind of persons we have become and what to expect in the life which has been given to us. Can anyone say he or she has perfectly created him or herself? Though life can be a joy filled imposition, it has to be worked to be truly appreciated. Whatever chromosomes are passed on, whatever DNA winds up as *us*, is it strictly chance?

We have all come from circumstances over which we had no control. Born into conditions which eventually we have some control over, once we acquire the use of reason and the intellectual capability; but did we inherit or develop that capability? What reasons shall we offer? Who shall we blame for bad judgements; faulty and errant choices. If we become incapable of ordering our lives in positive ways, and instead are influenced by external or instinctual forces too powerful for us to overcome, then what; to whom shall we go?

We all have bitten into “the fruit of good and evil,” and though it looked delicious it turns out to be bitter-sweet. I think we all would agree it is better to be than not to be and the only thing we can sincerely hope for is an abundance of love. Do we know what that is? Is love something we get and keep, like “God loves you,” or is it something we get and give away like, “I love you,”— and how is that best accomplished? How often what we thought was love, was not; and what we thought was not, was? To maintain some kind of security; some kind of

## PREFACE

comfort in our own skin, we need to either deal with issues straight on and take the consequences, or punt and wait for a better day. Yet, even our aphorisms are contradictory. One says: “Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today,” another: “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” Will we fit the pieces of the puzzle life offers and see the whole picture? What is satisfaction; and what is it to be satisfied with what we have become? Is it a compromise between knowing and not-knowing, between believing and not-believing, between trusting and not-trusting? We are incomplete people in an unfinished world. David Bentley Hart put it beautifully:

“If faith provides any wisdom that can simultaneously humble and console us, it is this knowledge: each of our lives is an *opus imperfectum* (an imperfect work) , which within its own immanent terms must in some sense end largely thwarted and unrealized; but we may truly hope that, *sub specie aeternitatis*, (under the form of eternity) all the scattered and incomplete truths time contains will be gathered up into a final truth, and everything lost that is worth finding and everything broken that is worth mending will be restored, and all of it will finally be brought to a consummation that fulfills—but also immeasurably surpasses—the work we have always only begun.”

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**M**aybe we're wrong, but it seems that jigsaw puzzles are out of style. We hope we're wrong because thinking back we remember what great fun they were. Grandma use to dump the whole box of pieces on the dining room table and the whole family would go to work putting the puzzle together starting with the pieces that had straight edges; they became the outside edges of the picture shown on the cover of the box. Multitasking, you needed to match the colors with the surrounding shapes and gently fit the piece where it belonged as little by little the picture started to appear. This procedure is a wonderful example of the difference between inductive and deductive reasoning. Deductive; from the picture on the box to the pieces themselves. Inductive; from the pieces themselves to the picture on the box. You could not force a piece into a slot where it didn't belong because each piece was keyed by the jigsaw to fit snugly only in its proper place. Eventually someone had the pleasure of putting the last piece into place to finish the job; that is, if none of the pieces had been lost or vacuumed up since the last assembly. On a snowy or rainy day the sun was always shining on that dining room table.

Generally, the picture had some historic significance like the USS Constitution, the Washington Monument or a map of the United States, (all 48), etc., so you were bound to learn

something from the picture itself. We suppose that today it would be some sort of a killing game played on the TV with an electronic controller. It is amazing in these marvelous hi-tech cyber space days the kids know a lot less than they did in the days of the jigsaw puzzle, in our opinion. We hope we're wrong about that too.

The jigsaw puzzle is the perfect analogy for the story we're about to tell in this essay. It is the culmination of an idea we started thinking about, philosophically, many years ago after reading the works of Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit scientist and priest. A different view of the concept of consciousness was generated with the aid of certain aesthetics, rather than the common neural/mental state of consciousness simply meaning "awareness." An alert cognitive state in which you are aware of yourself and your situation, (Word Web). We believe this definition is perfectly fine for self-consciousness, but not broad enough in meaning to serve in the context which we were now seeing it. In the first of four essays dealing with Consciousness: The Quest for Consciousness was a bit misleading because it substituted the word "awareness" for the expanded idea of the meaning of consciousness. By the time we finished the fourth booklet: In Other Words, the idea had jelled enough for us to say the following:

I do not see consciousness emerging from mind. On the contrary, I see consciousness as an essential of life itself, the "sense," awareness, or "decisiveness" observed in paramecia, as well as in the options available to every human being since the brain to mind transformation. A pre-awareness of the good as opposed to the bad in terms of survival— as it has always been, and more so since the advent of Homo Sapiens. I do understand how the word conscious has been and is used to

mean awake. I am inclined to believe with Freeman Dyson an English-born American theoretical physicist and mathematician, known for his work in quantum electrodynamics, solid-state physics, astronomy and nuclear engineering; “The cosmos is suffused with consciousness, from the grandest level to the most minute dimensions.” There is a knowingness, a spirit, a good order out of disorder, everywhere. An inclination to the good reflected in the inherent desire for God in the “heart” of every human being. It represents coherence with the Creator the Ultimate Good, “In whom we live and move and have our being.” (St. Paul from Greek texts) Consciousness and Being are interchangeable terms in our way of thinking. (*In Other Words*, p. 22)

The following etymology of the word “consciousness” seemed to substantiate my point as well as Dyson’s.

“Conscious [adj.] c.1600, ‘knowing, *privy to*,’ from Latin conscious ‘knowing, aware,’ from conscire (see conscience); probably a loan-translation of Greek syneidos. A word adopted from the Latin poets and much mocked at first. A sense of ‘active and awake’ is from 1837.

Consciousness (n.) 1630s, internal-knowledge, from conscious+ness. meaning ‘State of being, aware’ from 1746.

“From these etymological clips you can see ‘knowing *privy to*’ [1600) is pretty much the same as ‘being aware of *before hand*.’ It is in the sense of: ‘being aware *in advance*.’ This is quite a bit different from simply ‘being awake.’(1837). The noun ‘consciousness’(1630’s) ‘internal knowledge,’ winds up as ‘the state of being aware’ in (1746).” For us this is a misapplication of the word to which we had also succumbed by using the word “awareness” as a substitute for “consciousness”

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in *The Quest for Consciousness*. So consciousness then, for us, is “being” (*The State or fact of existing. Word Web*), and being or consciousness admits the process of becoming. Although this point can be argued, in our opinion, nothing has remained the same since Creation— when everything that is, was, and ever will be was put in motion. This is an important philosophical point to help us fit the pieces of the puzzle of existence together and answer the question; why is there anything at all?

## CHAPTER II

No matter what we read in today's philosophy or science for that matter, to some degree we are often taken back to the early Greek Philosophers. It is amazing how "modern" many of them are when compared to modern or post-modern times. Hesiod's Theogony, from about 700 BCE "is particularly important as an [often confusing] account of the evolution of the Greek gods. Hesiod tells us that in the beginning was Chaos, a yawning chasm. Later Eros developed on its own. These figures were powers rather than anthropomorphic deities like Zeus (who wins and becomes king of the gods in the 3rd generation struggle against his father)." (Wikipedia, Hesiod). Most early creation stories have a family resemblance with the Hebrew Bible written about the Tenth or Eleventh centuries BCE. The conjecture of the Pre-Socratics regarding the concepts of nature have an uncanny connection with modern physics. Plato, in his Socratic literature gave us many ideas resembling our own modern concepts of governing and psychology. It was Aquinas' Scholastic Theology which shadowed Aristotle's philosophic way of thinking. Not knowing too much about the human brain, they surely understood quite well, in my view, how the "mind" worked especially involving its capability of transcendence. Some of their reflections are so pertinent that they could be thought of as the prophets for modern times.

One of these men, whose work only remains in "snippets" for us to study is Heraclitus, like many of the Pre-socratics, but it has proven to be enough to give us a clear idea regarding his thought. It is he who is most important in helping us try to put the puzzle of "existence" neatly together in this essay. I will explain how his thoughts in conjunction with others contribute to a clearer understanding of the "causal-joint" at which God -

as a transcendent, immaterial world cause — interacts particularly with causative factors in the material world; or to put it simply, how the infinite Creator remains literally in touch with his finite creatures and they with him.

