

FINITUDE, ETERNITY, LOVE, THE GOOD & MARTIN HÄGGLUND'S *THIS LIFE*

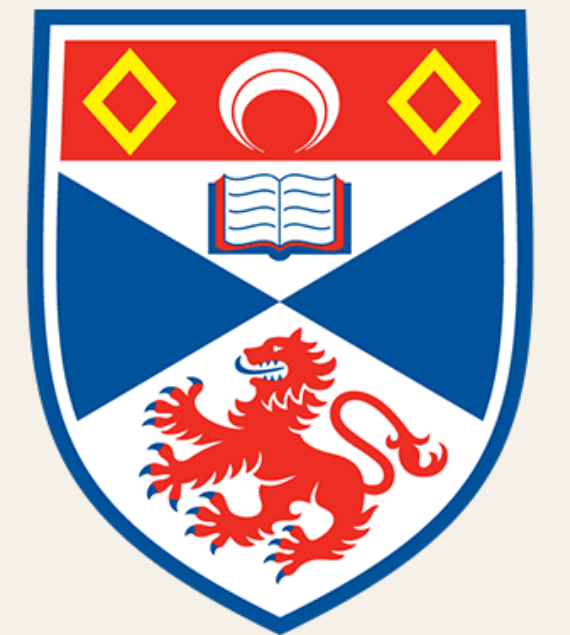
British Society for the Philosophy of Religion Conference · Oxford · September 2023

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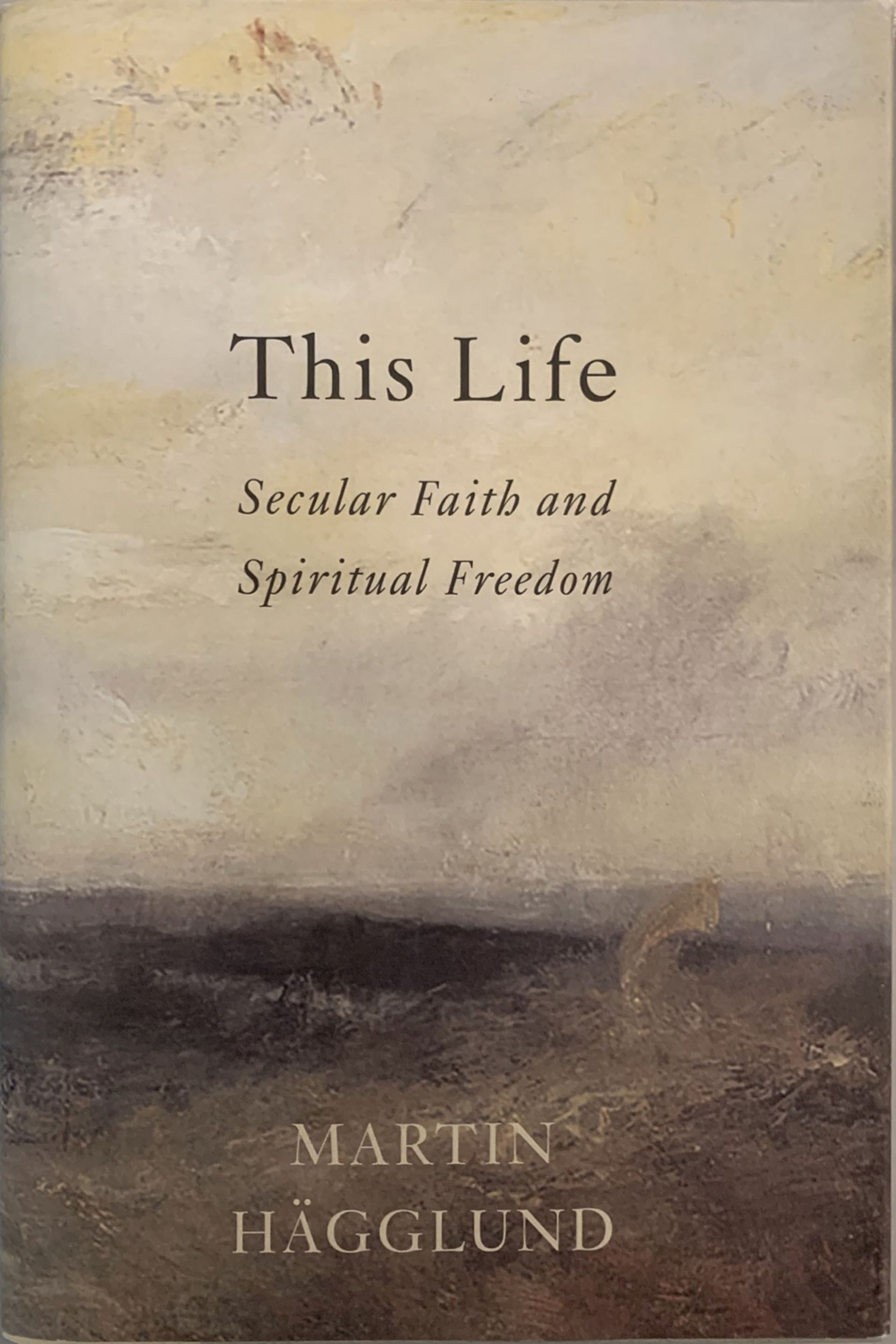
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The book cover features a textured, painterly background with a horizontal division. The upper portion is a light, warm yellowish-tan, while the lower portion is a dark, earthy brown. The text is centered and rendered in a classic serif typeface.

