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## From Here to Theology: Response to Joshua Farris

### Abstract:

Joshua Farris usefully applies my distinction between conditioned and de-conditioned philosophy to some limits of science, and the disclosure of the soul. It is argued that further de-conditioning is conducive to answering the profound philosophical questions: *What is it to be now?*, and *What is it to be?* but these answers are only adequate when they entail the existence of God. It follows that physicalism, determinism, and naturalism are false, and that science (knowingly or unknowingly) presupposes theology.

### Keywords:

Being, conditioning, consciousness, de-conditioning, determinism, existence, God, mind, now, philosophy, physicalism, science, self, soul, theology

I am grateful to Professor Farris for his application of some of my ideas about conditioned and unconditioned philosophy to the relation between science and religion. I agree with Farris that the various scientific and pseudo-scientific ideologies he discusses operate within the conditioned paradigm, and so fall far short of truly understanding one's *ownmost* existence as a soul. Unfortunately, people are rarely persuaded by logical argument. It is experiences that change people. So, I suspect we will have to wait for the disintegration of Enlightenment optimism, and the mechanistic world-view caused by the clanking iron and steel of Victorian industry, to see

the end of “physicalism” and “determinism.” In real science, these ideologies were of course ditched decades ago. Quantum physics is indeterministic and rules out any kind of materialism.<sup>1</sup>

Farris points to a crucial ethical dimension of de-conditioning, which clearly needs more work: “the sacrifice of our basic intuitions about consciousness, selves, and minds is a sacrifice of that which we value and cherish most.”<sup>2</sup> (Farris, “De-Conditioning” 26) Farris is certainly right that the effect of reductivist naturalism, materialism, and so on is to “effectively to eliminate the person.” One wonders whether eliminating the person in theory is a spurious legitimization of eliminating the person in practice.

Here I take seriously a statement Farris makes towards the end of his paper:

“Farris agrees with Priest that when exploring the nature of minds, consciousness, and persons we are talking about something that is ultimately, and deeply, theological in nature.” (Farris, “De-Conditioning” 14)<sup>3</sup>

One route from the soul to God is *via* arguments that only God has the power to create souls. God is the “soul-maker.”<sup>4</sup> Farris himself has argued in this way. Locke may be read as doing something similar, and I sketch a new “Autological” argument in my other contribution to this journal.<sup>5</sup> But there are other routes from the soul to God, or from *anything* to God. The de-conditioned mind is directly aware of the Presence of God, and so directly aware of the Being of God.

In the subsection of his paper, Farris considers “How is Deconditioning Possible?”<sup>6</sup> I list some methods of de-conditioning: asking philosophical questions, undergoing spiritual experiences, using imagination, acquiring real self-knowledge, doing history, discovering portals, practicing meditation, and mysticism. The list is not exhaustive, and there are interesting logical relations between the methods. Here I show how the deployment of each moves us closer to God; from worldly closure to Divine Revelation.

## The Eternal Now as the Presence of God

Suppose we ask a cluster of philosophical questions: *Why is the time now? When is it now? Why is it now? Why is it now, now? What is it for now to be the time it is? What makes a day today? Why are the living the living? Is anything unchanging?* The conditioned mind is inclined to say “it is now because the universe has gotten this far.” But at *any* time since the Big Bang, past, present or future, the universe has only “gotten that far.” The trouble is, it really *is* now, now.

The meta-use of “When” in “When is it now?” looks illegitimate, but the cogent answer is: “The time is always now.” Whatever clock time it is, it is right to say “The time is now.” It is never not now. Similarly, if a day is today, it has begun, but is not yet over. Yet, choose any day you like, there is an infinite number of times between its beginning and its end. The living are the living because they are alive now. But “now” is

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1) Bell’s critique of the Einstein, Podolsky, Rosen experiment rules out conclusively the existence of any Newton-Einstein level of material reality which determines events at a quantum level. See Einstein, Podolsky, and Rosen, “Quantum.” (1935). I argue that, on any plausible interpretation, quantum reality presupposes consciousness in Priest, “Quantum.” (2024).

2) Farris, “De-Conditioning,” 26.

3) *Ibid.*, 14.

4) I owe the expression “soul-maker” to my colleague Stephen Mulhall.

5) See Farris, “Emergent-Creationism”; 2014, Locke, *Essay An Essay*, 1951, Bk. IV, Ch. X, 1. ff.; and Priest, “Limits,” 2023.