It must be said that our attempt does not wish to over interpret the ideas of Heraclitus, sparse as they are, and make them into something they were not meant to be. We will take them faciem valorem and let the reader determine their credibility. We would like to post the warning given in a scholarly volume about Heraclitus' pieces written many years ago by George Thomas White Patrick (1887-1949) Prof. of Mental Philosophy at the University of Iowa. (*The fragments of the work of Heraclitus of Ephesus on nature; translated from the Greek text of Bywater, with an introduction historical and critical. Kindle Edition*)

“One of the greatest evils in circles of philosophical and religious thought has always been the evil of over-systemization. It is classification, or the scientific method, carried too far. It is the tendency to arrange under any outlined system or theory, more facts than it will properly include. It is the temptation, in a word, to classify according to resemblances which are too faint or fanciful. In the field of historic criticism this evil takes the form of over-interpretation. Just as in daily life we interpret every sense perception according to our own mental forms, so we tend to read our own thoughts into every saying of the ancients, then proceed to use these, often without dishonesty, to support our favorite modern systems. The use of sacred writings will naturally occur to every one as the most striking illustration of this over-interpretation. Especially in the exegesis of the Bible has this prostitution of ancient writings to every man's religious views been long since recognized and

condemned, and if most recently this tendency has been largely corrected in religious circles, it is all the more deplorable, in philosophical criticism, to find it still flourishing. Unfortunately, this vice continues, and it appears nowhere more plainly than in the interpretation of Greek philosophy.”

First, let us hope, as an amateur, we will not willingly violate Prof. Patrick’s admonitions. May he RIP. Secondly, there is no point for us to rewrite the biography of Heraclitus when a source such as Wikipedia, Stanford University and the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy does such a good job with it. I will quote what I swipe from them so as not to be accused of plagiarism. They’re all free, and that’s a good thing:

Heraclitus was “a Greek philosopher of Ephesus near modern Kuşadası, Turkey, [c. 500 BCE). Heraclitus propounded a distinctive theory which he expressed in oracular language. He is best known for his doctrines that things are constantly changing (*universal flux*), that opposites coincide (*unity of opposites*), and that fire is the basic material of the world. The exact interpretation of these doctrines is controversial, as is the inference often drawn from this theory that in the world as Heraclitus conceives it, *contradictory propositions must be true...*”

“...He is said to have written a single book [papyrus roll], and deposited it in the great temple of Artemis at Ephesus. The story is plausible enough: temples often served as depositories for money and other valuables, and no libraries are known from the time of Heraclitus. The structure of Heraclitus' book is controversial. It could have consisted of a relatively coherent and consecutive argument. On the other hand, the numerous fragments (over one hundred) that have come down to us do

not easily connect with each other, even though they probably constitute a sizable fraction of the whole...”

“...Unlike most other early philosophers, Heraclitus is usually seen as independent of the several schools and movements later students [somewhat anachronistically] assigned to the ancients, and he himself implies that he is self-taught. He has been variously judged by ancient and modern commentators to be a *material monist* or a process philosopher; a scientific cosmologist, a metaphysician, or a mainly religious thinker; an empiricist, a rationalist, or a mystic; a conventional thinker or a revolutionary; a developer of logic or one who denied the law of non-contradiction; the first genuine philosopher or an anti-intellectual obscurantist. No doubt the sage of Ephesus will continue to remain controversial and difficult to interpret, but scholars have made significant progress in understanding and appreciating his work...”

“...Heraclitus' most fundamental departure from previous philosophy lies in his emphasis on human affairs. While he continues many of the physical and cosmological theories of his predecessors, he shifts his focus from the cosmic to the human realm. We might well think of him as the first humanist, were it not for the fact that he does not seem to like humanity very well. From the outset he makes it clear that most people are too stupid to understand his theory. He may be most concerned with the human relevance of philosophic theories, but he is an elitist like Plato, who thinks that only select readers are capable of benefitting from his teachings. And perhaps for this reason he, like Plato, does not teach his philosophical principles directly, but couches them in a literary form that distances the author from the reader. In any case he seems to regard himself not as the author of a philosophy so much as the

spokesman for an independent truth: ‘Having harkened not to me but to the Word (Logos) it is wise to agree that all things are one.’...”

“...Heraclitus stresses that the message is not his own invention, but a timeless truth available to any who attend to the way the world itself is. ‘Although this Word is common,’ he warns, ‘the many live as if they had a private understanding’. The Word (account, message) exists apart from Heraclitus’ teaching, but he tries to convey that message to his audience. The blindness of humans is one of Heraclitus’ main themes. He announces it at the beginning of his book”

“Of this Word’s being forever do men prove to be uncomprehending, both before they hear and once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Word, they are like the unexperienced experiencing words and deeds such as I explain when I distinguish each thing according to its nature and show how it is. Other men are unaware of what they do when they are awake just as they are forgetful of what they do when they are asleep”... Although his words are meant to provide concrete vicarious encounters with the world, Heraclitus adheres to some abstract principles which govern the world. Already in antiquity he was famous for advocating the coincidence of opposites, the flux doctrine, and his view that fire is the source and nature of all things. In commenting on Heraclitus, Plato provided an early reading, followed tentatively by Aristotle, and popular down to the present (sharpened and forcefully advocated by Barnes 1982, ch. 4) [Jonathan Barnes b. 1942, is Professor of early Greek philosophy at the University of Geneva]. According to Barnes’ version, Heraclitus is a material monist who believes that all things are modifications of fire. Everything is in flux (in the sense ‘everything is always flowing in some respects,’), which entails the coincidence of opposites (interpreted as the view

[‘every pair of contraries is somewhere co-instantiated; and every object co-instantiates at least one pair of contraries,’]. The coincidence of opposites, thus interpreted, entails contradictions, which Heraclitus cannot avoid. On this view Heraclitus is influenced by the prior theory of material monism, ( all of the worlds objects are composed of a single element), and by empirical observations tend to support flux and the coincidence of opposites. ‘In a time before the development of logic’, Barnes concludes, ‘Heraclitus violates the principles of logic and makes knowledge impossible’...”

“Obviously this reading is not charitable to Heraclitus. There are, moreover, reasons to question it. First, some of Heraclitus' views are incompatible with material monism so that the background of his theories must be rethought. Second, there is evidence that Heraclitus' flux theory is weaker than that attributed to him by this reading. Third, there is evidence that his view of the coincidence of opposites is weaker than that attributed to him here... Barnes bases his Platonic reading on Plato's own statement:”

“Heraclitus, I believe, says that all things pass and nothing stays, and comparing existing things to the flow of a river, he says you could not step twice into the same river. (Plato Cratylus)” (Stanford)

We must switch to Wikipedia here in order to further clarify the concept of the Unity of Opposites proposed by Heraclitus. *The idea that “you could not step in that same river twice” is one of Heraclitus' preeminent fragments.* You have to ask yourself in a philosophical framework— though the banks remain relatively the same, the water continuously changes; so is it the same river you are stepping in now then the one you stepped in yesterday; or not?—It is obvious that what Heraclitus is doing with this statement is emphasizing the idea of continuous flux.

(From Wikipedia): “The unity of opposites was first suggested by Heraclitus [ca. 535–475 BC], a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher.”

Philosophers had for some time been contemplating the notion of opposites. Anaximander posited that every element was an opposite, or connected to an opposite (water is cold, fire is hot). Thus, the material world was composed by some indefinite, boundless apeiron from which arose the elements (earth, air, fire, water) and pairs of opposites (hot/cold, wet/dry). There was, according to Anaximander, a continual war of opposites. Anaximenes of Miletus, a student and successor of Anaximander, replaced this indefinite, boundless arche with air, a known element with neutral properties. According to Anaximenes, there was not so much a war of opposites, as a continuum of change. Heraclitus, however, did not accept the milesian monism and replaced they're underlying material arche (something that was in the beginning: first principle), with a single, divine law of the universe, which he called Logos. The universe of Heraclitus is in constant change, but also remaining the same. That is to say, an object moves from point A to point B, thus creating a change, but the underlying law remains the same. Thus, a unity of opposites is present in the universe as difference and sameness. This is a rather broad example though. For a more detailed example we may turn to an aphorism of Heraclitus:

‘The road up and the road down are the same thing.’ (Hippolytus, Refutations)

“This is an example of a co-present unity of opposites. For, at the same time, this slanted road has the opposite qualities of ascent and descent. According to Heraclitus, everything is in

constant flux, and every changing object co-instantiates at least one pair of opposites (though not necessarily simultaneously) and every pair of opposites is co-instantiated (at the same instant) in at least one object. Heraclitus also uses the succession of opposites as a base for change: ‘Cold things grow hot, a hot thing cold, a moist thing withers, a parched thing is wetted.’ As a single object persists through opposite properties, this object undergoes change...In his criticism of Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher Hegel who tried to systematize dialectical understandings wrote:”

“The principles of the metaphysical philosophy gave rise to the belief that, when cognition lapsed into contradictions, it was a mere accidental aberration, due to some subjective mistake in argument and inference. According to Kant, however, thought has a natural tendency to issue in contradictions or antinomies, whenever it seeks to apprehend the infinite (Finite and Infinite being opposites). We have in the latter part of the above paragraph referred to the philosophical importance of the antinomies of reason, and shown how the recognition of their existence helped largely to get rid of the rigid dogmatism of the metaphysic of understanding, and to direct attention to the dialectical movement of thought. But here too Kant, as we must add, never got beyond the negative result that the thing-in-itself is unknowable, and never penetrated to the discovery of what the antinomies really and positively mean. That true and positive meaning of the antinomies is this: that every actual thing involves a coexistence of opposed elements. Consequently to know, or, in other words, to comprehend an object is equivalent to being conscious of it as a concrete unity of opposed determinations. The old metaphysic, as we have already seen, when it studied the objects of which it sought a metaphysical knowledge, went to work by applying categories

abstractly and to the exclusion of their opposites,” says Hegel, whom we shall cover a little later.