This Life

*Secular Faith and
Spiritual Freedom*

MARTIN
HÄGGLUND



1. THIS LIFE: SECULAR FAITH & SPIRITUAL FREEDOM
2. HÄGGLUND'S CRITIQUE/ANALYSIS OF MLK
3. LOVE, THE LOVER & THE BELOVED
4. FACETS OF DEPENDENCE & INDEPENDENCE

***This Life: Secular Faith
& Spiritual Freedom***

To be **finite** means primarily two things:

to be dependent on others,
and to live in relation to death.

I am finite because

I cannot maintain my life on my own,
and because I will die.

Likewise, the projects to which I am devoted are finite
because they live only through the efforts of those who are
committed to them
and will cease to be if they are abandoned. [TL, p. 4]

The sense of finitude—the sense of the ultimate fragility of everything we care about—is at the heart of what I call **secular faith**.

To have secular faith is to be devoted to a life that will end, to be dedicated to projects that can fail or break down.

[p. 5, 6]

I call it secular faith because it is devoted to a form of life that is bounded by time. In accordance with the meaning of the Latin word *saecularis*, to have secular faith is to be dedicated to persons or projects that are worldly and temporal.

Secular faith is the form of faith that we all sustain in caring for someone or something that is vulnerable to loss. [p. 6]

In contrast, the common denominator for what I call *religious forms of faith* is a devaluation of our finite lives as a lower form of being.

All world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) hold that the highest form of existence or the most desirable form of life is eternal rather than finite.

To be religious—or to adopt a religious perspective on life—is to regard our finitude as a lack, an illusion, or a fallen state of being.

[p. 6]

When we own our secular faith, we acknowledge that the object of our faith—our spiritual cause—*is dependent on* our practice of faith.

The practice of faith is our practical identity (e.g., political activist) and the object of faith is our spiritual cause (e.g., our political cause). [p. 373]

[W]hat I call religious faith disowns our secular faith. Religious faith takes the object of faith to be a god [...] that is independent of our practice of faith.

Our spiritual cause is treated as though it were a being that commands and has power over us without being dependent on us. This is the type of faith that King espouses in his religious sermons.

[p. 373]

FINITUDE-AS-ILLUSION: There is no genuine loss or risk for those whose life is meaningful, since God (or a right relationship with reality, etc.) has secured your eternal destiny; the sufferings of this contingent world are of no real significance. They are, at most, are *illusions* to be transcended.

