Divine Inspiration

The prominent western religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam assume that God delivers His will for humanity through individual people to spread His decrees. Although each religion believes its own sacred texts are their deity’s will captured in the writings of a human, people from other religions do not accept the same texts to be divinely inspired. People who do not believe in God base any credence they give to the text on its message instead of its origin. We contend that however you choose to approach divine inspiration, the way in which one views the outcome is the same.

Our analysis will begin with the case of a person who believes in God and is a member of a religion that believes its texts were divinely inspired. The message relayed to the audience, members of the religion, is viewed as a message from God that gives insight into how they should lead their lives and what they should believe. For example, in the book of Exodus 19:5 the Lord said to Moses and the rest of Israelites, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.” Thus, God tells the Israelites that if they follow his laws and respect the covenant, they will live contently in the Promised Land. Also, in Matthew 5:19, Jesus states, “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven…” Thus, He states that the laws of men and the commandments of God must be followed. In the Holy Qu’ran, Chapter 16 (An-Nahl) and verse 89, al-Lah decrees to Mohammed, “We have sent down to thee the Book explaining all things, a Guide, a Mercy, and Glad Tidings to Muslims.” In all faiths, the message sent to the reader is for the expressed purpose of a guide to live one’s life.
First, we will look at the message and its path between God and what the inspired person puts down as written text. If God delivers the message in words, then one must consider whether or not God altered the message He was trying to convey by forcing Himself into putting it in a language the writer could understand. If this is the case, then it is God that is placing the filter between his original intent and what the religious person is reading as God’s word. If God is not limited by language and is able to convey his exact meaning to the divinely inspired, then there is no filter between God’s intended meaning and what the writer transcribes as God’s word.

Examples of this occur in both Judaism and Islam, as members of the faiths are taught to believe that God’s law has been written explicitly, with no question to its veracity. When Moses was atop Mount Sinai receiving the commandments, God told Moses to tell the Israelites that, “You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you [Moses] from heaven.” The message that Moses relays to his people must be completely correct, as the hand of God was on the mountain, and the Israelites as the base of the mountain saw this. The Torah, according to biblical account was revealed in this one session on Mount Sinai. In the Holy Qu’ran. Chapter 58 (Al-Hashr) and verse 8, al-Lah says, “So take what the Messenger gives you, and refrain from what he prohibits you.” Central to these faiths is the idea that the message of God has been faithfully been passed from God to his messenger.

There are some cases when a prophet sees fantastic visions, but God still tells him exactly what to write. For example in the Old Testament, before the appearance of the Lord, Ezekiel saw “A windstorm coming out of the north- an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light” in Ezekiel 1:4. Fantastic visions
continued to come to Ezekiel until he heard the voice of the Lord. But, the veracity of Ezekiel’s visions were solved by the Lord giving him a scroll to swallow, with which he was chosen to speak to the “rebellious house” of Israel exactly as decreed by the Lord. In Islam, the reaction of Mohammed to the Word of God being passed to him was a traumatic experience, as he would “enter a tranced state and sometimes seemed to lose consciousness; he used to sweat profusely, even on a cold day…” (Armstrong, 139)

These sessions of God revealing the Qu’ran occurred over a period of twenty-three years. Some of these revelations were inarticulate to him, and only when he fully understood what they meant did the “reverberations” in his head subside. As with Ezekiel, even though he had fantastic visions, the prophet eventually understood the message.

Now consider the situation where God does not deliver his message to the writer in words, but through thoughts, emotions, and ideas. In an effort to make enough sense of the message so that he can write down the experience, the divinely inspired writer must filter it through his own rationalization, biases, and inferences, thereby applying a filter to the message. Thus, the inspired person has taken an intense emotional experience and attempted to record it in text, which can never fully capture the essence, or impact, of a first-hand experience.

These first-hand experiences can be quite disconcerting and trying to those chosen by God to relay His message. In Exodus 3:6, after God speaks to Moses from a burning bush, “Moses hid his face, because was afraid to look at God.” Besides evoking fear in the hearts to which He appears or makes His presence known, God gave other prophets very vivid images. In Daniel 8, God inspired in Daniel a moving prophecy, “I looked up, and there was a ram with two horns, standing beside a canal…I, Daniel, was exhausted
and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king’s business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.” After the vision, the angel Gabriel tried to explain the vision to Daniel, which he faithfully recorded in the book, yet even after divine guidance, the human Daniel could still make no sense of the awesome images he witnessed.

One important aspect of the flow of a message from God to a reader of the divinely inspired scripture is its filtering through a church. Many times, especially in the early Catholic Church, councils were formed in response to schisms within the religion to formally decide what was to be done to unify the Church. The councils, repeated later in Protestantism, sometimes resulted in the derecognition of books that had already been accepted as divinely inspired scripture. In what is accepted as the earliest version of the Old Testament, the Nag Hammadi includes many books that are not in the earliest Greek and Latin versions of the Bible, written centuries later. In the early Catholic Church, a commonly known expulsion of books occurred during one of the early Councils of Nicaea. At this council, the number of Gospels in use by different diocese of the Catholic Church was reduced to the four in the present Bible. Rather than a religious belief that these four were the only correct gospels, they were chosen because they described the selection of twelve apostles from among his disciples. This was a political move that lent more credence to the power of a pope, the religious descendant of Peter, one of the chosen apostles.