We should take a breather from swiping stuff and see if we can clarify by example what the unity of opposites means to us in real life. Thinking about it for a while, it would be strange, in our opinion, to come up with something that didn't have an opposite, or is not opposed in some way. Not until the theory of Relativity and light traveling at 300,000 km/s was the Cosmos truly understood, and this only in the twentieth century. However, it is still possible to know that the finite is the opposite of the infinite: matter is the opposite anti-matter one being the mirror image of the other, opposite but the “same”: cold the opposite of hot, etc., but a *unity of what is-holds*. Heraclitus' road up and road down has no specific orientation in spacetime without gravity, but the idea in the abstract still has its unity, it's the same mental road both up and down. Bad is the opposite of good, but both good and bad, though they are opposed are met in every human being. Who will say that the spirit and flesh of humanity are not opposed? Here we are—spirit and flesh combined, a person; a soul among other souls in a communion of souls all doing what is both good and bad, in a unity of differences where being *is* becoming, i.e., flux.

“Ever since Plato, Heraclitus has been seen as a philosopher of flux. The challenge in interpreting the philosopher of Ephesus has always been to find a coherent theory in his paradoxical utterances. Since Hegel, he has been seen as a paradigmatic process philosopher—perhaps with some justification.”

(Stanford)

Heraclitus' concept, “The Unity of Opposites” is the initial piece of our puzzle; understanding it, we can look for the next piece that fits together with it— and begin to widen the picture.

### Chapter III

*“To know that you know nothing. That is the meaning of true knowledge.”*

This Socratic quote was surely not wasted on Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), who is the next piece of the puzzle we are trying put in place. In the opening part of his book *De Docta Ignorantia* (Of Learned Ignorance) he says this:

“For a man—even one very well versed in learning—will attain unto nothing more perfect than to be found to be most learned in the ignorance which is distinctively his. The more he knows that he is unknowing, the more learned he will be. Unto this end I have undertaken the task of writing a few things about learned ignorance.” (*De Docta Ignorantia*, Ch. 1: 6) Once again we will rely on other sources for the detail.

“Arguably the most important German thinker of fifteenth century, Nicholas of Cusa [1401–1464] was also an ecclesiastical reformer, administrator and cardinal. His life-long effort was to reform and unite the universal Roman Church, whether as canon law expert at the Council of Basel and after, as legate to Constantinople and later to German dioceses and houses of religion, as bishop in his own diocese of Brixen, and as advisor in the papal curia. His active life as a Church administrator and bishop found written expression in several hundred Latin sermons and more theoretical background in his writings on ecclesiology, ecumenism, mathematics, philosophy and theology. Cusa had an open and curious mind. He was learned and steeped in the Neoplatonic tradition, well aware of both humanist and scholastic learning, yet mostly self-taught in philosophy and theology. Nicholas anticipated many later ideas in mathematics, cosmology,

astronomy and experimental science while constructing his own original version of systematic Neoplatonism.” (Stanford)

The list is long of those who have been inspired by him, but it must be said at least that both Copernicus and Kepler used his premonitions to find what they were looking for, which turned out to be earth shattering for all of us.

Our purpose at this juncture is to link elements of Nicholas’s theology with that of Heraclitus. Understanding the Unity of Opposites helps us make a neat fit with Cusa’s “Coincidence of Opposites.” We will use Professor Jasper Hopkins’ essay of the University of Minnesota to help us concretize and clarify Cusa’s thoughts as best we can; remember it’s a puzzle.

“The doctrine of the 'coincidence of opposites' as it appears in Nicholas of Cusa’s treatises and dialogues has been studied extensively though not exhaustively. Yet, there remains, among other things, the task of highlighting this doctrine’s thematic aspects as they surface in Nicholas’s sermons.”... The central tenets that are elicited from the treatises and dialogues can be reduced to five:

- (1) Coincidence is to be distinguished from complication: (enfolding);
- (2) The notion of coincidence of opposites encompasses, but is not combined with, the notion of contradictory coincidence;
- (3) In God opposites coincide, and, yet, God is beyond the coincidence of opposites;
- (4) Opposing ascriptions (assignments) are coherently predicable (attributable) of God;
- (5) The declaration that opposites coincide is not necessarily to be construed as the claim that the opposites are identical.”

I have tried to simplify Professor Hopkins' essay at this point by adding parentheses, by listing them and by translating his Latin terms to English. However, I believe Cusa's thought will become clearer as the Professor elucidates in a more detailed explanation in the Five Central Tenets of Cusa's work. I must stick with Prof. Hopkins for now because most other sources tend to be more complicated and elaborate mostly on biographical material.

*Tenet 1: coincidence is to be distinguished from complication or enfolding:*

In *De Docta Ignorantia* Nicholas says both that God enfolds all things and that in God contradictories coincide. Nicholas teaches the following: Ontologically (not chronologically) prior to its creation the world is enfolded in God as an effect is enfolded in the power of its cause. Now, in the power of the cause the effect is the cause, rather than being its subsequent singular self, which differs from its cause. Likewise, the world is present in God's infinite power ontologically before it exists as its finite self. Moreover, as it exists in God, it is God and is not the world as such. That is, in God the world does not exist as the world and cannot be said to coincide with God. The world can be said only to be enfolded in God's power, from which it is unfolded in the act of creation. Although Nicholas refers to God as the Enfolding of all things, he never calls Him the Coincidence of all things. Rather, he says that in the Divine Enfolding all things coincide without difference (*De Coniecturis* II, 1 [78]).

Here, another clarification regarding Nicholas's teachings must be adduced: according to Nicholas the world as unfolded from God is not God unfolded, is not God in His unfolded state, as it

were. For God is *Complete Actuality* and as such has neither an unfolded nor an enfolded state. Nor is the world in any sense God or in any sense divine. Although Nicholas speaks of the world as a contracted reflection of God, a reflection of God is not God—any more than the mirror-image of a man is that man. Nicholas has no tendency toward pantheism, though many believe him to be pantheistic.

*Tenet 2: The notion of coincidence of opposites encompasses, but is not combined with, the notion of coincidence of contradiction.*

Nicholas sometimes says that opposites coincide in God and sometimes indicates that contradictories coincide in God. The difference lies in the fact that the meaning of the word “opposites” includes not only contradictories but all contraries. So when Nicholas says that in God, -opposites coincide, he sometimes is referring to contradictions such as *not-being* and *necessary being* and sometimes is referring to contraries such as *motion* and *rest*.

*Tenet 3: In God opposites coincide, and, yet, God is beyond the coincidence of opposites.*

That in God opposites coincide is Nicholas’s way of saying that God is altogether undifferentiated. Although He can admissibly be symbolized as Being itself and as Oneness itself, there is in Him no distinction between Being and Not-being, between Oneness and Not-oneness. Likewise, He is not a being, since all beings are finite and differentiated; nor does he have—in and of Himself—a plurality of attributes. That God is beyond the coincidence of opposites is Nicholas’s way of saying that no finite mind can comprehend God, since finite minds cannot

conceive of what it is like for God to be altogether undifferentiated.

As Nicholas writes in *De Possest* 74:

When we attempted to see Him beyond being and not-being, we were unable to understand how He could be visible. For He is beyond everything plural, beyond every limit and all unlimitedness; He is completely everywhere and not at all anywhere; He is of every form and of no form, alike; He is completely ineffable; in all things He is all things, in nothing He is nothing, and in Him all things and nothing are Himself; He is wholly and indivisibly present in any given thing (no matter how small) and, at the same time, is present in no thing at all. So the claim that in God opposites coincide is not incompatible with the claim that God is beyond the coincidence of opposites. For God, *as undifferentiated Being itself*, just is ineffably beyond all comprehension.

