

ESSAY FOR RABBI BRODY
by
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For most of my life, I was completely hobbled by oceanic alcoholism and an intense drug problem. Let's just look at the latter.

For decades of my life – most of it – I was grossly overprescribed a needed drug.

The overprescription was between 400-600% more than I should have been taking. This level was imposed on me for 35-40 years.

For that period, I suffered intense side effects caused by the overprescription. For decades, I experienced the following emotional & psychological side effects: suicidal ideation, depression, acute confusion, behavioral disorders. I was **very literally** insane. I'm sane now (*ahem*). I only began to grasp this sanity in my 50's when the daily intake was significantly cut.

My life has been working through really f----- up stuff. It was not screwed up by my conscious choices. That is not to say that I did not make bad choices. I did. Horrible ones. The countless suicide attempts. The time that I got myself into a position where a pimp held a gun to my head and nearly blew my head off.

I only made those choices because I was crazy as a bedbug. Silly expression: they would be content little things. Anyway...the drinking and drugs messed my head up. I made those horrible choices because of them.

I quit drinking in my mid-thirties. My prescription was adjusted to the appropriate level when I was approximately 55. My head cleared to an appreciable degree a couple years later. It was only then that I began to pull my life together.

I am now 65.

I have come to believe that a person has a unique self...an Authentic Self. This lies within the individual and that individual is driven to physically manifest it.

This is not about metaphysics. These qualities of self are determined by one's genetic makeup and other physiological factors.

Authentic Self is divided into three spheres.

A person has qualities:

- (1) Emotional.
- (2) Intellectual.

(3) Sexual.

Those qualities are hard-wired into one's being before birth. A person's fundamental traits are inherent in a person's being before taking that first breath. More precisely, the potential exists. They are possibilities that are lying dormant. If one is fortunate – and that fortune is the clarity that produces an awareness of the qualities that make that person unique – that person will cultivate those conditions.

Being gay or trans – for example – are determined by genetics. At least partially. But these natural qualities put a person in the minority. And the majority represses the minority because that individuality makes them question their blandness. So, they collectively persecute those who have these inherent qualities.

Authentic Self.

Being able to dance...sing...draw...write...are all manifestations of it.

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A dynamic individual rises above the forces that constrain – and ultimately seek to obliterate – the qualities from which the dynamic arises. And – in so doing – come to know that which always was.

By fighting to physically manifest one's Authentic Self, that person touches the face of God.

God is not a deity but that which is beyond human comprehension.

...And you are God.

A person seeks the fulfillment of his or her Self.

This is different from Authentic Self: (the compendium of qualities and talents that were forged in the Big Bang). The carbon – and other elements – that compose one's genes took form in the physical Creation... along with everything that a person interacts with.

Self is that which can physically manifest the Authentic Self.

Self is partially determined by genetics. DNA contains carbon that was produced billions of years ago in the interior of a red giant star. Self-actualization is only possible because of the Big Bang. To know Self is to physically manifest the Authentic Self: and – in so doing – touch the face of God.

That is both a metaphor and a term that describes ineffable reality.

I am a non-deist.

Self is that which perceives Authentic Self (by manifesting it). Self is consciousness.

Emotions are a process, a particular kind of automatic appraisal influenced by our evolutionary and personal past, in which we sense that something important to our welfare is occurring, and a set of psychological changes and emotional behaviors begins to deal with the situation.

And

It is our responsibility to learn to become emotionally intelligent. These are skills, they're not easy, nature didn't give them to us – we have to learn them.

Both quotes are from Dr. Paul Eckman (1934 – present).

Even if a person becomes self-aware enough to attempt to connect to one's existential qualities and talents(Authentic Self), the multiplicity of distracting emotions – embedded in Self – tends to frustrate success.

Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you.

- Friedrich Nietzsche (15 October 1844 – 25 August 1900), German philosopher, philologist, poet, cultural critic, and composer

Maimonides, Mordecai Kaplan, and Plato—each in their own era and idiom—offer frameworks for understanding the human journey toward truth, transcendence, and self-realization. At the heart of their teachings lies a shared conviction: that most people live in a state of constrained perception, mistaking shadows for substance, and that liberation requires both inner courage and intellectual rigor.

Maimonides, writing in the medieval period, viewed the cultivation of intellect and ethical character as the highest form of divine worship.

He believed that true knowledge of God comes not through ritual alone, but through philosophical inquiry and moral refinement. To rise above ignorance and base desire is to imitate the divine, and in doing so, one fulfills the purpose of creation.

This juxtaposition between Maimonides' rationalist theology (to connect to the ineffable) and the Buddha's doctrine of impermanence opens a rich philosophical dialogue about the nature of truth, transcendence, and the human condition.

At first glance, their frameworks seem to diverge: Maimonides seeks permanence through intellectual and moral refinement, while the Buddha teaches liberation through the deep acceptance of impermanence. Yet when placed in tension, they illuminate the fragile scaffolding upon which human striving rests.

Maimonides posits that true knowledge of God is *attained not through ritual or emotional fervor, but through disciplined inquiry and ethical elevation*.