Later, during the Protestant reformation, twelve books of the Old Testament included in Catholic Church doctrine, were thrown out of the new Bible. In response, during the council of Trent, the Catholic Church inspected these books and threw out
only one of them. These are just a few of the examples of how the institutions governing religion can filter the text the reader gets to see through their own biases and political motives.

The next stage to be inspected is the path between what the church accepts as scripture and how the religious person interprets it. The religious person then makes a choice of whether to view the text as exactly what God told the inspired person to write down, or as the inspired person’s attempt to convey the ideas given to him into words, i.e., a literal or figurative interpretation of God’s original message. If God intended for the text to be taken literally but the reader takes it metaphorically, or vice versa, then the message of the meaning has been lost by not being able to understand God’s intent.

For the moment, let’s assume that the message has been interpreted from God’s message as purely as possible, a view that many religions and denominations take regarding their own interpretations. A textual message perfectly explaining God’s ideas for humanity has been perfectly transcribed by a writer, the institutions associated with religion allow the text to remain unchanged, and the readers of the text choose to accept the scripture literally, as God intended. Thus far, it is an unfiltered mechanism transforming the will of God into the rule of the people.

In both secular and religious law, there can be disputes over what the meaning of words, even when literally and explicitly written, ultimately means. For example, in the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution, the Fourth Amendment explicitly states, “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” The English language has not changed very much in the last 200 years, so the literal meaning of this law is not questioned by anyone. It states forthright that Congress has no power to
infringe upon the citizens’ right to own munitions. But, as the United States has
developed over the past two centuries, American society has seen the implication of this
statement, especially in regards to modern gun technology. Therefore, scholars have
questioned the intentions of the writers of the Constitution, and thus they choose to
interpret it to meet their aims, i.e. they rationalize the restriction of arms. All groups
involved in the dispute over “intention” understand the literal meaning of the Fourth
Amendment, but its figurative meaning has been highly debated. Thus, even when a law
is written explicitly and faithfully transcribed over the years, and where all citizens can
understand what the law says, the actual “meaning” of the law can still be disputed. This
secular example still has valid correlations in religious texts.

After God has inspired the writer to convey His message in scripture and the
reader has decided upon the manner in which to understand the text, one should consider
the fact that the differences in the meaning of words could cause a difference in
interpretation of the original message. People have different experiences and different
understandings, thus they take the same stories and the same words as meaning various
things. Language is not a perfect description of reality, as one cannot always describe an
intense experience in words to his satisfaction. So, when two different readers read the
same words, they may get different meanings from the words, because they understand
them differently. It is an example of differing language schemes, and no matter how hard
the reader tries to attain the perfect meaning, he cannot.

Before the reader of the religious text can understand its meaning, one must
consider that there are filters in place in the actual act of reading the text. In

*Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein argues that during the act of reading, one
reads the text aloud or to oneself. He states that the words themselves are representations of sounds when it is read, but the actual reading involves concentration, so we let the words guide us, based on situation. He also states that there are many ways to be guided, so the actual reading of words can cause people to understand text differently, because the words of the text guide them in innumerable directions. This applies well to all texts, including religious texts. Even if one follows the “purest” path from God to the reader, where God gives the literal message to the writer, who transcribes God’s words verbatim and the reader looks at the text as being literal, in reading the text, different people would have different understandings of the Word because the words contained within it guided the readers to different experiences.

The reader also operates under a very personal set of pretenses. After much social influence, including parents, church, siblings, etc., the reader has a set of beliefs and ideals under which he operates. Anything that goes against these ideals could threaten the person’s confidence in their beliefs. They have three choices: completely disregard the different idea, reconcile the new idea with their own ideals, or take the new idea as truth. This set of pretenses applies to all facets of life, including how the reader applies religious scriptures to his own life. The reader can choose to take parts of the scripture as truth and disregard others completely. The reader can meld the ideas presented in the message into his existing beliefs. The reader can also drop his old thoughts and become “enlightened” from the newfound knowledge presented in the message. Thus, even if God literally presented his message to the divinely inspired writer, who wrote down verbatim the word of God, and these words meant the same to the reader as they did the writer, if the ideas go against fundamental beliefs of the reader,
or question in any way how they operate, then the reader has the option of arbitrarily taking to heart parts of the message, while disregarding others.

One can argue that because God crafted the message and divinely inspired someone to write down exactly his intentions in the exact words God conferred to him, His divine words can be perfectly crafted such that the words are clear to the reader, and the nature of the words cause the reader to take the message in the intended manner, as it does to all readers. This argument is overlooking the fact that the text has been translated by humans into languages that a majority of the people in their respective faiths can understand. Until now, it has been assumed that the reader has been reading the divinely inspired texts in the same language as they were written. In reality, however, the reader cannot usually speak Hebrew, Greek, or Arabic, the languages in which the sacred texts of the prominent Western religions were written. They must be translated into languages that the members could readily understand, i.e. the common language of the area in which the religion is prevalent. Also, the act of translation is a completely human endeavor, thus the translator is free to apply his own biases to the text that he deals with. The translator is free to word the translations in a manner that makes sense to him, but wasn’t exactly the form and content that God had intended.