*Tenet 4: Opposing significations are coherently predicable of God symbolically.*

Although Nicholas makes this point in the text just quoted from *De Possest*, he makes it even more clearly when in *De Possest* 11 he writes: “It does not matter what name you give to God, provided that ... you mentally remove the limits with respect to its possible being.” So we may appropriately refer to God as sun, as does the Psalmist, as long as we remove limits from the physical sun: If ... we construe [this statement] as [a statement] about a sun which is actually all it is able to be, then we see clearly that this sun is not at all like the sensible sun. For while the sensible sun is in the East, it is not in any other part of the sky where it is able to be. [Moreover, none of the following statements are true of the sensible sun:] “It is maximal and minimal, alike, so that it is not able to be either greater or

lesser”; “It is everywhere and anywhere, so that it is not able to be elsewhere than it is”; “It is all things, so that it is not able to be anything other than it is,”— and so on. Similarly, in *De Venatione Sapientiae* 22 (67) and 30 (89) Nicholas alludes to Pseudo-Dionysius and endorses his view “opposites are to be affirmed and denied of God at the same time.” And in *De Visione Dei* 21 (91:5-7) Nicholas notes that we affirm of God Incarnate “most true contradictories. For You are Creator and likewise creature, the Attracting and likewise the attracted, the Infinite and likewise the finite.”

*Tenet 5: The declaration that opposites coincide is not necessarily to be construed as being the claim that opposites are identical.*

Nicholas does sometimes use “coincidence” in a way that makes it interchangeable with “identity”; but he does not routinely do so. An example of such interchangeability is found in *De Docta Ignorantia* III, 1 (182), where he indicates that in the universe no thing coincides with another thing. By this statement he means that no two things are exactly identical, no two things differ in number alone. Likewise, in *De Possest* 8 he states that absolute possibility coincides with absolute actuality; and he focuses this statement by indicating that “possibility and actuality are identical in God.” But even further, Nicholas goes on explicitly to indicate *Summa cum laude* “coincidence” does sometimes have the meaning of identity. For in discussing the two natures of Christ, he writes (prayerfully addressing Christ): “You are not the coincidence of creature and Creator in the way in which a coincidence causes one thing to be another thing.” So although the two natures in Christ may in one sense be acceptably said to coincide, such coincidence is certainly not identity, emphasizes Nicholas,

adhering to an orthodox Christology. Accordingly, then, a reader must take pains to decide in a given context whether or not Nicholas is using “coincidence” in the sense of “identity”. (Hopkins)

To draw a connection between opposites is not the easiest thing in the world to do today. Our thinking processes are usually comfortable with the distinction we make *between* things. We understand opposite colors; red as opposed to green, blue opposed to yellow; the opposite sides of the road, coming and going. Opposing contestants in games and sports, loud as opposed to quiet, darkness as opposed to light, and so on, as being distinctions. However, when thinking philosophically; that is studying the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline, the mind is stretched or widened to consider all kinds of differentiation as well as similarities in the human psyche, so the paradoxes of Heraclitus’ Unity of Opposites is not easily grasped. Up-down, in-out, on-off , etc., as universal constant change, flux; with the underlying law remaining the same as a continuum of opposites. We should, at this point, give a few examples of Nicholas’ “Coincidence of Opposites” as they relate to both the concepts of Heraclitus and to Catholic ecclesiology and theology of the pre-scholastic and scholastic periods, For Christ, he was both God and man, at once the alpha and omega; Mary was both Mother and Virgin. Mercy and Justice coincided, as does Being and Oneness. Worldly Wisdom is Foolishness; Humility is Exaltation according to the coincidence of opposites as understood by Nicholas. All of the church’s theology had previously been based on Sacred Scripture, particularly the letters of Paul and the early fathers, Irenaeus and Origen; the council of Nicaea and the other early councils; Augustine, Anselm and others. It seems that

Heraclitus' thoughts fit perfectly well with the paradoxes the faith offered to Cusa. Heraclitus' philosophy started to make sense of the Church's mysteries; the thread ran from Heraclitus' antinomies to the metaphysics of belief in a similar way Aquinas previously had used Aristotelian "reason".

By Cusa's time, in the Fifteenth Century, philosophy and theology had been synthesized with Greek thought introduced to the West via "the silk road" around 800 CE by the Arabs. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) had written extensively on the issues of God and man in a Christian context primarily utilizing Aristotelian philosophy as we have said. Aquinas started his Summa, about the middle of the Thirteenth century, about two hundred years before Cusa.

"Throughout his Summa, Aquinas cites Christian, Muslim, Hebrew, and Pagan sources including but not limited to Christian Sacred Scripture, Augustine of Hippo, Avicenna, Averroes, Al-Ghazali, Boethius, John of Damascus, Paul the Apostle, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maimonides, Anselm, Plato, Cicero, and Eriugena." (Wikipedia). The Summa of Aquinas was the most important book, other than the Bible, used at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) during the Counter Reformation. Aristotelianism had ushered in a new empirical cast of mind and an interest in the study of nature on its own terms. The scientific rationalism and empiricism of Aquinas replaced the Platonic based mystical theological speculation of earlier times. (Re- Cousins).

"Aquinas, a Dominican, was writing in a time of heightened stakes, about questions of tremendous religious, political, legal, and social importance. The church sought to defend itself from pagan philosophy, even as it tried to crush heresy and establish

its sovereignty against secular rulers. These later tried to centralize their own power, while a population explosion and expanded trade networks reshaped the very societies they ruled.

Throughout it all, ideas took on a new importance and sophistication, as concepts of law, right, truth and sovereignty constituted the boundaries between the sacred and profane the See of the Church and the spaces of the kings and men and the new institutions they were setting up” (Columbia University).

“A contemporary of Aquinas, the Franciscan, St. Bonaventure attempted to bind together the older theological speculations with the new. Thomas approached God through the cosmological argument,\* rejecting Anselm's ontological argument\* and turning aside from Augustine's inner way through subjectivity. In contrast Bonaventure integrated all three in a complex approach to God that was both rational and mystical. Following this comprehensive design, Bonaventure worked out a rich integration of Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and the Greek Fathers, the Pseudo-Dionysius and Francis of Assisi. He brought together the cosmic Logos-Christology of the Greek Fathers with the Western sense of particularity expressed in Francis' devotion to the humanity of Christ. In the theology of history, he blended cosmic Christocentricity with elements drawn from the radical eschatology of Joachim of Fiore. One might argue whether Bonaventure's desire to integrate so much was laudable or whether his performance was effective; yet one can look to his system as perhaps the richest integrative venture of the Middle Ages.”(Cousins)

\*The cosmological argument is the argument that the existence of the world or universe is strong evidence for the existence of a God who created it. The existence of the universe, the argument claims, stands in need of explanation, and the only adequate explanation of its existence is that it was created by God.

\*Ontological Argument for God's Existence. One of the most fascinating arguments for the existence of an all-perfect God is the ontological argument. While there are

## Putting the Puzzle Together

several different versions of the argument, all purport to show that it is self-contradictory to deny that there exists a greatest possible being.

Though Bonaventure is believed to have never used the term “coincidence of opposites” a few quotes from his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* reveals his devotion to the more mystical approach that Cusa picked up on about 200 years later. Though Bonaventure is a veritable potpourri of mystical, theological speculation, he is one more piece of our puzzle, Bonaventure writes:

*But you have ground for rising in wonder.*

*For Being itself is first and last, is eternal and yet most present, is simplest and greatest, is most actual and immutable, is perfect and immense, is most highly one and yet all inclusive. If you wonder over these things with a pure mind, while you look further, you will be infused with a greater light, until you finally see that Being is last because it is first. For since it is first, it produces all things for its own sake alone; and therefore it must be the very end, the beginning and the consummation, the alpha and the omega.*

*Therefore it is most present because it is eternal. For since it is eternal, it does not come from another; nor does it cease to be nor pass from one thing to another, and therefore has no past nor future but only present being. Therefore it is greatest because most simple. For since it is most simple in essence, therefore it is greatest in power; because power, the more greatly it is unified, the closer it is to the infinite.*

*Therefore it is most immutable, because most actual. For that which is most actual is therefore pure act. And as such it acquires nothing new nor does it lose what it had, and therefore cannot be changed. Therefore it is most immense, because most*

*perfect. For since it is most perfect, nothing can be thought of which is better, nobler, or more worthy. And on this account there is nothing greater. And every such thing is immense. Therefore it is all-inclusive ("omnimodal"), because it is one to the highest degree. For that which is one to the highest degree is the universal source of all multiplicity. And for this reason it is the universal efficient cause of all things, the exemplary and the final cause, as the cause of Being, the principle of intelligibility, the order of living. And therefore it is all-inclusive, not as the essence of all things, but as the super excellent and most universal and most sufficient cause of all essences, whose power, because most highly unified in essence, is therefore most highly infinite and most fertile in efficacy.*  
(From *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, Ch. 5, Sec. 7)

Bonaventure may not have used the term “coincidence of opposites” but you can’t miss the fact that he was certainly using the concept to make his point of the Oneness of God. In another quote we will later see how Bonaventure’s “deliberation” comes close to Hegel’s “dialectic”.