6) Farris, “Deconditioning,” 307–11.

a concept that resists ordinary analysis. Logically, the past is over, so does not exist. The future is not yet, so does not exist. The only time there is, is now. Call this unchanging now “the Now”.<sup>7</sup>

It is possible to have direct experience of the Now, which is rightly considered spiritual. There is no experience of the past, and no experience of the future. Indeed, no one has ever experienced the past or the future. All anyone has ever experienced is Now. The firmly entrenched dogmas that the past and the future exist are products of conditioning: as though events pass “from” the future “into” the past, or as though there is a line stretching out in front of you, and another line behind you.<sup>8</sup> But, not as thought, but as experienced, events arise and subside in the present, begin and cease in the Now.

Past and future are products of the imagination. To those with eyes to see it, the Now is revealed through every experience anyone has. Because we are “lost in thought” we fail to notice that we are only ever directly acquainted with the Now. Living out our lives in our own imaginations, we do not register what really exists: events arising and subsiding in the changeless Now. Absorbed in the world-view, we miss existence.

In acquiring real self-knowledge, I realize that Now is when I am, that I only exist in the Now, whenever I am in clock-time. Clock-time is a conditioned regimentation of what happens *with-in* the Now. Ordinary language indexical analyses of “now” as “when I am,” “when I am saying now,” etc. and so forth, are not so much wrong as superficial. (Much analytical philosophy is impressive in its complexity and logical rigour, but disappointingly superficial: blind to the profundity of philosophical questions.)

In doing History, we might wonder why as a historian or anyone, one divides the future from the past. What could have invested you personally with the huge cosmic significance of dividing everything that has been from everything that is to come?

Portals to the Now include the distinction between *what* happens and *when* what happens, happens. This distinction may be intuited, but probably only thought if the phenomenological distinction is already drawn in intuition. It is the difference between the changing and the unchanging, the Heraclitean and the Parmenidean.

In meditation there is a revelation of an unbounded stillness that is entirely Now. With the cessation of thoughts and experiences, the Now in which they normally occur is *dis-closed* as the Eternal Now: the ground of all there is.

In meditation, there is a shedding of the world. As Descartes puts it, in Meditation III:

*Claudam nunc oculos, aures obturabo, avocabo omnes sensus, imagines etiam rerum corporalium omnes vel ex cogitatione mea delebo.*<sup>9</sup>

I shall close [my] eyes now. I shall stop-up my ears. I shall remove [lit: call away] all [my] senses, and I will delete from my thoughts even all images of physical things.’

Meditation III is called “*de Deo, quod existat*,” “Concerning God: that He exists.”

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7) Sartre deploys an argument like this in the opening of the “Temporality” chapter of *Being and Nothingness*, pp 107 ff. See also Priest, Sartre, , 2001. 163 ff.

8) Kant calls the construing of time in spatial terms “figurative synthesis.” Kant, *Critique*, B 50 ff., B 152.

9) Descartes, *Meditationes III* [32] Did Descartes meditate? To a reader of Descartes who has engaged in any of the practices called “meditation” it is clear that Descartes meditated. Descartes’ *Meditations* are reports of meditation. Meditating is not thinking (as the conditioned mind assumes). Quite the opposite. Meditation entails the cessation of thought. There is in Descartes a thoughtful writing up of what is then *dis-closed*. One should, I suppose, not be surprised that the philosopher who has seen the truth should be the bugbear of modern philosophy. Anti-Cartesianism unites philosophical movements whose practitioners otherwise barely recognize each other as doing philosophy.

On close phenomenological inspection, the changeless Now is *dis-closed* as having all and only the properties of the Presence of God: unlike the events within it, the Now is timeless. The Now is necessary for what happens in the Now: the world, the universe (or set of universes). Because the Now grounds anything physical, the Now is not physical but immaterial. Unlike a physical object, the Now is unbounded. If the world made possible by the Now is good, then we may infer that the Now is good. But being timeless, necessary for the universe, non-physical, and good, are essential properties of God. The Now, it turns out, is the *now-ness* of God. God is very close: closer to us than we are to ourselves. Presence is the Presence of God.

## Being as the Being of God

Suppose we ask the philosophical questions: *What is existence? What is it to be? Why is there anything? Could there have been nothing? What is the difference between something that exists and something that does not exist?* or similarly. “What is existence?” and “What is it to be?” are easily confused with “What exists?” or “What is there?” But we need to know: Given there is what there is, what is thereby true of it?