Even if the translator manages to be completely objective in his translation, some of the texts are very old, and the languages in which they were written have evolved since the texts were written. There may be words that are not used today or have a different emphasis than before. The age of the manuscript may also affect the legibility of the text due to the nature of the surface onto which the scripture was transcribed. Also, words in one language may not have accurate representations in the language to which it was
translated. Even if the translator understood the text exactly as God had intended, he may not have the words in the language into which he is translating the message to accurately represent the ideas and emphasis on words and contents of the message.

Now the message has traveled from God to the reader through several filters. Now the reader must decide what to do with what he has just read. If he accepts that the message has been placed through several filters, he must also accept that the message from God has been distorted and possibly lost. He must now judge the message on its merit, whether it is how the text affects the reader psychologically or emotionally, or on a logical argument that the text is making. Now the weight of the message rests entirely upon the reader’s biases and judgment, and it is his choice to lend credence to what he has just read or to ignore it.

Many times, the reader will choose to take some of the text as literal, some as figurative, and completely ignore or contort other parts. This is a very personal thing and independent of what language scheme or social environment the reader is working in, and depends rather on the reader’s personal experiences and biases. Highly visible examples of this are the various denominations of Christianity. The entire branch of Protestantism is based on a few men, namely Luther and Calvin, convincing others that their personal interpretation of the Bible were correct. Protestantism is an interesting example in that most of the reformation movement came from political strife rather than any personal conviction that the religion was correct. The early powerful subscribers of Protestantism, like the German princes, did so to break from the institution that was limiting them, the Roman Catholic Church, instead of any spiritual belief.
If one argues that God works on a personal level, such that every believer of the faith is divinely inspired when one reads the text, then no other argument can be made. If this is the case, then it does not matter who wrote it or even if it was divinely inspired, and the interpretation is still a very personal thing. The person is basing his interpretation of the scripture on something completely independent of its source.

The next example of a reader is one that believes in God but does not subscribe to the religion that accepts the text as scripture. There is an obvious bias that the reader applies to the scripture, and any merit he attributes to the reading is based on the ideal the passage is trying to convey. If it coincides with his personal beliefs, the reader will accept it as a legitimate source. If it is not obvious that the text agree with his biases, he will either try to contort the message or disregard it completely. This reader who does not subscribe to the religion of the sacred text is faced with almost the same decision as the person who does subscribe to the religion and realizes that it has passed through so many filters. Perhaps the only significant difference in the two is a local pressure from other members of the religion to accept the text as is generally accepted by the rest of the community.

A notable example of a member of one faith evaluating the merits of another involves the Hindu spiritual and political leader Mahatma Gandhi who commented on what Jesus Christ meant to him. He wrote, “He was a living example on earth… He was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had.” In this statement he was commenting on how even though he was not Christian, and thus could not accept Christ as the only Son of God, he could still learn from the example of Jesus. Thus, Gandhi did not ascribe to the religion, but because he thought the message that Christ delivered to the
world was so inspiring, he held the prophet of another faith as a great example for humanity. In this case, he accepted the texts of the Bible enough to believe that such a figure as Jesus once lived, and based on the merits of Jesus’s message, Gandhi took the example with much esteem.

Someone who does not believe in God could also read the text, but would view it as an intellectual work outlining a set of beliefs through the telling of stories, much in the same way as a philosopher. The reader judges the text on much of the same criteria as the two types of readers previously described: coincidence to pre-existent beliefs or the logic of an argument made. This reader also append many personal biases to the text, so the merit is totally dependent on the reader’s interpretation, rather than any message God may have been trying to convey. Thus, no matter what level of faith one has, the filters placed upon the route from God to reader and the actual reader biases and misunderstandings based on the nature of reading and understanding, will cause the reader to have to evaluate the validity of the message based on content.

The following sections deal with writings that we were inspired to write. As we were able to put them down into words, the words must have originated from somewhere. Were we divinely inspired when we wrote them? Did we make any revisions? Will you understand what we are trying to say? These are all questions that will remain unanswered. Why should we answer them? The answer would be distorted by your filters and subject to your biases anyway.
The Gospel of Abraham Thomas

I could barely breathe. My eyes dilated, I started sweating, and I could not explain that loud echo which kept pulsating through my mind. I could somehow see the echo... I was sitting in traffic, with the wincing smell of smog filling my lungs. Was it a dream? No, for as hard as I tried to push these thoughts from my heads, new ones kept inundating me. I was drowning; yes, that’s it. I was drowning without a drop of water to be seen.

What spirit had entered my head to so vigorously shaking any coherent thought out of my being? It was no spirit at all.

The feeling that had come over me was self-loathing. In fact, it was a collective self-loathing for the entire planet. I could not believe that we had let things deteriorate to this degree. Why should I even value my humanity when humanity is the plague on this planet? I felt shame, not just for myself, but also for the entire human race. Now I remember, the event that had put me to this position was seeing my car, stuck in the middle of an endless line of other cars. Behind me, the late-day sun, permeating the smog, was casting a murky, gray cloud overtop the buildings. All around me was a concrete jungle of lanes on top of other lanes, weaving in and out of the sky like a girl’s braided hair being recklessly undone. In front of me, I could see the taillights of the cars entering the tunnel, a line of red stretching down to the infinite depths of the abyss.