*“The function of the power of choice is found in deliberation, judgment, and desire. Deliberation is found in inquiring what is better, this or that. But the better has no meaning except by its proximity to the best. But such proximity is measured by degrees of likeness. No one, therefore, can know whether this is better than that unless he knows that this is closer to the best. But no one knows that one of two things is more like another unless he knows the other. For I do not know that this man is like Peter unless I know or am acquainted with Peter. Therefore the idea of the good must be involved in every deliberation about the highest good.”*

*A judgement of certitude on matters of deliberation is made according to some law. But none can judge with certainty through law unless he be certain that that law is right and that he ought not judge the law itself. But our mind judges about itself. Since, then, it cannot judge the law it employs in judgment, that law is higher than our minds, and through this higher law one makes judgments according to the degree with which it is impressed upon it. But there is nothing higher than the human mind except Him Who made it.*

*Therefore in judging, our deliberative faculty touches the divine laws if it reaches a solution by full analysis.”(From Itinerarium Mentis in Deum, Ch. 3, Sec. 4)*

In my opinion Cusa could have easily written this. We will continue with this thread of the unity-of-opposites or the coincidence-of-opposites through subsequent history as our puzzle starts to resemble the virtual “picture on the box.”

## Chapter IV

“Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel [1770 – 1831) was a German philosopher who was a major figure in German idealism. His historicist and idealist account of reality revolutionized European philosophy and was influential to Continental philosophy” (Wikipedia). Hegel will be the next piece of our puzzle which we will attempt to set in place. Off and on we have read as much of Hegel as we could handle. Reading Hegel is similar to reading Kant; it’s small solace when one understands that they didn’t always understand what they were saying. It takes a real philosopher to summarize not only Hegel’s thought but Hegel’s thought about Kant, Schelling and Fichte. Al Gore’s “world wide web” delivered once again. I found the perfect summery by Benedetto Croce “an Italian idealist philosopher, historian and occasional [leftist] politician. He wrote on numerous topics, including philosophy, history, historiography and aesthetics”. (Wikipedia) The piece, fortunately in English, that I will cherry-pic for clarity is titled: *What is Living and What is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel*.

We’ll let Croce pick it up from here:

### *1. The Dialectic or Synthesis of Opposites.*

Hegel is one of those philosophers who took philosophy itself, not just immediate reality, as the object of his thought, thereby contributing to the development of a *logic* of philosophy... (In other words he made an effort to systematize it.)

No one doubts that mathematics has a method of its own, studied in the logic of mathematics; that the natural sciences have their method, the source of the logic of observation,

experiment and abstraction; that there is a method of writing history and therefore a logic of historical method; that for poetry and art in general there is a logic of poetry and art, or aesthetics; that there is a method inherent in economic activity that appears later in reflective form in the science of economics; and finally that moral activity has its own method, presented in reflective form as ethics (or a logic of the will, as it has sometimes been called). But then, as we move on to philosophy, a great many people resist what follows: that philosophy too, once it exists, must have *a method of its own*, which must be defined. On the other hand, very few are surprised when treatises on logic, which give a great deal of space to discussions of mathematical and scientific disciplines, usually pay no special attention to the philosophical disciplines and often pass right by them in silence...

...That anyone who rejects philosophy in general, whether from thoughtlessness or mental confusion or eccentricity, should reject a logic of philosophy is perfectly natural since one cannot claim to accept the theory of something whose reality has been disallowed...philosophers themselves – or philosophizers, perhaps — too often seem to show themselves lacking any awareness of this inevitable necessity. One of them asserts that philosophy must follow the abstract-deductive method of mathematics; and another sees no other way to save it but to hold firmly to the experimental method, dreaming and boasting of a philosophy studied in laboratories and clinics, an empirical metaphysics, and so forth. Finally (and this fashion is the most recent, newly on offer, if not new) the custom now is to recommend an individual and imaginary philosophy produced like art. All methods (from the compass to the scalpel and eventually the guitar) seem useful for philosophy, except the philosophical...If philosophy's object is *not* to produce or

reproduce art and mathematics and various other human activities but to *comprehend* (understand) them all, this comprehending itself is an activity with its own method, infused or implied, and it is important to make it explicit.”

I believe what Croce is saying here is that if philosophy’s function is to explain certain aspects of life for our understanding, Hegel’s attempt to systemize it makes sense, there should be a method; a logic to it, so to speak.

...It should be devoted primarily and mainly to his position on the nature of philosophical inquiry and on the differences between such inquiry and other theoretical and non-theoretical forms...Philosophical thinking for Hegel is (a) concept; (b) universal; and (c) concrete. It is concept, meaning that it is not feeling or rapture or intuition or any such psychic state ungoverned by logic and devoid of demonstrative force. This settles the difference between philosophy and theories of mysticism or direct knowing. At best, these have negative value in that they recognize the impossibility of basing philosophy on the method of the empirical and natural sciences, sciences of the finite. They are profound, if you like, but theirs is an ‘empty profundity.’ Against mysticism, mania, melancholy, the raising of eyes to heaven, the bending of necks and wringing of hands, against swooning, gnomonic prophecy and mystical initiatory formulas, Hegel becomes fiercely satirical, always insisting that philosophy must have a reasoned and intelligible form, that it must be “not esoteric but exoteric,” the property not of a sect but of humanity...

Before we go on with Croce, we must give consideration to Hegel’s spirituality while he was working out his philosophy; he was “Protestant” through and through and extremely critical

of the Catholic Church and its theology. Howard Kainz writes: “In Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl, the great Protestant theologian Karl Barth refers to the German philosopher, G.W.F. Hegel as the 'Protestant Aquinas.’” Barth mentions that he has some theological differences with Hegel, but wonders why Hegel did not become for the Protestant world what Aquinas was for the Catholic world. It’s a good question. Hegel and Aquinas are certainly comparable in the sense that they treated a wide variety of topics in philosophy and theology, and unified and organized them. Another similarity resides in the prominence of theology in their writings — but with the following caveat: Whereas, in the scholastic approach adopted by Aquinas, philosophy (Aristotelian, Platonic, Stoic, etc.) is the “handmaid of theology,” with Hegel the relationship is inverted: theology becomes the handmaid of philosophy.

Hegel was a staunch Lutheran. Trained to become a Lutheran pastor, he found his vocation as a professor of philosophy instead, and attained great fame and celebrity, even in his own time — rare among philosophers.” As you may have noted, our inquiry leans more to the theology of Bonaventure and Cusa rather than Aquinas. Be that as it may, let us continue with Croce:

I shall focus all my attention on the most characteristic part of his thought, on new features of truth revealed by him and on errors that he left standing or in which he was complicit. Thus, setting aside the various issues that I have just briefly noted (rebellling against them seems to me impossible, even granted that one must promote learning by treating such problems as a philosophical alphabet, now often unlearned), I come straight to the point that sparks all the debates and where the sharp objections of opponents are aimed the *problem of opposites*...

...while imagination may be distinct from understanding, it is the foundation of understanding and indispensable to it, as people often say...Two distinct concepts are connected, as has been said, even in being distinct, while two opposed concepts seem to exclude one another: where one appears, the other totally vanishes. A distinct concept is assumed and lives in the other that follows it in the order of ideas. An opposed concept is destroyed by its opposite: the saying that applies to it is *mors tua, vita mea*. (your death, is my life)...

...But examples of opposed concepts come from the many pairs of words that abound in our language, and they are certainly not happy, loving pairs. They are oppositions of true and false, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, valued and unvalued, joy and sorrow, activity and passivity, positive and negative, life and death, being and nothing, and on and on. It is not possible to confuse the two series, the distinct and the opposite, which are so strikingly different...

...This grave and urgent situation has always caused the human mind to be troubled by the problem of opposites but without always giving a clear account of its trouble. And one solution to which people have constantly clung over the centuries has been to exclude opposition from the philosophical concept by claiming that this dangerous logical category is not real. The facts actually showed the opposite, if truth were told, but facts met with denial, and only one of the two terms was accepted while the other was declared an 'illusion' — or else a difference of greater and less was applied to the two terms, which amounts to the same thing. This logical doctrine of opposites turns up again in the philosophical systems of sensism, empiricism, materialism, mechanism and whatever else one may call them...

...The thought of unity as not incompatible with that of opposition, and that opposition can and must be thought in the form of the concept, which is the highest unity. Ordinary thinking — which is usually called non-philosophical and might better be called summarily or potentially philosophical — is not perplexed by difficulty. It thinks unity and opposition at the same time. The saying that applies to it is definitely not *mors tua, vita mea*, but *concordia discors*. (agreement in disagreement) It recognizes that life is struggle but also harmony; that virtue is a battle against ourselves but also is ourselves; that once an opposition has been overcome, a new opposition arises from the very core of unity, and then a new overcoming followed by a new opposition, and so on, which is exactly how life works...

