



laetus in praesens

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Requisite Childlike Cognition for Integration of "Heaven"?

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Introduction

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Introduction

This explores the sense in which there may be value in revisiting learning capacity of children at the earliest age to gain understanding of a proactive modality easily lost through adaptation to the conventional cognitive modalities readily understood as the primary requirement for survival. This forms part of a more general discussion, where relevant references are located (*Way Round Cognitive Ground Zero and Pointlessness: embodying the geometry of fundamental cognitive dynamics*, 2012; see alternative [table of contents](#)).

The exploration is encouraged by religious injunctions held to be significant in relation to faith-based government, especially of Christian inspiration. These can be usefully reframed in relation to more general understandings of access to "Heaven", whether understood in religious or secular terms, as an integrative expression of the highest values of which humanity can conceive.

Ultimate strange attractor: "Heaven" ?

If "Heaven" is to be understood as the ultimate, integrative ordering of human values, it is fruitful to consider it through the subtleties of the dynamics of a *strange attractor* (*Human Values as Strange Attractors*, 1993). Efforts to provide visual renderings of the highest orders of *group symmetry* discovered by mathematics echo intuitive appreciation embodied in rose windows and other religious architecture.

Religious preoccupation: Widespread reference is made to "heaven" explicitly and by implication. As noted above, it is a key feature of religion as the origin and anticipated outcome of life. Religion is important to governance, recognized as faith-based governance, most notably in the USA, Islam, and Israel. Efforts by atheists such as [Richard Dawkins](#) (*The God Delusion*, 2006) have relatively little impact, despite the use of scientific arguments. Any case for *The Heaven Delusion* must necessarily be seen in this light. The argument of Dawkins can however be generalized to include any form of belief and the inference of a form of consensus which might be metaphorically described as "heavenly" (*The Consensus Delusion: Mysterious attractor undermining global civilization as currently imagined*, 2011).

The outcome of life, and the nature of any *afterlife*, is therefore potentially a focus of universal concern. Science has, as yet, little of personal significance to offer in relation to it. Belief in "heaven" is of considerable significance to those under risk of death in conflict situations, notably exacerbated by science. This applies as much to the beliefs of Islam and its role in encouraging suicide bombing as to the formal role of military chaplains in the NATO forces. These encourage those faced with death, bless their perpetration of it, and console the relatives of the perpetrators in grief for any fatal outcome to them -- with less attention to the spiritual welfare of their enemies (and their relatives) than the torturers of the Inquisition.

Indicator of quality of life: It is significant that "heaven" is fundamental to the description of aspirations to quality of life and interpersonal experiences, readily identified as "heavenly". The qualifier has been widely appropriated as a descriptor in marketing lifestyle choices. More profoundly the qualities may be sought in a heavenly pattern of relationships (framed as "eternal") or in the appreciation of a "home". A political formulation may be recognized in the [pursuit of happiness](#) -- incorporated as the influential phrase "*Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*". These characteristics are together listed among the "unalienable rights" or sovereign rights of man -- and, as such, perhaps to be understood as "heavenly" characteristics manifest in the mundane world. Any fundamental set of values may then be fruitfully understood as embodying transcendental characteristics of "heaven" to some degree (*Human Values as Strange Attractors*, 1993).

Integrative comprehension: Of interest are quests for forms of comprehension which might be understood by theologians as particular characteristics of "heaven". This may be seen in widespread fascination with the [Holy Grail](#) (*In Quest of Sustainability as Holy Grail of*

Global Governance, 2011). It is also evident in the many forms of quest for integrative understanding, whether psychologically or in science, as separately documented ([Human Development Project](#), [Integrative Knowledge Project](#)). For the individual this may be framed in terms of [enlightenment](#) or [illumination](#) (*Varieties of Rebirth: distinguishing ways of being born again*, 2004).