As the line started inching forward and the cars behind me began insistently blaring at me to move forward, my mind slowly regained composure. Yet, visions still flowed in and out of my mind. I saw visions of forests and prairies. I saw predators going for the kill and ants building their colonies. I could hear the sizzle of lava flowing into the sea and the beating of the rain against the mountainside. I was part of it all, yet I
did not understand. I was in the city. I had never even been to a prairie before! What did it all mean?

Then, it all made sense. When I awoke from bed, I felt awake. It was not that I felt awake in a non-drowsy sort of sense; it was something more. I understood. It must have sorted itself out when I was not thinking about it. How could I have understood it if all the images had hit me at once? After I awoke that morning everything had a place. What had driven me to such revulsion in that car was a realization that our imposed subjugation of nature had its consequences. We are putting the world out of balance. I will now share what I understand, without even being aware I ever contemplated it.

My one revelation was that the world is an intricate balance. Every action, whether "good" or "evil", that one performs has a consequence. But, such words as good and evil do not mean much, as one has to have something ultimately good and evil to compare one’s actions against to measure relative amounts. There is no such thing as good and evil; there is only balance and imbalance. Balance brings with it harmony and order. Imbalance contains within it all actions that seek to take away from harmony and order. Balance is not "the" term for the order. It is just a word that I use to try and capture the intricacies of interconnectedness. I also describe the balance as the ultimate order, the fundamental order, the web, etc. The name itself is unimportant. What is important is the concept of balance. From the visions I underwent and the revelation about the balance of the world, other realizations have been made, but these all still follow that balance and the seeking of balance should be the true underlying motivation for all actions. These other realizations are as follows: strive to understand the world around you, be tolerant of other views, and become one with the world. These
realizations are ordered such that one starts by understanding nature and through
toleration of others, one becomes a part of the balance that is nature. Appreciation runs
through each of these strands. As one appreciates the order that has been setup, one
realizes why it would not be wise to do harm to it and why one wants to become part of
it.

First, strive to understand means that one should look at the world around him as
an open book. By learning about how the world works, one admires the intricate webs
that exist to sustain life. Knowledge of the world can be obtained in many ways,
including rational inquiry, experience, and communication. Rational inquiry involves in
deepth, scientific study. Science is key to understanding nature. Through science, one
learns the multitudinous layers upon layers of complexity that have been built up. If one
seeks merely to understand as much about the world as he can, he is missing the picture.
One uncovers the details for personal satisfaction and the satisfaction of others. This
satisfaction is derived from a deep appreciation that one is on the path to truly
understanding how the balance is setup. As long as scientific inquiry does not disturb the
balance, the rewards of the action benefit all.

Next, experience with the knowledge of the world involves going out into the
world and becoming part of the web of life. If one experiences that different cultures can
look at life in different ways, one begins to appreciate the diversity of the human
condition. Also, if one sees subtle interactions that occur in the natural world, including
the harmony setup among the vast variety of species that inhabit the same areas, then one
will be imbued with an appreciation of the interconnectedness. Another source of
understanding is communication with those around you, which allows one to see varying
viewpoints, and thus achieves the same aims as experiencing different cultures. The attainment of knowledge about the external world brings with it an appreciation for balance. Thus, one is aware of the harmony that exists, or should exist. I say should exist, because right now, humanity as a whole does not understand that causing the extinction of species, deforestation, and other means by which the natural balance is altered will hurt us in the end. A human-controlled world is only useful to man if man can find a way to sustain it. But, sustenance of life is in the realm of balance among all living things. Perturbations in this balance, without remediation, only guides one away from the ultimate order. Since it is a wise idea to strive for understanding, it follows that ignorance does one no good. If one is not aware of the repercussions one has on the ultimate whole, then one cannot appreciate that other people and organisms have an equal right to be a part of the balance.

So you question whether the "lower" animals are part of the order, do you? I suppose it seems unlikely that animals are anything but respectful of their surroundings. The young fight with each other for mates, different species compete for the same resources, and the predators kill their prey. Thus, it might seem that such an order cannot be rationally and intentionally formed, because there are organisms involved that do not seem capable of realizing repercussions of actions. I would have once agreed with this, but I have come to realize that this order has evolved such that organisms, which have no fundamental understandings, have the balance imposed on them by the rest of the organisms. In nature, one finds that the wolf does not kill all the sheep, for if all the sheep are dead than the wolf has nothing to eat. The order makes it such that there are more sheep present than the wolves could ever eat, so this situation never occurs. But, if
there are too many sheep in an area, then the grass will surely be eaten. But, the order
makes it such that there is much more grass present than the sheep could ever eat. If the
numbers of any of these organisms change, then the numbers of the organisms which
they depend on and the numbers of the organisms which depend on them must also be
altered. The balance is not an external imposition of order, the order and harmony are
derived from interactions among every strand of the web.

The next revelation I had was that one should strive to be tolerant. This ties in
with the idea of harmony, which is necessary for a balance to exist. For, if one is tolerant
of those around him, then one will be in harmony with everyone. It is much harder for
"lower" animals to be non harmonious with the rest of the organisms, because the order
places constraints on these animals. But, humans are special in the fact that our problem-
solving skills have conferred upon us an ability to change the natural order. But, we do
not understand the web well enough to realize what the true implications of our decisions
are, we only know that we can change the world. This natural order can be duly
interfered by intolerance of humans. This idea of tolerance is a natural progression from
the attainment of knowledge. As one learns more about the world and the diversity that
comprises it, one begins to appreciate it, thus he is much less likely to harm or disrupt a
portion of the balance.