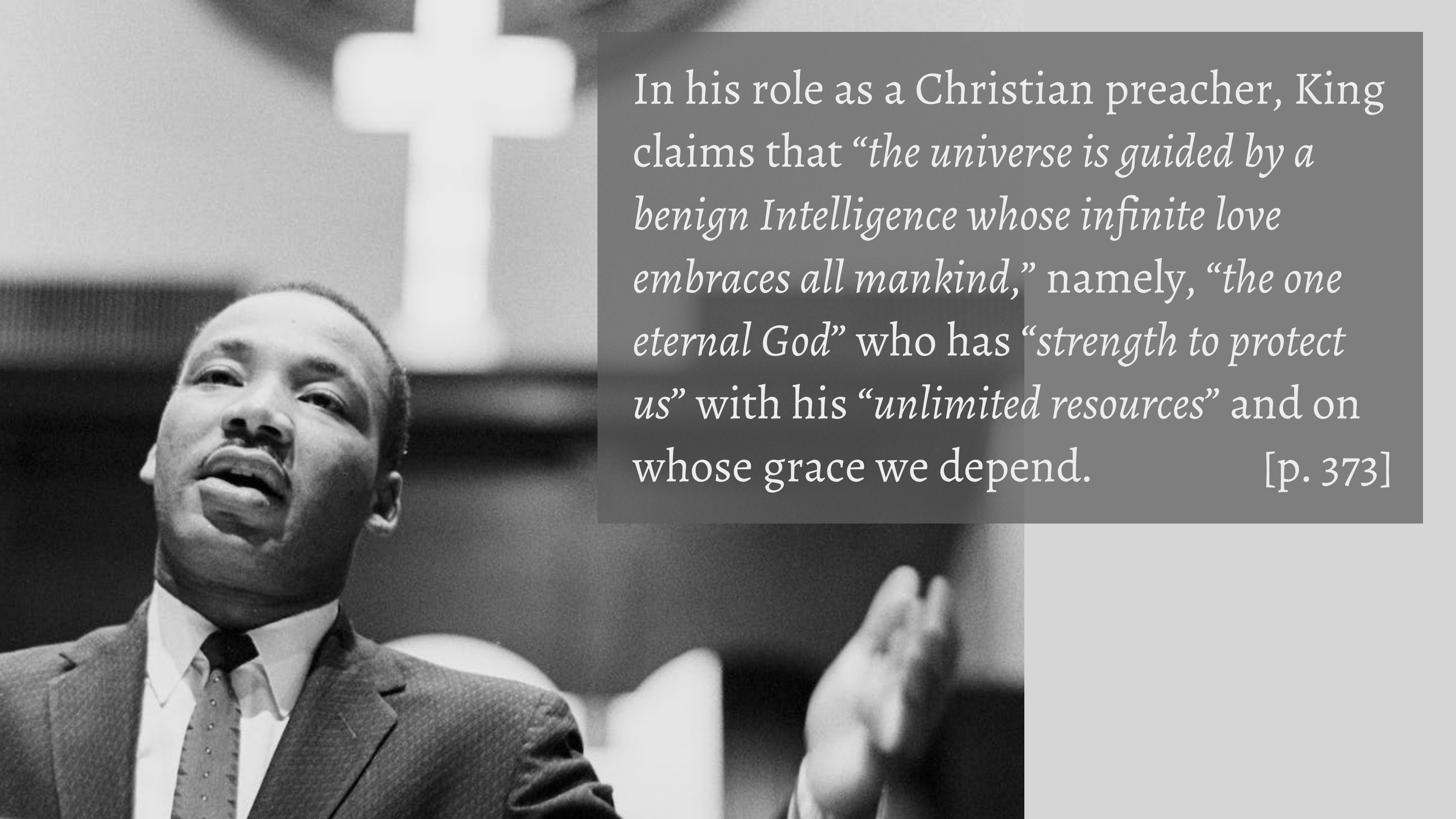
A finite life, on its own is *meaningless*. Life has meaning only if it is ongoing, or if this finite world is transcended.

FINITUDE-AS-INCLUSION: A finite life is *incomplete* on its own. A finite contingent life exists *inside* the infinite, and the contingencies of this world can only be properly understood in the enclosing context of the non-contingent.

Finite life involves genuine loss and risk, and this finite life has value, but this value can only be properly understood by way of its relationship to a non-contingent infinite other, which is in some sense beyond us.

Conclusion 1: FINITUDE-AS-ILLUSION and FINITUDE-AS-INCLUSION are two distinct ways in which the finitude of life can be understood in a religious orientation to the world.

Hägglund's
Critique/Analysis
of MLK



In his role as a Christian preacher, King claims that “*the universe is guided by a benign Intelligence whose infinite love embraces all mankind,*” namely, “*the one eternal God*” who has “*strength to protect us*” with his “*unlimited resources*” and on whose grace we depend. [p. 373]



[T]he supposed relation between God and our emancipation becomes incomprehensible. What we take to be evil and unjust can be part of God's "*plan*" or his unfathomable "*purposes*," which purportedly redeem what happens to us beyond anything we can understand.

Moreover, if God is beyond our comprehension, his notion of goodness and justice can be completely at odds with our own. As King avows in one of his religious sermons, "*I do not pretend to understand all of the ways of God or his particular timetable for grappling with evil.*" [p. 373, 374]

The command or the will of God only makes sense if we understand the term in a Hegelian way.

“God” is a name for the communal norms that we have legislated to ourselves and to which we hold ourselves.

When King invokes the will and the command of God in his political speeches, he is reminding us of what we are committed to in being committed to social freedom for all.

[p. 375]

Conclusion 2: The Hegelian reinterpretation of God-talk obscures the fallibility of our own commitments.

To take God to be incomprehensible does not mean we cannot speak truly of God.

Love, The Lover
& The Beloved

The Lover

The Beloved

*The Lover's Idea
of the Beloved*

The Thinker

The World

*The Thinker's
account of the World*

The Lover

The Beloved

*The Lover's Idea
of the Beloved*

Conclusion 3: There is a two-way relationship between our *conceptions* and their *targets*.