In the case of science this notably takes the form of a quest for a [Theory of Everything](#) or identification of the highest order of symmetry (*Dynamics of Symmetry Group Theorizing*, 2008). It is appropriate to recall that an earlier, and long-standing, motivation for mathematics was in an effort to understand the nature of God and his works -- and the organization, if not the geometry, of heaven. Each stage in imagining richer mathematical organization of the universe effectively provides a new template for speculation on the integrative nature of heaven. Such exploration can be explored as mathematical theology. Given the possibility of generalizing "theology" to include whatever is given the equivalent of what amounts to "divine" significance within an integrative belief system, a more generic understanding of "theology" can be usefully considered (*Mathematical Theology: Future Science of Confidence in Belief*, 2011). The current relevance of this framing suggests the need for its institutionalization, as explored separately (*International Institute of Advanced Studies in Mathematical Theology*, 2011).

Some forms of mathematics may be understood as a means of enabling the development beyond "childishness", as separately explored (*Beyond Childishness through Symbol-empowered Tensegrities*, 1979). These might inform recognition of the "inner child" through development of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990), as discussed separately (*Convention on the Rights of the Child Within*, 1997). The possibility of using insights acquired as children in relation to the comprehension of complex mathematical insights is considered separately in the light of cognitive psychology ([¿ Embodying a Way Round Pointlessness?](#), 2012).

Salvation: Through their various understandings of [salvation](#) -- as distinguished by [soteriology](#) -- many religions recognize processes through which individuals can ensure their access to a heavenly afterlife -- whether a condition of [eternal life](#) or [deathlessness](#) (Howard A. Snyder and Joel Scandrett, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: the ecology of sin and grace*, 2011). Curiously, in the face of physical mortality and the potential collapse of global civilization, the quest for both individual "[immortality](#)" and for the "[sustainability](#)" of global governance may be understood as efforts to embody some of the timeless, eternal qualities associated with heaven.

Cyberspace: Current popular understanding of "heaven" has been explored in relation to cyberspace by [Margaret Wertheim](#) (*The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: a history of space from Dante to the Internet*, 2000). She argues that one way of understanding cyberspace is as an attempt to realize an electronic version of heaven given its historical association with a non-physical space. In this sense cyberspace posits the existence of a genuine yet immaterial world in which people are invited to commune in a non-bodily fashion, just as medieval theology brought intangible souls together in heaven. For Morten Hojsgaard and Margit Warburg (*Religion and Cyberspace*, 2005) the related issue is how religious individuals and groups are responding to the opportunities and challenges that cyberspace brings.

Achieving "Heaven" through renewal of childlike cognition?

Religious insight: If "heaven" is to be taken seriously -- despite the reservations and agendas of those who might be said to have only richer varieties of "opium" to offer to the people -- it is appropriate to explore the cognitive implications of clues claimed as vital to achieving or embodying it.

It is therefore intriguing to note the following biblical references:

- it is to those who are childlike that the Kingdom of the Heavens belongs ([Matthew 19:14](#))
- unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. ([Matthew 18:3](#))

Such references have been the subject of extensive commentary within the Christian tradition ([Charles G. Finney](#). *The Child-like Spirit: an essential condition of entering Heaven*. *The Oberlin Evangelist*, 26 May 1852). For [Victoria Finney](#) (*Renewing our childlike nature, Helium: where knowledge rules*, August 2007):

Children learn incredibly quickly. Rediscovering this ability is not a subject for religious schmaltz, or comforting fluffy discourse, it is serious stuff. If you give yourself time to relax and to see as a child does, to fully take in your surroundings and roam freely from thought to thought, you will function at the very best of your capability.

Childlike? Whatever the reservations regarding the religious context, the question of how "childlike" has been interpreted merits consideration. As might be expected of those with a religious agenda, the question has been framed in terms of the meaning to be associated with having unquestioning "childlike faith". In commentary on *The Simplicity of Childlike Faith*, (*Following Jesus Daily*, 23 January 2010), for example, the characteristics are identified as follows:

- **belief:** children assume the good in everyone; they believe everyone deserves a second chance (and a third, and a fourth); they believe anything is possible, they are full of hope!
- **trust:** children have complete trust in their parents; they trust their parents know what is best for them, and will do what is best for them
- **love:** children are so loving! They have a natural concern for others, and more than that, they love **freely**
- **humility:** children are so eager to learn from others, they never claim to know it all; they are ok with being corrected; they are truly humble of heart
- **obedience:** have you ever noticed how thrilled children get after doing something that is clearly pleasing to their parents? It just tickles kids pink when they do something that wins the approval of mom or dad. Would that we all got such happiness from doing the will of our Father!