Intolerance, resulting from imbalance within, in humans leads to such social
wrongs, which causes an imbalance on the whole. Social wrongs include inequality,
disrespect, and violence. For a group of people to setup an order such that inequality is
built into the system against another group, harms both groups. The balance is setup in
such a way that the maximal and most diverse members of the population are available to
exist and reproduce. Thus, if one group harms another group, it works such that the whole is negatively affected, because one group is suffering, thus the maximal conditions for balance have not been met. Also, inequality runs in direct opposition to harmony. As inequality reduces harmony among humans, the balance is therefore put in a state of imbalance.

Disrespect is another societal ill. Not appreciating what the value one member of the web of life can have has deleterious effects on the whole. When one is disrespected, one harbors resentment for the wrongs that one has been dealt. The disrespected, put at an imbalance, causes further imbalances in the ultimate order. Thus local changes in the balance could have global effects. One must also realize that violence usually disturbs the balance, for committing an act of violence negatively affects the person harmed. Having an act of violence committed against the person harmed might cause him to commit acts of violence in retaliation, or other negative effects, which cause an imbalance in the whole.

But, there are cases where violence might be justified. One such case occurs when one commits a violent act against a person who commits harmful deeds to others. The small perturbation in the balance due to the act of violence against the offender could possibly balance out the reduction in the perturbations to the balance which the offender is creating. But, the outcome is still uncertain, as the intricacies of interactions among the web are not fully understood, and may never be fully understood. Thus, violence against the violent could have potential benefit, but the likelihood is uncertain at best. Another case of violence involves the sacrifice of animals and plants as food. Removing animals from the web has an effect on the balance, because the animals were food for animals and
fed upon other organisms. But, as humans should be part of the balance, it makes sense that we should be subject to the constraints placed upon other organisms. Our population should never get to a level where we can devour more animals than we can eat, because those organisms affect the populations of other organisms. If humans consume only enough organisms as is necessary for survival, we are not destroying the balance because we would be a part of the order. But, as soon as humans become too numerous or become wasteful, we begin to disrupt the natural order. One might argue that humans do not effect the balance because the organisms that we consume are raised on farms, not in the ecosystems described. But, these animals are still indirectly affecting the natural order because in order to raise the organisms, we must feed them, water them, and use physical space that once was part of the ecosystem. Each of these conditions require disruption in the balance. Is violence among animals justified? This violence is justified because if the animals did not hunt other animals or eat plants, then the diversity of wild life would be substantially reduced as bacteria and plants would be the only organisms left. Diversity increases complexity of the balance, which is beneficial because the same sized disruption in small and large webs would cause a much greater perturbation in the small web. Thus, diversity and predation are necessary to create large webs and thus a stable, intricate balance.

The final revelation I had was that of becoming one with nature. The other revelations led up to this one. Understanding of the balance makes one appreciate the balance, and thus makes one tolerant of other members of the web. If one accepts that he is part of the web, he will then realize that he is part of nature, and thus must abide by the constraints of the web. Becoming part of nature means limiting human expansion and
colonialism, in order for the maximally diverse and intricate web to be formed.

Minimizing human perturbation of the balance helps maintain the state of the balance, which is the most optimum arrangement of organisms in our current environment.

If one asks why they should strive to be part of the balance, I can only respond by insisting that being in balance is the natural and only way to live. If one is at imbalance within oneself, one causes further imbalances in those around him. One might argue that he is perfectly happy contenting about himself and does not need to care for or understand those around him. But, every action and deed, which causes imbalance in oneself and others pushes one away from the ultimate order. After one grows old and dies, one might think that he leaves the balance. This could not be farther from the truth. The seeking of balance is the ultimate truth, leading for one to strive to become part of the order. The balance that one has achieved reflects how easily one can enter into nature and become life itself. As balance both sustains life and is composed of life, the embodiment of life that one achieves based on how balanced one is with the world affects how easily one can become the balance. The more imbalanced one is with the world, the longer it takes one to become the balance. How does one transition from being imbalanced to becoming the balance? The fundamental order slowly corrects the perturbations one has caused. As the perturbations in the whole settle down, the perturbations in one’s own balance are lessened. Thus, the web allows one to become the balance. What does one do while one waits to become the balance? He does nothing different than one who is in balance with the world. The imbalanced one just does not sustain life and become life to the degree that the more balanced one embodies life. Can one experience this imbalance after one dies? It depends on what one means by
experience. By being imbalanced, one is not truly part of the whole. Since the purpose of life is to maintain and become part of the balance, the imbalanced one does not experience the whole.

Several implications of abiding by the constraints of the balance are placed upon human society. Vices such as greed and selfishness sets one at an imbalance from the rest of the world, as one is focusing primarily on one’s own actions without regards for what effects could occur. Greed and selfishness occur because one is ignorant of the consequences. The ignorance breeds self-centeredness, which opposes harmony of the fundamental order. Also, societal ills such as hypocrisy and untruth should be eliminated. If one commits hypocrisy, it tends to make others resentful of one’s inconsistencies, which results in the affected members of the balance being put in a state of imbalance by the resentment they harbor, which could have further cumulative effects. Imbalances of members of the web would have an effect of imbalancing effect on the whole, which is not desirable. Other societal ills such as hatred and contempt would also imbalance the whole, as these acts would also cause affected members to harbor resentment, thereby causing imbalances.