...Since the philosophical concept is completely analogous to aesthetic expression, why must it lack the perfection that belongs to the aesthetic, the power to resolve unity in opposition and represent it? Philosophy is knowing the universal, obviously, and hence it is thinking, while poetry is knowing the individual, and hence it is intuition and imagination. But why can the philosophical universal not be different and the same, discord and concord, separate and continuous, precise and fluid all at once, *like aesthetic expression*? When the mind makes its leap from contemplating the particular to contemplating the all, why should reality have to lose its own character? Does the *One* not live in us like the particular?...At this point Hegel shouts his joyous cry, his cry of discovery — eureka! — The basis of a solution for the problem of opposites, a very simple basis and so obvious that it deserves to be placed right alongside those symbolized by

Columbus and his egg... (wonderful analogy, no room to explain it here).

...Opposites are not illusions, and unity is not an illusion. *Opposites are opposed to one another, but they are not opposed to unity because true and concrete unity is just the unity or synthesis of opposites: it is not immobility, it is movement; it is not stasis, but development.* The philosophical concept is a concrete universal, and therefore it is a thinking of reality as both united and divided at once. Only in this way does philosophical truth correspond to poetic truth, and the pulse of thought to the pulse in things...

...Someone who uses the true without the false, then, makes the true into something not thought (since thinking is a struggle against the false) and therefore something not true. Likewise, for someone who uses good without evil, the good becomes something not willed (because willing the good is rejecting evil) and therefore something not good. Outside of synthesis, the two terms used abstractly become confused with one another as they trade roles. *Truth comes only with the third term, which, for the first triad, is becoming.* Thus, as Hegel said, it is 'the first concrete concept.'...

...The theory of dialectic is a work of mature thinking, a product of long philosophical incubation. We find the difficulties that arise from the concept of opposites first noted in ancient Greece, when Zeno of Elea denied the reality of movement. Movement is same thing as development but in a form more accessible to reflection. Zeno put great emphasis on these difficulties and resolved the conflict by denying that movement is real (using arguments from the contradiction between space and time, from the arrow, from Achilles and the

tortoise and others). Movement is an illusion of the senses; being or reality is one and unmoving.

In opposition to Zeno, Heraclitus identified movement or becoming as the true reality. The depth of his attention to reality as contrariety and development shows in his sayings: 'being and non-being are the same'; 'everything is and also is not'; 'everything flows.' It shows in his metaphors: things are a river; opposition within opposition is like sweet and bitter in honey, like the bow and the lyre. It shows in his cosmological notions about war and peace, discord and harmony. Hegel said that Heraclitus made no claim which he did not incorporate into his own logic. But note that Hegel gave these claims a richer and thus different meaning than they had by themselves just because he did incorporate them into his theory. As we have them handed down to us, their clear and simple vision of the truth must obviously have great value, but we must not make too much of it, or else we run the risk of falsifying history by turning a pre-Socratic into a post-Kantian...

...With Giordano Bruno, who declares himself a disciple of 'the divine Cusa,' this idea takes on a more positive function. He too celebrates the coincidence of opposites as the outstanding principle of a philosophy which has been forgotten and needs to be revived. He provides an eloquent account of the unification of contraries, of the greatest circle and the straight line, the acute angle and the obtuse, of heat and cold, corruption and generation, love and hate, poison and antidote, spherical and plane, concave and convex, anger and patience, humility and pride, greed and generosity.

Echoing Nicholas of Cusa, he writes these memorable words: *'Anyone who wants to know nature's greatest secrets should look at the minima and maxima of contraries and opposites and*

*think about them.* There is deep “magic” in knowing how to draw out the contrary after locating the point of union. This is where poor Aristotle was heading with his notion of positing privation, conjoined with a particular disposition, as the ancestor, parent and mother of *form*, but he could not reach his goal. He could not get there because he planted his foot in the genus of opposition and stayed stuck there in such a way that he did not move down to the species of contrariety and could not succeed or even keep his eyes on the target. He missed it every time, claiming ‘contraries could not really come together in the same subject.’...

That would be his famous “law of non-contradiction.” In order for something to be contradictory, it must violate this law. It states that A cannot be both A (what it is) and non-A (what it is not) at the same time and in the same relationship. In other words, you have contradicted yourself if you affirm and deny the same statement. For example, if I say that the moon is made entirely of green cheese but then also say that the moon is not made entirely of green cheese, I have contradicted myself.

Who can say why St. Thomas, with all Aristotle’s reasoning, quit the *Summa*; perhaps St Bonaventure might have completed it for him— albite following a different Greek concept, that of Heraclitus? Croce had much more to say than we have given him space for here, but we must not deny him the accolade for Hegel in his last paragraph.

“If a point of view shows itself more advanced by including views which are less advanced; if evidence of a theory’s truth comes from its ability to provide both justification for truths discovered by others and an account of the mistakes associated with those truths, such evidence was not lacking in Hegel’s

theory. Kant, who did not fully understand his own position, fell into the hands of Neo-Kantians who turned away from his transcendental logic to a purely naturalist logic. Schelling, who did not fully understand his own position, ended up ingloriously as the second Schelling. But in connection with Hegel, the destiny of both was to become part of the grand conception produced by their intellectual heir, a nobler fate than providing exercises for the schoolroom or continuing alone in they're lonely failure to understand themselves.”

## Chapter V

In 2006 Stanford L. Drob Ph.D wrote: *A Rational Mystical Ascent: The Coincidence of Opposites in Kabbalistic and Hasidic Thought*. It is available on the web. He said:

“In this paper I explore the use of coincidentia oppositorum in Jewish mysticism, and its singular significance for the theology of one prominent Jewish mystical school, Chabad [or Lubavitch] Chasidism. It is the achievement of Elior and other modern scholars of Jewish mysticism to have brought the philosophical use of the coincidentia doctrine by the Chabad Chasidim to our attention.”

In this paper Dr. Drob has done much more than that. His treatment, though primarily concerned with Jewish Mysticism, he gives us a very concise treatment of the subject as it applies through the middle ages and in the modern world up to and including Derrida, with a full complement of notes. It's a treasure. Since my excursions are non-for-profit and with a very small distribution, I will swipe from sections of it as I did with Croce in the interest of our philosophical pursuits. This will supply us with quite a few more pieces of our puzzle.

“The doctrine of coincidentia oppositorum, the interpenetration, interdependence and unification of opposites has long been one of the defining characteristics of mystical [as opposed to philosophical] thought. Whereas mystics have often held that their experience can only be described in terms that violate the “principle of non-contradiction,” western philosophers have generally maintained that this fundamental logical principle is inviolable. Nevertheless, certain philosophers, including Nicholas of Cusa, Meister Eckhardt and G.W.F. Hegel have held that presumed polarities in thought

do not exclude one another but are actually necessary conditions for the assertion of their opposites. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the physicist Neils Bohr commented that superficial truths are those whose opposites are false, but that “deep truths” are such that their opposites or apparent contradictories are true as well. The psychologist Carl Jung concluded that the “Self” is a *coincidentia oppositorum*, and that each individual must strive to integrate opposing tendencies (anima and animus, persona and shadow) within his or her own psyche. More recently, postmodern thinkers such as Derrida have made negative use of the *coincidentia oppositorum* idea, as a means of overcoming the privileging of particular poles of the classic binary oppositions in western thought, and thereby deconstructing the foundational ideas of western metaphysics...

...I engage in what the modern Neoplatonic philosopher, J. N. Findlay, has termed “rational mysticism.” Rational mysticism is a method of thought and inquiry that not only articulates mystical doctrines in rational terms, but utilizes reason to arrive at insights and conclusions that are typically only arrived at through meditative and other experiential/mystical techniques. The “rational mystic,” as I am using this term, endeavors to achieve a unified conception of the world by rationally overcoming the distinctions, oppositions and antinomies that have torn it asunder and given rise to the polarities (e.g. between words and things, mind and reality, subject and object, humanity and God, good and evil, etc.) that characterize the world for ordinary, pre-mystical consciousness and discourse...mysticisms of many, if not all, cultures develop a paradox in which the “absolute,” “universal self,” or “truth” of the world is understood as both vacuum and plenum, as both absolutely nothing, and the totality of all things. In addition, several other paradoxes are characteristic of mystical thought; for example, the validity of both a ‘truth’ and its negation, the reality and unreality of space and time, and the substantiality

and illusory character of the self. Such paradoxes are present in the mysticisms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam as well as in the Kabbalah, where, for example, the infinite godhead is regarded simultaneously as both nothingness (Ayin) and the infinite (Ein-sof)...

...Paradox and contradiction are more readily accepted in Eastern philosophical traditions than in west. As Graham Priest has pointed out the logicians of ancient India standardly held that propositions could be (1) true only, (2) false only, (3) both true and false, or (4) both true and false (to which the Buddhist added “none of these”). The Jains went so far as to hold that a proposition could be both true only and both true and false. Contradictory propositions abound in Taoism, and it is clear that in the Japanese school of Buddhism, Chan or Zen, which fused the teachings of the Buddha and the Tao, contradictions (in the forms of Koans) play a significant role in propelling the adherent towards enlightenment...