The human intellect, in his view, is the divine faculty that allows us to rise above ignorance and base desire. This ascent is not merely personal—it is metaphysical. To know God is to align oneself with the eternal truths embedded in creation. However, this pursuit assumes a kind of stability: that the intellect can grasp enduring truths, that moral refinement leads to lasting insight, and that the self is a coherent agent capable of sustained elevation.

The Buddhist concept of *anicca* (or impermanence) challenges this foundation. According to the Buddha, all phenomena—including thoughts, identities, and moral aspirations—are transient, conditioned, and ultimately dissolving. Attachment to permanence, whether in the form of selfhood, ideals, or divine knowledge, is the root of suffering.

From this vantage point, Maimonides' path to divine knowledge is constantly disrupted by the flux of existence.

The very faculties he champions—reason, will, moral clarity—are themselves impermanent, subject to decay and distortion. In this light, the pursuit of divine knowledge becomes a Sisyphean task: noble, perhaps, but always vulnerable to the shifting sands of reality.

Yet this tension need not be seen as a contradiction. Rather, impermanence can be reframed as the crucible through which the Maimonidean ascent is tested.

The transient nature of thought and desire does not negate the pursuit of truth...

...it intensifies its urgency.

To rise above ignorance in a world of flux is to engage in a dynamic, recursive process: one that acknowledges the fragility of insight while still striving for coherence. In this sense, impermanence becomes the very condition that makes philosophical inquiry meaningful. It is not a barrier to divine knowledge, but the terrain through which it must be navigated.

Ultimately, the interplay between Maimonides and the Buddha invites a more nuanced view: one that honors the pursuit of divine knowledge while remaining attuned to the impermanent, conditioned nature of the self. It is a call to cultivate wisdom not despite change, but through it.

Kaplan, centuries later, reimagined this ascent through a [Reconstructionist](#) lens. He saw God not as a supernatural being but as the force that enables human flourishing. For Kaplan, creativity and communal engagement are sacred acts (expressions of the

divine within). Both thinkers affirm that the development of one's talents and inner truth is not merely personal growth, but a spiritual imperative.

My conception of God aligns with Kaplan's theology.

[Mordecai Kaplan's](#) Reconstructionist theology, Transcendentalist thought, and classical Taoist philosophy each offer distinct yet resonant visions of divinity: not as a distant, supernatural entity, but as an immanent force embedded in the fabric of existence.

Though emerging from different cultural and historical contexts, all three traditions converge on a shared intuition: that the divine is not above or beyond life, but within it. This overarching force animates growth in a coherent manner. This coherence leads to transformation.

Kaplan redefined God as "the power that makes for salvation": a phrase that encapsulates his belief in divinity as the force that **enables** human flourishing, ethical progress, and communal vitality.

For Kaplan, God is not a personified being who intervenes in history, but the sum of animating, organizing forces that bring order out of chaos. This view aligns with religious naturalism and process theology, emphasizing creativity, relationality, and moral evolution. God, in Kaplan's framework, is experienced through acts of justice, learning, and cultural renewal...

...not through supernatural revelation.

This conception finds a philosophical cousin in the Transcendentalist idea of the *Oversoul*, articulated by Ralph Waldo Emerson. The Oversoul is a universal spiritual presence that permeates all beings, connecting individual consciousness to a greater whole.

Emerson writes that:

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one.

The Oversoul is not a deity to be worshipped, but a reality to be awakened to...a source of intuition, moral insight, and creative power. Like Kaplan's God, the Oversoul is immanent, ethical, *and participatory*.

It calls on individuals to align with their highest selves and contribute to the moral arc of the universe.

Taoist philosophy – especially as expressed by Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu – offers yet another lens.

The *Tao* is the ineffable, generative principle that underlies all existence. It is not a god, but the Way—the spontaneous, self-arising order of nature. Lao Tzu describes the Tao as [“the mother of ten thousand things,”](#) a source that nourishes without possessing, guides without controlling.

[Chuang Tzu](#) deepens this view by emphasizing the fluidity and relativity of all distinctions.

To live in harmony with the Tao is to embrace spontaneity, humility, and non-resistance. Like Kaplan’s God and Emerson’s Oversoul, the Tao is not external to life—it is life’s deepest rhythm.

I like the Tao. I differ in the process of its realization.

The Taoist concept of [Wu Wei](#) often translated as “non-action” or “effortless action,” is one of the most elegant and misunderstood principles in Eastern philosophy. It doesn’t mean doing nothing: it means doing *without forcing*. Wu Wei is the art of aligning with the natural flow of life so completely that action becomes spontaneous, uncontrived, and deeply effective.

You allow things to unfold, intervening only when the moment is ripe.

This paradox captures the essence of Wu Wei: when you stop trying to dominate life, life begins to work through you.

I love that. But it overlooks something critical. We live in an artificial...mechanized...reality. It incessantly magnifies a person’s harshest emotions (that cocoons one in ever mutating existential angst). Conscious, aggressive, action is required to break free.