Ways of living that are normally thought of as being "good" correspond to acts which keep the balance. Examples of "good" behaviors are humility, self-confidence, forgiveness, cooperation, and compassion. Humility does not disturb the balance. When one does not flaunt his actions, others will not harbor resentment or be imbalanced in any other way, thus there would be no way for imbalances to be spread to the ultimate order. One might argue that not drawing attention to one’s self might imbalance the whole, because you would be causing harm to yourself, because you do not feel that you
received the attention that you deserved. This is where having the feeling of self-confidence helps. If one is negatively affected by one’s insecurities, an imbalance in one’s self will perpetuate into a disturbance in the balance. If one has self-confidence, he does not need approval from others to have a sense of fulfillment. Therefore, one would not become imbalanced if one stayed humble. Another attribute to attain is forgiveness. Forgiveness is a way to minimize an imbalance in oneself, caused by another. This act of forgiveness also ameliorates the imbalance which the offender caused. Thus, forgiveness tends to minimize the disturbance to the balance. But, this does not mean that one should passively allow oneself to be attacked. For the violence inflicted upon you, imbalances both you and the offender as the attack continues. This imbalance within yourself will further cause you to be more resentful of the attacker. The key to removing the imbalances created by the attack is stopping the attack before it happens. But, once the attack starts, the best course of action is to defend oneself only to the point that the attack ceases and both can begin to move in the direction of balance. Cooperation and compassion are both ways by which both the person you are influencing and youself are put more into a state of balance, as one feels self-worth of accomplishment and doing helpful deeds, and the person one is helping is moved closer to the direction of balance.

As has been revealed, traditionally bad deeds tend to result in imbalance while traditionally good deeds lead to balance. This balance is met by understanding, tolerance, and striving to be a part of the system. For, if one is in balance within himself and with the people and environment around him, he will eventually become life itself.
Praxedis Flores III and Abraham Thomas
21A.213

The Gospel of Praxedis Flores III

It had been unseasonably cool that mid-June morning as they rushed to the hospital, and Praxedis nervously lit a cigarette, thought, and then snuffed it out after remembering his little daughter in the passenger seat and his wife, quietly suffering the pains of labor in the back seat. He was rushing to a city over an hour away to have his son born by the doctor who had attended to Ana all along. They had been through this before, but the faint smell of sweat in the air, mixed with the aroma of cut grass wafting in through the open windows had a strange effect, making both parents think of the order of nature and life. They had been so cautious and loving for the past nine months to bring another child into this world.

After checking in and making his way to the drowsy doctor that had been calmly asleep when he received the call to come to the hospital, Praxedis did not have to wait long for the contractions to shorten and for his wife to begin giving birth. Three hours later, a father sighed and looked in his wife’s tired and tear-filled eyes. The long wait was over, and a beautiful baby boy, named after his father, had been born.

The parents cared for their newest child with just as much love and attention as their first, but with a little more knowledge and fewer missteps. Praxeditos, as Praxedis and Ana affectionately called him, had been born of average size, but had grown quickly, and was expected to crawl very soon. Things were peaceful as the Texas summer winded down, and Praxedis was very busy with his new job as a State Trooper. He had been away for 4 months for training just before Ana gave birth, and was trying to make up for lost time by immersing himself in family life. Ana had stopped working almost a year
ago, so gave her every minute to attending to the needs of Praxeditos and his three year old sister Vanessa. Things were good.

Darn! Why can’t my parents understand me? I’m trying so hard to speak to them… Oh well, it makes me happy to hear them laugh and see them smile with joy every time mumble or crawl or even laugh. I wonder why that is? And why is that little girl so nice to me? Seems to me like she is just trying to copy my mommy, and she is a lot better than I am. I can’t even get them to understand me. Why am I trying so hard to get them to understand me? What do I have that is so important to say? Maybe I want them to know that I appreciate them taking care of me… And what does that word love mean? It seems to coincide with them being happy…

Finally, I can almost say complete thoughts and have everyone understand. They get so silly whenever I do something new. A couple of weeks ago, when I finally quit busting my bum and actually took a couple of steps, they looked like they were going to smile too large for their face. It made me feel good to see them like that, so I’m going to keep trying to do things that have that reaction. I feel like it’s my job.

Time. It’s a neat thing. I just turned two, and I my parents had a party for me. I have a little brother now. His name is Juan and it seems like only my mom and I understand him. He was sick for a while, and my parents were very frightened. I told them everything would be okay, probably because I didn’t want them to be so sad. He just got to the starting-to-speak stage. My parents keep telling me that it is my job to take care of him, even though I get mad that he gets all the attention. But my parents keep telling me that they love me and love him and love my sister and love each other. Maybe love is more than just being happy; it’s a responsibility too.
I start school next week. I’ve heard so much about it from my older sister. We just moved into this new town named Uvalde. I have only seen a little bit of it, but it is really pretty. I haven’t met any of the kids around here, and I have been spending most of my time playing outside with Juan. We got in a fight last week. My mommy said we shouldn’t get in fights, but I was just so mad at him. She said we should love each other instead of fighting. Not that I disagree with her, because if another kid tried to hit him, I would beat him up. My mommy said we have to defend each other. Maybe that’s what love is too.