...The Gnostics, for example, held that to know one’s arche (beginning) is to know one’s telos or end, that one can become the knowledge that is known (via a reunion with one’s divine self), that both God and reality are androgynous (both “Mother” and “Father”). The Gnostics further held there to be a radical coincidentia oppositorum between God and man, affirming, for example: God created men, and men created God. So is it also in the world, since men created gods and worship them as their creations it would be fitting that gods should worship men. The Gnostics typically held that the coincidence of opposites occurs between a perfect divine and a corrupt worldly reality...

...The idea that God and the world exist in coincidentia oppositorum finds a prominent place in Plotinus’ Enneads, where we learn that the “All” is necessarily “made up of contraries,” that “to deny Evil...is necessarily to do away with

the Good as well.” Plotinus further held “in the Intellectual-Principle Itself there is a complete identity of knower and known.” For Plotinus “the Supreme must be an entity in which the two [knower and known] are one.”...

...Early in the twentieth century, the interest in opposition and antinomy spread from philosophy to psychology. Noting the tendency of the human mind to think in either/or terms, psychologists developed theories and therapies that implored individuals to embrace those aspects of their psyches, which they had hitherto tended to ignore, reject or otherwise exclude. Psychoanalysis, for example, sought to expand the psychic field to include both conscious and unconscious, and socially acceptable as well as unacceptable ideas, emotions and impulses. Carl Jung (1875-1961) went so far as to hold that the fully developed or individuated self is a *coincidentia oppositorum*, a coincidence or blending of oppositions. Drawing upon spiritual and practical traditions that had themselves been marginalized in the history of western thought (Gnosticism, alchemy and the Kabbalah), and embracing eastern (Taoist and Hindu) modes of thought as well as western (Christian) mysticism. Jung’s vision of humanity was one that united the polarized aspects of both the individual and the “collective” psyche. It would not be an exaggeration to say that for Jung the “coincidence of opposites” is the key principle of his entire psychology. Elaborating on the basic Freudian insights that there are no contradictions in the unconscious and that personality develops as a result of psychological conflict, Jung articulated a conception of the whole “Self” which unifies the conscious and the unconscious, the personal and the impersonal and a whole host of other archetypal oppositions (e.g. between anima [female] and animus [male], shadow and persona, etc.). As Jung himself put it “The self is made manifest in the opposites and the conflicts between them; it is a *coincidentia oppositorum*”. For Jung, the measure of both an individual and an entire culture is the capacity to recognize

polarity and paradox and to balance and unify oppositions. However, in contrast to Hegel, Jung held that the “union of opposites on a higher level of consciousness is not a rational thing, nor is it a matter of will; it is a process of psychic development that expresses itself in symbols.” Indeed, Jung himself held that Hegel had erred by intellectualizing what were essentially insights into human psychology. One might, perhaps more dispassionately, say that Jung attempts in the realm of the symbolic, mythological and the psychic what Hegel endeavored to accomplish in the sphere of reason: a dialectic of oppositions and antinomies leading to the full development of psyche or “mind”...

...While mystics of various traditions had for millennia contemplated the oppositions of thought, and had sought, for example, to dispel them as illusions cloaking a unified God or Absolute, in the last two hundred years a rational approach to overcoming these oppositions has emerged, paving the way for a form of philosophical, even scientific, reason, which avoids the either/or distinctions of traditional rational inquiry. This trend has found expression among modern physicists, in particular in the theory of wave/particle complementarity as it was articulated and interpreted by the twentieth century quantum physicist Neils Bohr (1885-1962)...Citing the fact that the findings of quantum physics support both a particulate and wave theory of light and matter Bohr concluded “we are not dealing with contradictory but with complementary pictures of the phenomena, which only together offer a natural generalization of the classical mode of description.” In other words, Bohr tells us that it is only by thinking two seemingly opposing theories together that we are afforded an adequate scientific understanding of light and matter. Bohr reminds us that both “radiation in free space as well as isolated material particles are abstractions” but that both are “indispensable for a description of experience in connection with our ordinary space time view.” Bohr notes that modern physics leads to a blurring

of certain other distinctions that had earlier been thought to be sharp and clear. Drawing on Heisenberg and others he speaks of the “impossibility of any sharp distinction between the behavior of atomic objects and the interaction with the measuring instruments which serve to define the conditions under which the phenomena appear.” The collapse of a clear distinction between the instruments of knowing the world and the world itself, between the knower and the known, subject and object, epistemology and metaphysics, brings physics close to the insights of mystical consciousness. Bohr regarded his “complementarity” as a philosophical position that stretched well beyond quantum physics, to matters of psychology and biology (e.g., the controversy between mechanism and vitalism). With regard to psychology he wrote: ‘As is well known, many of the difficulties in psychology originate in the different placing of the separation lines between object and subject in the analysis of various aspects of psychical experience. Actually, words like ‘thoughts’ and ‘sentiments,’ equally indispensable to illustrate the variety and scope of conscious life, are used in a similar complementary way as are space-time and dynamical conservation laws in atomic physics.’...

...The most recent, and perhaps most radical, philosophical voices concerned with conceptual oppositions, have developed an anti-metaphysical relativism that at first blush, appears to be unrelated (and even opposed) to any form of mysticism, metaphysics and theology. Philosophers, led by Jacques Derrida (1932-2004), have argued that the entire history of western philosophy and religion is actually predicated upon radical distinctions between a wide variety of conceptual oppositions (God-world, subject-object, inside-outside, good and evil, etc.) and the privileging of one pole of each of these oppositions. These philosophers have called for a post-metaphysical consciousness in which traditional ideas and values become open to that which they were meant to exclude

and in which we learn to embrace both poles of oppositions and all that does not fall neatly into the dichotomies that have dominated western thought for the past 2500 years...

...Derrida invokes the notion of the “supplement” in his critique of a totalizing absolute or essence. The “supplement,” a notion that suggests there is always something else, is designed to disrupt all binary oppositions: nature/culture, animal/human, child/adult, mad/sane, divine/human, without creating new integrative models of understanding the subject matters which these oppositions consider and classify. “Supplementarity,” by suggesting that there is always something beyond what one encompasses with one’s vision or refers to with one’s words, undermines the idea that anything can be fully present to consciousness (what Derrida calls ‘presence’), or that one can fully grasp anything’s identity. What something (anything) is, is in part constituted by that which at first appears “outside” of it, i.e, by that which it is presumably meant to exclude...

Mystics of various persuasions have generally held that such paradoxes are the best means of expressing within language, truths about a whole that is sundered by the very operation of language itself. Any effort, it is said, to analyze these paradoxes and provide them with logical sense is doomed from the start because logic itself rests upon assumptions, such as the laws of “non-contradiction” and “the excluded middle,” that are violated by the mystical ideas. Indeed, Stace has argued that mystical truths are essentially alogical, inasmuch as they apply to unity, whereas logic applies to, and indeed defines the nature of, multiplicity.

A synoptic view of the human mind can only be attained once we recognize the mutual interdependence of such dichotomies as determinism and free will, objectivism and constructivism, facts and interpretations, individualism and collectivism, and public vs. private psychological criteria... a similar analysis is

necessary with respect to certain metaphysical and theological ideas, and further, that such an analysis is necessitated by the very nature of linguistic representation.

It should be noted here that much of Marx's thought in *Das Capital* was the reverse of Hegel's Dialectic. The following is a snippet from the web site *In Defense of Marxism*:

“In the writings of Hegel there are many striking examples of the law of dialectics drawn from history and nature. But Hegel's idealism necessarily gave his dialectics a highly abstract, and arbitrary character. In order to make dialectics serve the ‘Absolute Idea,’ Hegel was forced to impose a schema upon nature and society, in flat contradiction to the dialectical method itself, which demands that we derive the laws of a given phenomenon from a scrupulously objective study of the subject-matter as Marx did in his *Capital*. Thus, far from being a mere regurgitation of Hegel's idealist dialectic arbitrarily foisted on history and society as his critics often assert, Marx's method was precisely the opposite. As he himself explains”:

“My dialectic method,” wrote Marx, “is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of ‘the Idea,’ he even transforms into an independent subject, the “demiurge” of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of ‘the Idea.’ With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the *material world* reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.” Hegel's Absolute was God, for Marx, God did not exist. It's hard to even imagine the pain and suffering caused in this world by the implementation of Marx's ideology. This piece of the jigsaw is from a completely different puzzle. It was a puzzle started in the “age of enlightenment” with the new science and since then has led down the road to perdition.