Wu Wei in Taoism and the [Zen Buddhist](#) pursuit of [Satori](#) both aim at transcendent realization, yet they diverge in method and metaphysical tone.

Wu Wei – effortless action – is “going with the flow” (without force or contrivance).

Satori is the Zen Buddhist flash of awakening: an abrupt, intuitive grasp of reality beyond dualistic thought: unexplainable, indescribable, and unintelligible by reason and logic. It demands rigorous discipline: zazen meditation, koan contemplation, and the stripping away of conceptual frameworks.

While Wu Wei emphasizes fluidity and alignment with nature’s unfolding, Satori is a rupture (a sudden clarity born from disciplined emptiness).

Both dissolve the ego and reveal a deeper truth, but where Taoism flows, Zen cuts.

Given that realization of *Authentic Self* entails breaking free of the artifice of society, we are talking about forceful effort. I am simply closer to Zen.

What binds Kaplan's God, Emerson's Oversoul, and the Tao is their rejection of supernaturalism and their embrace of immanence.

All three are expressions of a sacred force that animates growth, coherence, and ethical possibility.

They invite individuals not to submit to divine authority, but to participate in divine creativity. Each tradition affirms that the path to transcendence lies not in escape from the world, but in deeper engagement with it—through justice, intuition, and attunement to the rhythms of nature.

[Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*](#), found in *The Republic*, dramatizes this journey with haunting clarity. Prisoners chained inside a cave mistake flickering shadows for reality, having never seen the world beyond. When one prisoner escapes and encounters the sun—the ultimate source of truth—he realizes that everything he once believed was illusion. Upon returning to liberate the others, he is met with hostility and disbelief. Plato's allegory illustrates that enlightenment is not only painful but socially disruptive. Most people cling to familiar distortions, and genuine insight often isolates the knower.

I add the concepts *Personal Validation* and *Personal Vindication*. The former is establishing a connection to Authentic Self. The latter is crafting a sense of meaning that is defined by impermanence.

The Cave allegory resonates deeply with the concept of *Personal Validation*. Like the escaped prisoner, the individual who embraces Personal Validation rises above inherited constraints—religious dogma, authoritarian systems, cultural scripts—and connects to the Transcendent through inner knowledge. This is not mere self-expression; it is transrational defiance (going beyond or surpassing human reason or the rational).

In proclaiming "THIS IS ME," the individual affirms a wordless understanding of the universal spirit, transcending the illusions of the cave. It is the painful, luminous journey toward truth that Plato describes, and the intellectual and ethical ascent that Maimonides demands. It is also the creative self-actualization that Kaplan celebrates...

...a refusal to be defined by systems that domesticate the soul.

It is an ineffable rebellion that mirrors both Maimonides' ascent and the Buddha's liberation. To proclaim "THIS IS ME" in a world of impermanence is to embrace the paradox: that identity is both fleeting and profound (truth is both elusive and worth pursuing). It is the journey out of Plato's cave, not toward static enlightenment, but toward a deeper engagement with the shifting nature of reality.

In contrast, *Personal Vindication* seeks comfort in external validation, reinforcing the illusions of permanence that the Buddha warns against and that Maimonides would see as intellectual failure. It clings to the shadows on the wall, mistaking them for truth, and in doing so, avoids the painful but necessary confrontation with impermanence.

Personal Vindication mirrors the plight of the prisoners who remain chained. It seeks comfort based upon external approval: soothing insecurities without challenging their root. It is the best that the cave-dwellers can hope for: a flicker of reassurance within a world of shadows. Maimonides would see this as a failure to pursue true knowledge, mistaking emotional appeasement for intellectual clarity. Kaplan might interpret it as a stunted form of creativity—one that lacks transformative power. Plato would simply call it ignorance.

Together, these thinkers and concepts converge on a radical insight: the path to truth is not paved by conformity or appeasement...

...but by the courageous cultivation of intellect, creativity, and inner sovereignty.

Whether through rigorous study, communal engagement, or radical self-affirmation, the sacred is accessed when we rise above what diminishes us and embrace what makes us whole. The journey out of the cave is painful (but it is the only way to see the sun).

Because of my indescribably obtuse and – frankly – stupid parents, I was cocooned in crippling problems like alcoholism and the intense side effects of my overprescription. While utterly well-meaning, they aggressively encouraged both. This blocked me from embracing my talents and native intelligence. These are manifestations of my *Authentic Self*.

Look, I'll be blunt. I am trapped. I'm in a hell that I can't get out of. All I want to do is use my brains & talent to earn my daily bread (and – in so doing – embrace my true nature and touch the Face of God).

I want to be recognized as being bright (and having some talent).

But I am stuck in idiot-hell.

It is my dream to work as a writer or do research (for a non-profit, a progressive political entity, a law firm or something similar).

I am 65 years old.

Rabbi Brody, I am asking you to give me spiritual counseling: this – in part – means developing some “outside-the-box” strategies to realize my Professional Dreams.

[<><><><><><><><> PLAY ME <><><><><><><><>](#)

John Eisenhower

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