I just got in my first fight at school. It’s almost Christmas time in Kindergarten and this other boy pushed this friend of mine. I didn’t think it was very nice, and I felt bad when I saw the other boy picking on him. When I told my parents I had gotten in a fight, they told me they were disappointed, but then the mother of the boy I defended called and wanted to thank me for helping her son. My parents weren’t so mad after that. They said that it was okay to help defend other people, but only fight if I have to. They said they forgave me for acting up in school, and told me to make sure the reason I got in a fight was a good one. Maybe forgiveness is part of love too. I love my family.

We went to my grandparents earlier today. My mommy was the maddest at me today that she has ever been. I had been outside playing catch with my father when it started to rain. I wanted to stay outside and play with my new friend next door, but my father said that I should go back inside and he would tell my friend that I couldn’t come out and play. I was so mad; I thought it was unfair. Right after I slammed the door to my grandparents’ house, I muttered, “Stupid Dad.” My mother heard me and spanked me.
She never spanks me! I guess I just really got under her skin because she told me never to say that again and didn’t talk to me for almost an hour.

When she saw that I was sulking in the living room, she came and sat down next to me, apologizing for losing her temper and told me she wanted me to not only respect the people in my family, but other people too. She sat down next to me, and told me this story: “When I was younger, I worked as a waitress in this little restaurant down the street. A lot of the people that came in were regulars, and they liked to drink a lot and play darts. One day a blind man walked in and sat down. I took his order, and while I was relaying the order to the cook, many of the drunken men came over to the table and started harassing the blind man. They decided it would be amusing to poke fun at him and challenge him to a game of darts, and the blind man was scared of what they would do if he didn’t accept, so he did. Of course he did not do very well, and when he went back to take his seat, they jeered at him from across the room.

“It just so happened that right then an amazingly beautiful woman walked into the room, and passed by the jeering men, instantly attracting their attention. She instantly had control over the men, and they fell in love with her. She continued to walk over to the other side of the restaurant… to sit with her father, the blind man. Her father told her of how the men had treated him, and the young lady was so appalled that she would not even speak to the men that came up to her and made fun of their slovenly appearance. All the men left heartbroken at not having the chance to speak to the woman of their dreams.” My mother then told me that I had to treat others the way I would like to be treated, and I could make my life and many others’ life much better if I always remembered that.
I just turned twelve. It is the summer before junior high and I can feel the excitement building. I am going to start playing tennis next year. There was always something about that sport that I liked… maybe all the girls running around in skirts. My mom tells me that it’s okay to like girls at my age, but she won’t let me go out with anyone until I am sixteen. I just found out my uncle is homosexual. I don’t really know what to say or think, if I should feel funny the next time he gives me a hug after not seeing him for a few months… I still love him, but for some reason it would feel funny to tell him that now. I’ve talked to my mom about it, and she wants me to treat him like I always have, but it’s so hard when all the kids at school would make fun of me if they knew I had a homosexual uncle. My mommy tells me that I should be tolerant of other people, and that I should let love for fellow man rule over all these pressures I am feeling from my immediate peers.

My father has a little different take on it. He is not so happy about my uncle being homosexual, and sometimes I think he is worried that if he comes over, it might rub off or something. I think my dad is wrong, and I know that he acts differently than what he says. One of the best defenses I heard for being tolerant was one of my father’s own stories, though it had to do with race. My father worked in Houston and lived with my mother in a trailer home while she was pregnant with Vanessa and got breakfast for her every morning before going to work. He did not want to leave her alone though, especially when it was getting close to her due date, so he had a black co-worker stay with my mom for twenty minutes while he went and bought breakfast. Living in Houston, where the black population is high and so is crime, I think her inexperience with black people and the news made her a bit fearful of them. She told me that after
talking to him for a few days, her fears diminished, and she realized she had met one of the politest people in her life. I had learned from that story that different didn’t mean bad, and I figured that this was the case with my uncle too.

I am sixteen now, and I am about to leave home for school, and I will be living 8 hours drive away from them. My family has now extended to five children: Vanessa, myself, Juan, Ruben and Gustavo. I am forced to reflect upon the past five or six years, ever since I really started to think on my own, and come to terms with what I have learned at home before going off in the world on my own. Love. Love is definitely the most important thing. I would do anything for anyone in my family, and now I am going to leave them. I wonder how much I will miss them, and whether I will try to find something to fill the void. I have learned that my love for my family is both selfless and selfish. It feels good to be loved, and it feels good to love others, and I can’t imagine anyone being as important to me as they are. The big lesson my father has been trying to teach me lately is personal growth and finding individuality without forsaking my values and ideals. This next year will be a great time to start.

I am done with my junior year at the academy, and there have been quite a few times where I felt I was on my own, and it was my responsibility to make the right or wrong choice. I had begun to question my faith... myself, rather. I was seen as a “good” person because of the things I did, like listening to others’ problems, community service, and going to church. But is it the church’s imposition of a communal idea of what is right and wrong that makes me do it, or is it of my own free will? I have decided to stop attending church. I want to know if I am still happy with the kind of person I am without the constant influence and pressure of a church and a community of people who judge
others, and if I do what I do out of fear of being ostracized. I want to be a good person without constant reinforcement.