Even this is inadequate to the profundity of “What is Being?”. The conditioned mind is misled by the plurality of beings into assuming that being rather than not being pertains only or essentially to the existence or non-existence of particulars. In fact, answering “What is it to be?” has next to nothing to do with plurality. Logically, “‘There exists at least one...’” does not give us “‘There exists more than one...’” Heidegger rightly points out that Aristotle is side-tracked from the *Seinsfrage* (*What is it to be?*) onto (roughly): *What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for x being a substance?* where a substance could exist even nothing else existed. But Heidegger himself is side-tracked from the *Seinsfrage* onto (roughly) *What does the existence of Dasein consist in?* where *Dasein* is the mode of being implied by being a human being, being in *being* someone. It is not wrong to read “*Dasein*” as “‘human *be-ing*,’”, so long as we underline “*be-ing*.”. “*Dasein*” does not denote a human being, but the human manner of *be-ing*.<sup>10</sup> *Dasein* does not admit of a plural (and is only contingently human). Derrida is right to read Heidegger as an existentialist, given the descriptions of the structures of *Dasein* in *Sein und Zeit*.<sup>11</sup>

But the whole discussion of whether exists is a predicate has also been a distraction, side-tracking *What is being?* or *What is it to be?* onto: *What is it for this, or that, particular to exist?* We need to sever the Question of Being from the meaning of the existential quantifier, even though it would also be nice to know what “‘There exists at least one’...” means. Various analyses of “exists” fail, through circularity.

Frege says: “affirmation of existence is in fact nothing but denial of the number nought.”<sup>12</sup> (Frege, *Arithmetic*, 5) What is this “denial of the number nought”? It is to say “‘There is not zero of it’” or “‘There is at least one of it’...” But this tacit “‘There is’” means “‘There exists...’” so existence is not explained, but presupposed. Frege’s ingenious and interesting attempt to construe “0” and “1” as prior to “exists” is therefore uninformatively circular.<sup>13</sup>

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10) Nagel perspicaciously calls the subsection of *Nowhere* dealing with one’s own existence “Being Someone.”. Of course, neither Nagel nor Heidegger is essentially interested in psychology or personality here, but in being in so far as it is one’s own. See Nagel, *Nowhere*, 52 ff.

11) In “Existentialism” (delivered October, 1945) Sartre cites Heidegger as an existentialist. Heidegger distances himself from existentialism in the 1949 Letter. In “Ends” (French text, 1969) Derrida suggests Sartre understands Heidegger more perspicaciously than Heidegger understands himself. The three pieces could be published in chronological order in a single volume, exhibiting some contested differences between Fundamental Ontology, Existentialism, and Post-Structuralism.

12) Frege, *Arithmetic*, 5.

13) Over dinner, Saul Kripke told me he was researching the number “zero.”. We may hope the publication of his *Nachlass* will shed some light on the relation between zero and what it is to exist.

Russell says: “existence is essentially a property of a propositional function. It means that the propositional function is true in at least one instance.”<sup>14</sup> (Russell *Knowledge*, 232) But, to say there are instances of  $x$  (or there are examples in space time) is to say there exist instances (or examples in space-time). So, again, the analysis is empty circular. This is an ingenious attempt to construe “true” as primitive with regard to “exists’”, but “ $x$  is  $F$ ” can only be true if we read it as ‘T“there is an  $x$  such that  $x$  is  $F$ ,” as  $\exists(x) F(x)$ , so, the existential quantifier is tacitly presupposed. But the existential quantifier means “Tthere exists a,...”, so existing is again presupposed not analysedanalyzed.

Quine thinks “to be is to be the value of a variable’,”<sup>15</sup> or, as it is commonly taken: “to be is to be the value of a bound variable.”. But a value is an interpretation, a putative referent. But the referent of an expression (sentence, theory, etc.) either exists or does not exist. Either way, what it is *to be* is not explained. A bound variable is bound by the existential quantifier, and the existential quantifier means “There exists at least one.”. So, again, existing is presupposed not analysedanalyzed.

“Exists” is hard to analyseanalyze in more primitive terms.<sup>16</sup> Part of the problem is a failure to address existing monolithically: tThere could be Being rather than Nothing, even if there were no beings. At a conditioned level, being is assumed to only pertain to the things that are. At an unconditioned level, there is intuition of Being *qua* Being. I offer this suggestion:

“Being” (*def.*) Being is that which nothing lacks.