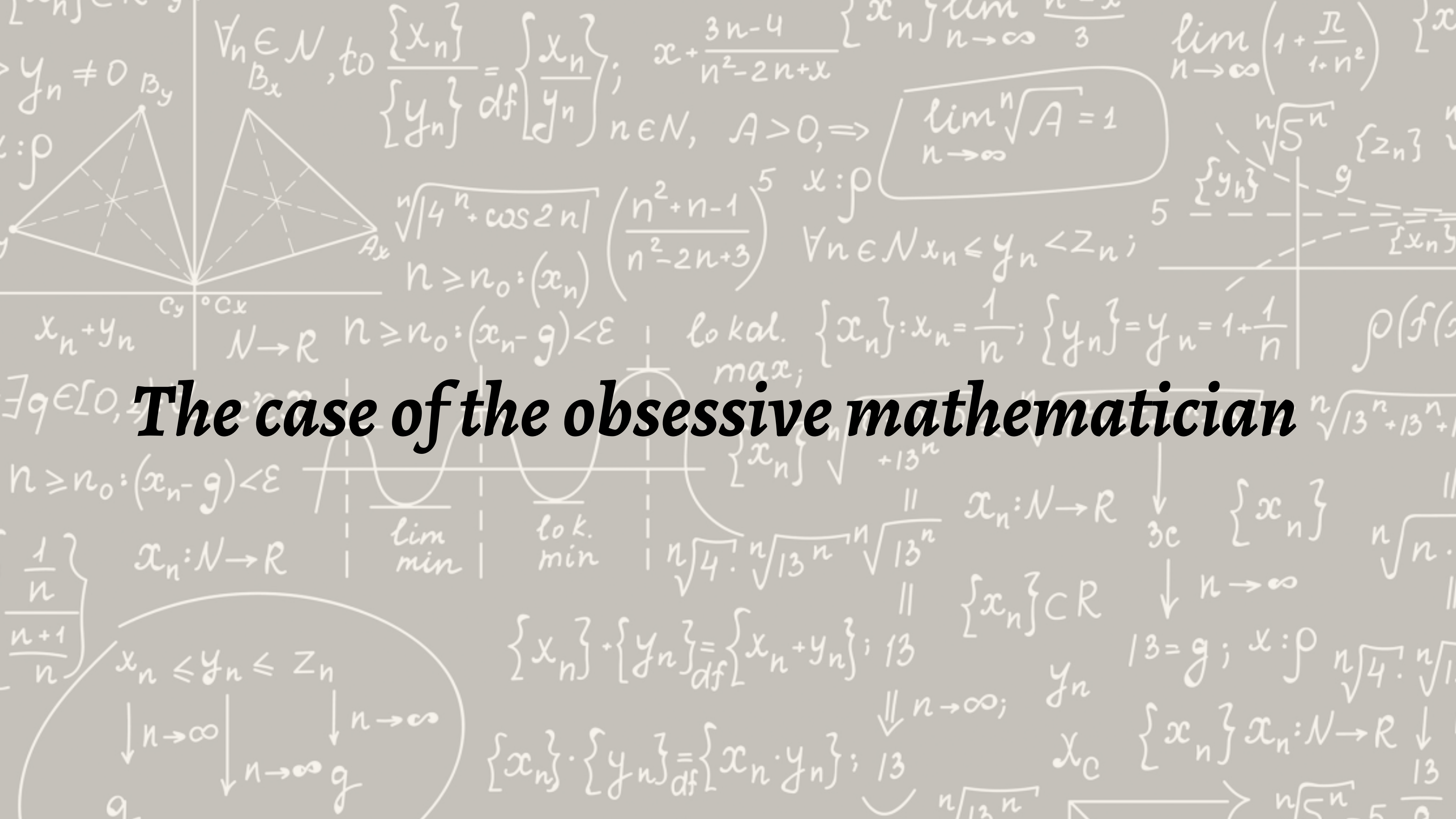
The beloved is (*ideally*) the source and norm of the idea of the beloved. The idea of the beloved *orients* the lover *toward* the beloved.

Facets of Dependence & Independence

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The practice of faith is our practical identity (e.g., political activist) and the object of faith is our spiritual cause (e.g., our political cause). [p. 373]

The case of the obsessive mathematician





“We’re going to win our freedom because both the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of the almighty God are embodied in our echoing demands. And so, however dark it is, however deep the angry feelings are, and however violent explosions are, I can still sing “We Shall Overcome.” We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution — preached at the National Cathedral, Washington D.C., 31 March, 1968.



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Conclusion 4: MH's secular faith is consistent with a religious commitment to a God upon whom we depend, but who does not depend upon us, and with a concomitant commitment to work towards finite social ends that have value in themselves.

Our finite, contingent lives have value, and the commitments we undertake can be sustained by faith in a God upon whom we depend.

Thank you!