I am a few months into my senior year and have not gone to church in almost a year. My father does not like that I do so much community service. In spite of his objections I continue to do it because it makes me feel useful. So it’s not the church that pressured me into doing things that benefited others if it wasn’t what I really wanted to do. Then what was it that caused me to think like this? It was my father, the very person who was concerned that I do things dangerous to myself to help others. At the time, the big thing for me was Habitat for Humanity, and I had no problem helping with the more dangerous things and actually hurt myself quite a bit. So why did I keep doing it?

My father once told me a story that occurred a few months after my sister was born. My father was still working in Houston at a gas station, but my mother had gone back to live with my grandparents, about an 8 hour drive away. It was the day before Christmas Eve and my father was about to close station and make the long drive home to spend with his new family when an elderly man pulled in with a huge trailer and asked if he could use the water and gas hookups for his trailer. My father waited to leave until he had helped him hook up to the lines and made sure he was alright.

After Christmas, my father went back to Houston to keep working at the gas station and the elderly man he had helped before Christmas was now a regular customer, and my father and him became good friends. My father told his new friend of his plight: his wife was 400 miles away, there were no jobs closer to home, and he was barely making enough money to support his family. His friend invited him over for dinner to meet his family. My father owned a truck at the time and slept in the gas station when it
was closed, so he decided to go to his friend’s house to eat for a change. When my father got there, he saw that they were cooking on three electric skillets for the man and his wife, their three son’s, two of their wives, and four or five grandchildren. My father’s friend offered him the trailer that he had used before, but my father felt guilty and a little ashamed that he had been sharing his hard times with his friend when his friend’s living conditions were just as financially tight as is own, so he refused. While dinner was still going on, two of the sons went outside and hitched the trailer to my father’s truck. When my father saw, he asked his friend to help him take it off, but the man forbade any of his sons to help him and told my father to take the trailer, that he needed it more.

After a few more weeks my father finally decided to leave Houston and try his luck again back home; he missed his family and hated working at the gas station. Again, his friend offered him a job installing garage door openers with him, and even though my father had no experience, he decided to try it. Between my father, his friend, and one of his sons, they installed a few garage door openers that week, but my father hadn’t been much help since he did not know the work, and decided to leave after just a few days. His friend asked him to come back before he left for one more dinner. While my father was there, his friend gave him a check for 300 dollars, 1/3 of the earnings for that week, which my father had only worked three days of. The man would not take the check back, and told him that if he was too proud to take it for himself, to take it for his little girl. My father is a proud man, but he needed help, and he wasn’t going to ask for it, and only took it grudgingly. I am sure that story affected me more than anything else I had heard in church, and I am going to keep helping people. I think it was this selfless act of love for
other people and the idea of helping people who are less fortunate that I was emulating, because it felt right.

I am nineteen now, and halfway through my sophomore year at MIT. I am definitely in love. I don’t just love someone else; I am in love. I feel as if this is the pinnacle of all the types of love I have felt before, and Melissa is helping me refine myself. It is so amazing to share your happiest moments with this kind of person that I hope everyone finds his one true love. Everything just seems so perfect that I can’t imagine there being more than one person that fits that way with me. I am already thinking of marriage and we have only been going out for four months. It is a wonderful whirlwind, and everyone should experience it.

It is the spring of my sophomore year. I just got back from Christmas break and I feel torn up inside. I had a huge fight with Juan, and I don’t think things will ever be the same. Of all things, it was my yelling at my mother that started it. I never yell at her. How could I do that to her? We got in an argument over my grandparents. They never really liked my father, and I had visited them earlier in the day and they had said mean things of my father. I was defending him now against my mother, who had berated my father for not going with Juan and I to visit them. I couldn’t believe that she expected my father to be so tolerant of her parents when they obviously did not like him. She got defensive and no longer wanted to listen to me, so I yelled and cussed at her. She started to cry and Juan and I got in a fight. We have to forgive each other…

It is a month into the spring semester of my sophomore year and I just found out that my mother had cancer of the uterus. She will go into surgery soon, and it is hard to deal with. I don’t talk about it with anyone because I don’t want anyone to feel pity for
me. I don’t even know what to think; I have never had to think about the possibility of 
the death of someone so close to me. It was easy enough to just accept the idea of a 
heaven, but how did I know when I had not even really inspected myself. So I searched 
for the answer that best suited what I felt. And I talked to people, because maybe they 
knew something I didn’t.

I cannot believe that my God sends people to hell. I believe that no matter who 
you are or what you did, God has enough forgiveness to go around. At the moment of 
death, you are shown the truth by God, behind everything you wanted to know, and you 
can choose to accept the truth and him as your God, or not. No one has ever or will ever 
choose against that truth.

I am twenty now and it is the end of my junior year. I have been taking this 
Religion & Science class and I am writing a paper on divine inspiration. After 
questioning what divine inspiration is, I thought that I have been divinely inspired to 
outline some of the ideals that I believe in to share with others through a story. But that 
story is a little complicated, so to sum up, I believe:

1. Love is the most important thing, and if everyone remembers that, life would be much 
better.
2. You should be tolerant of people’s differences and not judge them.
3. Forgive people.
4. Personal growth is what God is interested in. Be happy being you.
5. Help others less fortunate than you. It just makes you feel good.
6. Everyone goes to heaven, so make your peace on earth because you will be seeing 
everyone again.