

exclusivism. *William James* would make an excellent supplemental text for an upper division undergraduate/graduate religious studies or psychology of religion course.

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*Platonic Mysticism: Contemplative Science, Philosophy, Literature, and Art.* By Arthur Versluis. State University of New York, 2017. 172 pages. \$80.00 cloth; \$20.95 paper; ebook available.

Arthur Versluis' latest book seeks to reinstate the critical importance of Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought within multiple fields of academic study: literature, painting and fine art, philosophy, religious studies and, importantly, consciousness studies. In pursuit of this central agenda, Versluis provides the reader with an interesting overview of the current state of academia in regard to these fields.

The recurring theme is that the academy at large has completely disregarded the role of intuition, mysticism, or anything esoteric, in favor of discursive reasoning alone. "The greatest taboo among serious intellectuals is the heresy of challenging a materialist worldview" (80).

From my own experience, I would conclude that Versluis is completely spot on here. Furthermore, he is correct in stating that an insider/emic and outsider/etic approach to many of these fields is essential in order to have any hope of understanding the topics in question. Unfortunately, we are only allowed a dispassionate, cold, outside analysis in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. So, what is the solution?

Versluis' answer seems to have two steps. First, bring Plato back into the academy (he did found it after all!) and into professional societies where he has always belonged. Second, highlight the fact that many Platonic mystical notions were nearly identical to some now verified claims coming out of current consciousness studies and neuroscience. According to Versluis, consciousness studies and subfields in religious studies, like neurotheology, seem to validate a portion of the wisdom of the perennial philosophy and mysticism.

It appears that many of Versluis' points about the ascent of consciousness are apt, but only for mysticism, as opposed to esoteric religion, which feels like a much broader category that includes magic and occultism. Nevertheless, Versluis seems to equate esoteric religion with mystical awareness and not much else. "The ascent of consciousness is what makes esoteric religion esoteric, if it is not present then what you are looking at is not esoteric religion" (83). Perhaps this is true for Jewish and Christian mysticism, Sufism, Indian Tantrism and even internal alchemy. After all, Versluis does say, "the metaphysics of

mysticism is portable” (10), but I am not as certain that magic—divination, evocation, invocation, and enchantment—are as concerned with the ascent of consciousness. Perhaps in what may be called high magic there is an interest in illumination, but that is not as common amongst practitioners. In other words, isn’t esoteric religion often turned to for very external or exoteric ends, most notably: money, love/desires, health or, simply, power over others or oneself?

Versluis concludes by looking forward to how the new “religion of science” will likely develop its own manifestation of Platonic Mysticism (131). In the end, mysticism is about the transcendence of subject and object and many of our more intriguing scientific concepts discuss non-locality, uncertainty, and emergence, so he just may be right about this bold claim of mysticism developing within science. If Arthur C. Clarke was correct in stating “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic,” we may eventually need to add “but also vindicates history’s great mystics.” Plato did claim that all learning is truly recollection and Versluis wants to restore Plato’s thought, so that by looking backward, we may not need to wait until that future day when the insights of science and mysticism might converge.

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*Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality: From Popular Culture to Religion*. Edited by Carole M. Cusack and Pavol Kosnáč. Routledge, 2017. 300 pages. \$160.00 cloth; \$49.95 paper; ebook available.

While growing, the scholarly study of new religious movements that are based on fictional texts is still relatively new and controversial. Popular culture—film, fiction, graphic novels, and more—has played a significant role in offering social actors throughout the world extended sources from which to draw to create new spiritualities and religiosity. As a result, this has given scholars a fresh and exciting lens through which to theorize and critically engage the study of religion, especially vis-à-vis religion, law, and politics. *Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality* explores some of these emerging new religious practices and alternative virtual spiritualities in detail and offers the reader a good primer on a variety of “invented” religions. The contributors to this four-part volume are made up of both academics and religious insiders. One gets a better feel for what so-called “fiction-based,” “invented,” and “hyper-real religions” are and what they look like in practice, as well as their fraught existential struggle for legitimacy.

The Routledge Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements aims to attract general readers as well as scholars and one can see evidence of this within the text. In Part One, the history,