## Chapter VI

If one is at all prone to think aesthetically, philosophically, theologically and historically, he or she surely must be aware of all that has been written, preached or spoken about the “nature” of an Almighty Unseen God; The Father; The Absolute; The Supreme Being; Being Itself, and so on. Further, if you’re a Christian with a reasonably good understanding of Holy Scripture, when you read or hear the words of Jesus: “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” or “The Father and I are One,” or “no one comes to the Father except through me,”— why would anyone look any further than the “Son of God,” who, for believers *is* God and available to them in the Eucharist through the Holy Spirit every day anywhere in the free world— and even beyond where the Church happens to be persecuted at the time. It does seem obvious though, that as human beings we are very special creatures in that we are enabled to think not only self consciously but beyond ourselves. We can project and perceive extemporally and transcendentally. The need to know, love and serve the Creator; God, the Father, has been historically imbedded in us since the ape-to-human brain-to-mind transformations. Any good anthropology text book will support this hypothesis.

There are many who say we are able to do this “naturally” by the use of our imagination, mixing memory-experiences and desire, establishing a creative function that is unique only to the *human* race. We would agree. However, it seems to us that this ability is in fact much more than what one might call natural. It appears to be more of a super-natural condition; since we, as *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* have the freedom of self control and are capable of choosing right from wrong for our personal interests and for the larger mutual interest of those with whom we live, as well as those others who are “human beings” just as *we* are. We do not necessarily see this in the other creatures, the animals that inhabit the planet with us. We have been set apart

so to speak, by a wide margin even if it cannot be fully explained scientifically, although God knows we're trying. The puzzle will be complete when we see the ONE unified family of man, living in peace and harmony under the aegis of mutual care, otherwise known as love, or the love of the Absolute if you will. The true reality matching the virtual picture on the box when all is in All.

When Heraclitus was able to peer through the gauzy curtain of infinity he was only capable of perceiving with the eyes of a finite being. With great expectations and imagination he saw "being" as irresistible becoming. A *now* following a *when*, instantly made a *then* without the slightest pause. An unstoppable, cosmic state of flux where the "Coincidence of Opposites" is the imperative and unified modality. In the language of the Pre-Socratics he tried to give us examples which later even Aristotle didn't get; like "stepping in the same river twice"; since Plato's student and Alexander the Great's teacher was wedded to what has gotten to be known as his law of non-contradiction. Most of Western philosophy and Scholastic theology from Aquinas followed Aristotle's lead of classic binary opposition of right or wrong as opposed to right/wrong-wrong/right-right/wrong and so on. Now one might conclude that a "right and wrong" philosophy may be the road to relative judgement and weaken resolve, but isn't that exactly how we live? If we have been created free—or have become free by natural selection (according to some), do we not have the option of good and evil *at once* in everything we do? This is the very thing John Calvin was not quite able to work out after taking a clue from Luther about Sola Fides (faith alone).

Let's try to demonstrate the point. What would you reckon the answer be to the question: Is matter the only reality? We would wager the answer would be "yes and no." That answer would be conditioned, i.e., dependent on circumstances. If the circumstances are discrete, it would tend to give you a duality

— matter as opposed to mind, binary opposition; but we know through reason and “common sense” that we have *become* both mind and matter at once. The idea winds up as a *unity* of opposition. A concrete *yes or no* answer is what led the binary thinkers of religion to invent the homunculus, the little man inside the body called the soul; or why the great mathematician Descartes divided body and soul. It must be said that Aquinas was not one who followed that concept. “For Aquinas, rationality is not just about avoiding self-contradiction [according to Aristotle]; he points out two specific and necessary manifestations of rationality: 1) in the theoretical realm, always pursue the truth; and 2) in the practical realm, contribute to communal and societal harmony” (Crisis Magazine). For Aquinas the soul is the life of the body. He was not a dualist, neither was he a follower of the unity-of-opposites as was Bonaventure and Cusa. His theology stuck with Aristotle, Augustine and the Early Fathers.

Père Teilhard de Chardin SJ (1881-1955) a French Jesuit and scientist opened our eyes to a host of things with regard to the unity-of-opposites, and only lately. When he questioned the doctrine of Original Sin he got in big trouble with his order as well as with Rome. It was not until Vatican II that the Papacy began to see the relevance of his views on theology in the Church. When Paul VI with the approval of the Magisterium formally eased the acceptance of evolution it opened the door for accredited theologians to speculate on its inclusion in they're thinking, a full seven years after Teilhard's death on Easter Sunday in 1955. Soon after his death his thoughts were published by his friends for all to read which, we are sure, included a 36 year-old German theologian named Joseph Ratzinger.

Teilhard placed the main focus of “original sin” together with the science of “the big-bang” coming out of creation; in our opinion, that would be with the particle anti-particle

annihilation, or the synthetic disintegration of sub-atomic particles; radioactive decay. Referencing Genesis; God placed the metaphoric “tree of good and evil” in the center of the garden and instructed the first couple not to eat of its fruit. They did, and lost “paradise.” Thinking of Genesis from a Darwinian perspective, somewhere along the Homo lineage we had the ape-to-man brain-to-mind transition or transformation. Of course, there can never be absolute certainty but we do know that everything in “creation” is a process and that would surely include the procession of all life from being to becoming in a union of opposites from the time life appeared on earth with those first eukaryotic cells. In the story of the fall in Genesis, evil represented by the serpent was set apart from the good i.e. God. The onus for disobeying the good was placed on Adam and Eve, blaming them for following the lie of the anti-god, the evil-one; Satan. It would be hard to concede the idea that God, who is all goodness, would create the devil who is all evil. It was inevitable that the concept of Fallen Angels had to follow in the literature so as not to pin guilt on the Creator. “This angel, who became Satan [‘adversary’] out of Lucifer [‘angel of light’], was expelled from heaven together with all the others who joined him in his act of rebellion. The cause of his fall was pride, the desire to be independent from God, to refuse submission and inferiority to God. Lucifer wanted to be by himself more than his created status could permit him”. (Comparative Religion, Evil in Christianity, Ernest Valea.)

By accepting this story it would leave us speculating along with the authors of the Hebrew Scripture BCE (Before the Christian Era) about the politics in heaven among the Angels of God; when we know “God is everywhere” and particularly in us through Jesus and the Gospels. When Jesus speaks of the “Evil One” we’ve got to believe that *that force* is a reality, a part of our life so to speak. We definitely know of its existence but, if I may suggest, only as a psychological entity; the other side of man’s goodness. The gospel writers should not have been

expected to know that. There are undeniable innate tendencies in human nature that bear a strong resemblance to those of our previous animal nature. Maybe that's why the devil is usually pictured in art as part animal part human. That's if Darwin is right and Moses's Commandments make sense. It seems to us, at least at this writing, that we are very much a coincidence of opposites just as Heraclitus has suggested. When Flip Wilson use to say: "The Devil made me do it," surely it wasn't Flip's loving nature that was prompting him. Psychologists have known for generations that, by choice, bad habits on a continuous basis generally make happy people unhappy; good habits have the opposite effect. Unfortunately, through ignorance and or selfishness there are many who refuse to sense the difference and fall into the trap of perversion and degradation thinking it perfectly normal. P re Teilhard may have given us more than just another version of original sin when he said: "God obviously has no need of the products of your busy activity, since he could give himself everything without you. The only thing that concerns him, the only thing he desires intensely, is the faithful use of your freedom, and the preference you accord him over the things around you."

"The biological definition of homeostasis is 'the tendency of an organism or cell to regulate its internal environment and maintain equilibrium, usually by a system of feedback controls, so as to stabilize health and functioning'. Generally, the body is in homeostasis when it's needs are met and it is functioning properly. Every cell in every organ in the body contributes to homeostasis. A complex set of chemical, thermal, and neural factors interact in complex ways, both helping and hindering the body while it works to maintain homeostasis...A positive feedback mechanism is the exact opposite of a negative feedback mechanism. With negative feedback, the output reduces the original effect of the stimulus. In a positive feedback system, the output enhances the original stimulus". (Anatomy& Physiology, Jennifer Lutz.) From the time sperm

meets ovum to the breakdown of homeostasis, for what ever reason— we are in the process of *becoming* both mentally and physically. Though we can affect it by our free acts we cannot separate the positive negative activity within us. We are free creatures of God who has given us being— and in the fullness of time became one of us in the most incomprehensible demonstration of the co-incidence of opposites; the Incarnation of Jesus Christ through the Virgin Mary according to scripture; God and Man, Virgin and Mother. Heaven and Earth: joined in the Kingdom of God. The *beginning* and the *end* are connected in Jesus Christ. The Trinity is revealed; the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Creation and Redemption— unified— in the most important an absolutely necessary coincidence of opposites the world has ever known. This is infinitely more than philosophy or theology. It is the promise of eternal-life proven by the Resurrection where the puzzle is completed in perfect union, the absolute goal of universal Love.

Gospel Acclamation Jn1:14,12

Alleluia, alleluia!

The Word was made flesh and lived among us:

to all who did accept him

he gave power to become children of God.

Alleluia!

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time