The formulation expresses two propositions: “Being is that which none of the things that exist lack” (which is circular, because of “exist”) and, more profoundly: “Being is that which Pure Nothingness lacks.”. By “Nothingness” (or “Nothing”) is meant “absolutely nothing whatsoever’..”

In deep meditation, and in some mysticism, there is a dissolution of beings, a cessation of events, a shedding the world, and the revelation of Pure Being; an unbounded emptiness or *No-thing-ness* that is fully present, and makes possible the arising and subsiding of events or beings. The operations of the imagination cease because, as events cease, *a fortiori*, mental events cease). The dis-appearance of beings allows the dis-closure of Pure Being. We should call this dis-closure a spiritual experience because Pure Being is revealed to have all and only the properties of the Being of God: unbounded immateriality, being necessary for the world, being simple.

In acquiring real self-knowledge there is dis-closure of the *Sein of Dasein*. In Jaspers’ “I must search for being if I want to find my real self”<sup>17</sup> Karl Jaspers *Philosophy I trans. E.B. Ashton (Chicago, 1971) p. 45*. this “must” is an entailment, for example from the “am” of “I am” to the *be-ing* of Being. You are one of the portals to Being. The whole of History unfolds *with-in* Being.<sup>18</sup>

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14) Russell, *Knowledge*, 232.

15) Quine, “Designation” 707-708.

16) Hegel begins his dialectic with Being (Sein) partly because unless this concept is possessed no concept is possessed. Hegel, *Logic*, I, 1: “Being.”. If Hegel is right, there is no viable conceptual scheme in which anything is prior to Being. Yet, *Fundamental Ontology* and *Fundamental Theology* describe the essential properties of Being.

17) Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 45.

18) I understand Being, or Pure Being, in the manner of Parmenides. See Barnes, *Greek Philosophy*, chapter titled “Parmenides.” My late colleague, Michael Inwood, was agnostic, not atheist, only because he agreed with Anthony Kenny that people attach radically different meanings to “God,” so it is unclear a priori what one is denying. Inwood once said to me: “If you mean by ‘God’ ‘Pure Being’ then I suppose God exists” (or words to that effect). The thesis that Being is the Being of God is not vulnerable to attack by Nietzsche et. al. (despite Nietzsche’s process ontology), and is at least consistent with Aquinas’ thesis that God “is His existence.”

## The Being of Presence and the Presence of Being

Being is absolutely primordial, in this sense: unless there is Being, there is not anything, but Being depends on nothing except itself. Yet, it is not as though Being and Presence could ontologically or epistemologically *come apart*: Presence is the Presence of Being, and Being is the Being of Presence. Being and Presence are therefore most perspicaciously understood as the first two persons of the Holy Trinity, or the Holy Trinity is not fundamental. Being is expressed by the “I am” of Exodus. Presence is Christ, as the second person of the Trinity, who has existed from all eternity. The third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is Consciousness. (I have argued elsewhere that quantum physics presupposes Consciousness. The physical universe presupposes quantum physics. So, the universe presupposes Consciousness. Priest *Quantum*, 2023.)<sup>19</sup> Being, Presence, and Consciousness are Fundamental. Because the Holy Trinity is Being, Presence, Consciousness, the Holy Trinity is Fundamental.<sup>20</sup>

## Theology and De-conditioning

I am in agreement with Farris when he writes “conditioned approaches limit or eliminate what it is that makes us, us.”<sup>21</sup> This is, indeed, essentially what I was trying to put over in the original paper. “Joshua Farris exists” does not give us “I am Joshua Farris,” “You are Joshua Farris,” etc and so forth. The bare existence of Joshua Farris does not tell us *who* is Joshua Farris, who, so to speak *looks out of* Joshua Farris’s eyes, who is phenomenologically “centered on” Joshua Farris, whose presence pervades, at least, Joshua Farris. Nor does “Joshua Farris is Joshua Farris” give us “I am Joshua Farris,” etc and so forth. What it is to *be* someone is not any kind of straightforwardly empirical or modal fact. You are, in this sense “out of this world”. (Again, I use the expression “being someone” in Nagel’s sense.<sup>22</sup> See Nagel *Nowhere* (1986) p 52.)