Gullibility? It is understandable that such characteristics are readily considered as highly desirable by authority structures and therefore

readily transferable into political systems and their governance. They might even be framed as the systemic cultivation of the very gullibility which has resulted in the high degree of abuse in the governance of institutions, as noted above, including that of religious institutions (*Abuse of Faith in Governance*, 2009). Ironically governments might now be said to stand for "nothing", other than the appearance of standing for "something".

Cognitive implications: Curiously such religious articulation of "childlike" characteristics effectively ignore the cognitive dimension. Emphasis is placed on what children can be educated to believe as appropriate, according to the dogma of the respective faiths. This ignores the essential creative quality through which associations are explored between disparate domains prior to their formalization and rigidification. The issue is exemplified by understandings of education. How might an "education" be acquired into childlike insight when formal education is itself the antithesis of creativity -- and when both education and inculcation have problematic connotations as being vulnerable to abuse?

The issue is even more problematic when the progressive specialization of an ideal "higher education" (which might otherwise be interpreted as bringing individuals "closer to heaven") is contrasted with "meta-education" as the ability to navigate creatively across the fields of knowledge and modes of cognition (*Higher Education ∞ Meta-education ?* 2011).

Genetic epistemology: As noted above, it is then potentially fruitful to re-examine the work on [cognitive development](#) and epistemology of [Jean Piaget](#) in instigating the field of "genetic epistemology", namely the manner in which a child acquires cognitive skills from the very earliest age. The question is whether this process could be the subject of "reverse engineering" to embody cognitively what gets "thrown out with the bathwater" as the child is educated. With respect to such education, what might then be understood as "missing" in Deacon's terms?

The goal of genetic epistemology is to link the validity of knowledge to the model of its construction. In other words, it shows that the method in which the knowledge was obtained/created affects the validity of that knowledge. For example, our direct experience with gravity makes our knowledge of it more valid than our indirect experience with [black holes](#).

Genetic epistemology also explains the process of how a human being develops cognitively from birth throughout his or her life through four primary stages of development: sensorimotor (birth to age 2), preoperational (2-7), concrete operational (7-11), and formal operational (11 years onward). The main focus is on the younger years of development.

Yet, that said, it is also noted that the implications of his later work do indeed remain largely unexamined

Could the apparently ordered clarity offered by formal education effectively have designed out cognitive modalities associated with the capacity to respond spontaneously and creatively to complexity? This is suggested by the childlike cognitive capacity to adapt rapidly to the variety of linguistic environments in which it may be nurtured -- a capacity typically rapidly lost as a consequence of conventional education.

The concern is however with the cognitive embodiment of such dimensional simplicity -- on the assumption that explication of higher dimensionality is packed implicitly (and confusedly) into comprehension of lower dimensionality, beyond what can be expressed formally.

Is there then a possibility of getting cognitively "getting back into" those fundamental perspectives ("*ab origine*"), so unfortunately discarded in the course of the process of conventional education and acculturation? The quest for the begriming of the cognitive universe may then be understood as questionably displaced onto the quest by astrophysicists for the cosmological beginnings of the physical universe. Both hold understandings of a quest for "the source" -- as with the Australian Aboriginal understanding of the [Dreamtime](#), of which the recent cosmological summary is reminiscent ([Stephen Hawking](#) (Ed.), *The Dreams That Stuff Is Made Of: the most astounding papers of quantum physics -- and how they shook the scientific world*, 2011).

A response can be explored in terms of the ordered acquisition of "belief", namely the attachment to "somethingness" in contrast with exposure to "nothingness" (***) . As noted above, in this sense the theological framing of "heaven" and "childlike" can be reframed in more generic terms of belief in anything, as separately discussed (*Mathematical Theology: future science of confidence in belief*, 2011).

NB: See separate presentation of relevant [bibliographical references](#).



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