But for the reasons given above, we can go much further, or shed many more layers of conditioning. Conditioned thought and experience limit or eliminate what it is for God to be present to us. The Presence of God is nothing other than the *nunc stans*. Creation is the *nunc fluens*. The Being of God is Parmenidean. The becoming of Creation is Heraclitean. Creation is what comes and goes in the Now. God’s immanence is the Now. For those with eyes to see, God is “all here now.”. The unconditioned soul is directly or immediately in the Presence of God. But what is it to have “eyes to see’?”

Mysticism, meditation, sudden religious experience, poetic insight, all variously have the consequence of allowing a kind of pure consciousness, more fundamental than thought and perception, yet present in the ordinary exercise of both. We call this “intuition.”. It is typically not acquired by effort or struggle or will. On the contrary, it requires a quieting of thought and perception to *dis-close* a stillness, an openness, a receptivity; the absolute interiority of the soul. This is, in a sense, the natural state of the soul, in another sense a super-natural state. It is super-natural in that it entails shedding the ordinary objects of thought and perception, and the psychological attitudes towards them. It is natural in the sense of being the unconditioned state of the soul. The soul is what is ordinarily or commonsensically understood by “space.”

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19) Priest, *Quantum*.

20) Depending on how we define “idealism,” theism entails idealism. Suppose idealism is the thesis that consciousness is fundamental; so, unless there is consciousness, there is not anything. If God is fundamental, and God is Consciousness, then Consciousness is fundamental and idealism is true. For discussion of some varieties of idealism see Farris and Göcke, *Idealism and Immaterialism*, 2021.

21) Farris, “De-conditioning,” 1.

22) See Nagel, *Nowhere*, 52.



It is not right that the soul is inside the body, or *only* inside the body. That assumption derives from a third-person recuperation of an essentially first-person singular reality: the mis-construal of the subject as a kind of object. On the contrary, through de-conditioned experience, and on an accurate phenomenology, it is *dis-closed* that the body is inside the soul: at the center of the boundless inner space the soul is.

In its de-conditioned state, the soul is aware of being pervaded by the Presence of Being and the Being of Presence. It is not the case that there is anything more fundamental. (To doubt this is, again, to misunderstand the primordial meaning of “There is....”)

It is worth pointing out two common obstacles to this degree of de-conditioning. Anyone who has not had a mystical experience is, quite understandably, likely to be skeptical of their happening, and of their ability to yield knowledge. In intuition, empiricism and metaphysics *co-incide* in a manner rarely recognised/recognized in Western philosophy. There is experience of ultimate reality, but a kind of extreme or broad or metaphysical empiricism applies: wWithout the experience you doubt both the experience and the veracity of its findings.

The other obstacle is this. Someone who is partly de-conditioned might well become aware of their own essence, as *this* consciousness, *this* inner space, whether or not they notice that it has all and only the properties of the soul. In this stage of de-conditioning, it is not uncommon to feel the force of solipsism. (I *am* it. Anything else was *perceived* to be, *thought* to be, etc.) Solipsism is a source of mirth to the conditioned mind; an outrageous, ridiculous, theory. Solipsism is a source of utter terror to the partly conditioned mind; the soul is given to itself as though it is all there is. Metaphysics requires courage. Part of the suppression of metaphysics in the West, since Hume and Kant, is doubtless unconsciously motivated by fear: fear of the unknown, fear of death, fear of life after death, fear of God. I understand.

But further de-conditioning *dis-closes* to the soul that it is pervaded by infinite Presence and infinite Being, neither of which is itself nor of its own making. If you were not religious before, this is the time to become religious. God is very close (Acts 17: 27). Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.

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There are many ways of effecting the transition from conditioned philosophy and science to unconditioned philosophy and theology. One such route exhibits the *onto-logical* dependency Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology on the *Fundamentalontologie* of Martin Heidegger (or similar), and perspicaciously re-writes *Fundamentalontologie* as Fundamental Theology; *under-standing* Being as the Being of God. *Sein und Zeit* is famously incomplete, because Heidegger found Kant’s critique of metaphysics massively “in the way.”. Straight away, Heidegger wrote the *Kantbuch*, in a way, to try to clear the way. But then, Heidegger found himself in his own way, and *Sein und Zeit* remained unfinished. Yet.. Fundamental Ontology can only be essentially completed as Fundamental Theology. The first step in this phenomenological *de-conditioning* is what I call “Fundamental Epochē,”, but that is for another paper.<sup>23</sup>

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23) There exists an unpublished manuscript, *The Question of Being and the Existence of God*, in which many claims made in this paper receive further substantiation.

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