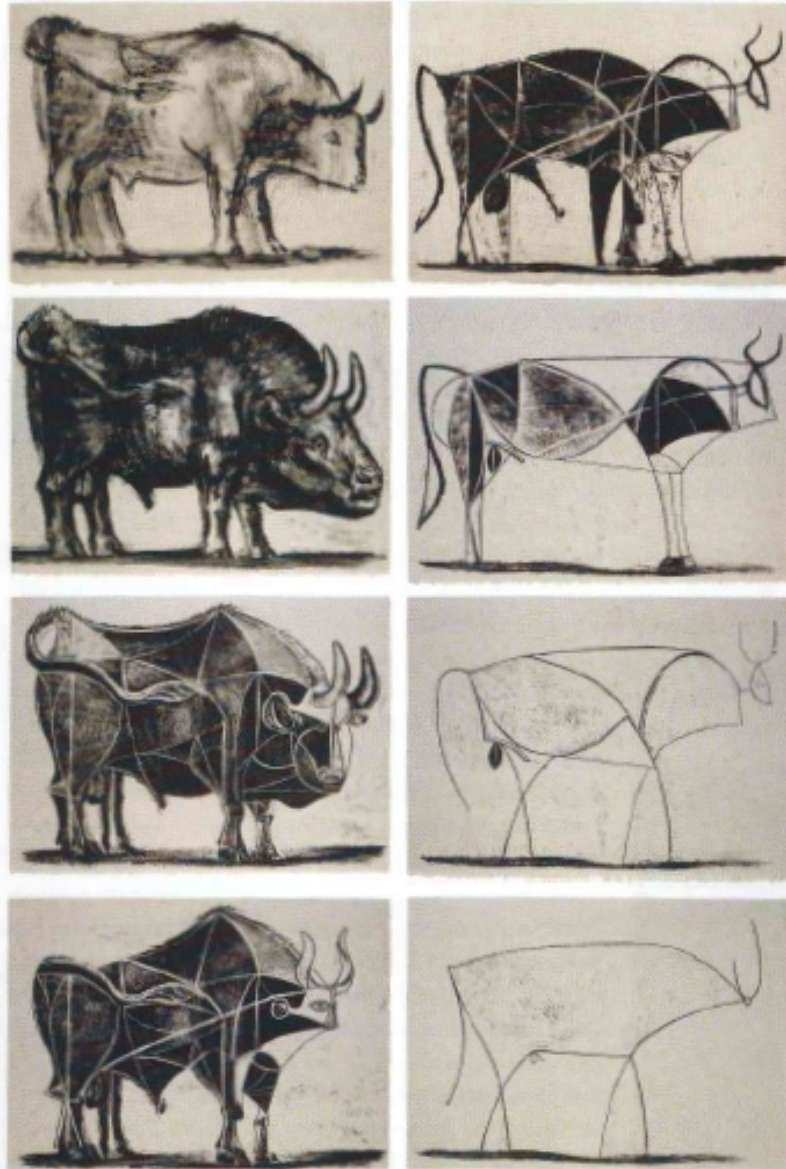


# Zero, One, Two, Three

## The Dimensions of Religious Thought

Paul Arveson

# The Abstraction of Religion



Picasso: Huit états du Taureau, 1945-1946.

Only one feature  
to be examined:

The dimensions of  
logic in religious  
thought.

A search for the  
simplest possible way  
to classify world  
religions.



A photograph of a forest path. The path is a narrow, dirt trail that winds through a dense forest. The trees are tall and thin, with some showing signs of decay or being dead. The ground is covered in green grass and small plants. The overall scene is a natural, somewhat somber forest setting.

## *The Tao*

- “The Chinese also speak of a great thing (the greatest thing) called the *Tao*. It is the reality beyond all predicates, the abyss that was before the Creator Himself. It is Nature, it is the Way, the Road....”

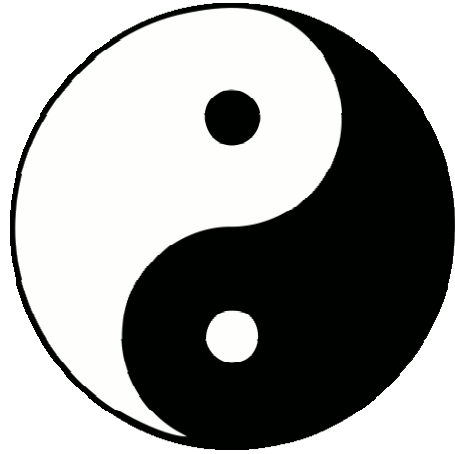
C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*



# The Laws of the Tao

- General Beneficence ~ to all mankind
- Special Beneficence ~ to kindred
- Duties to Parents, Elders, Ancestors
- Duties to Children and Posterity
- The Law of Justice
  - ~ Sexual Justice, Honesty, Courts
- Good Faith and Veracity
- The Law of Mercy
- Magnanimity, courage, sacrifice

# The Pre-Philosophical Ethic and Logic of the Tao



- There is a right way and a wrong way.
- There are distinctions.
- We must make a choice between them.
- Justice awaits in the background.

# Gautama Buddha's Innovation

c. 500 BC

- Observation:
  - Life is tragic: pain, illness, old age, death
    - Endless reincarnation (*Karma*)
  - There is no escape
  - Or is there?
- Root cause of the tragedy: desire or craving in ordinary existence (*samsara*)
  - Solution: eliminate the distinction between desire and no-desire
  - In fact eliminate all distinctions

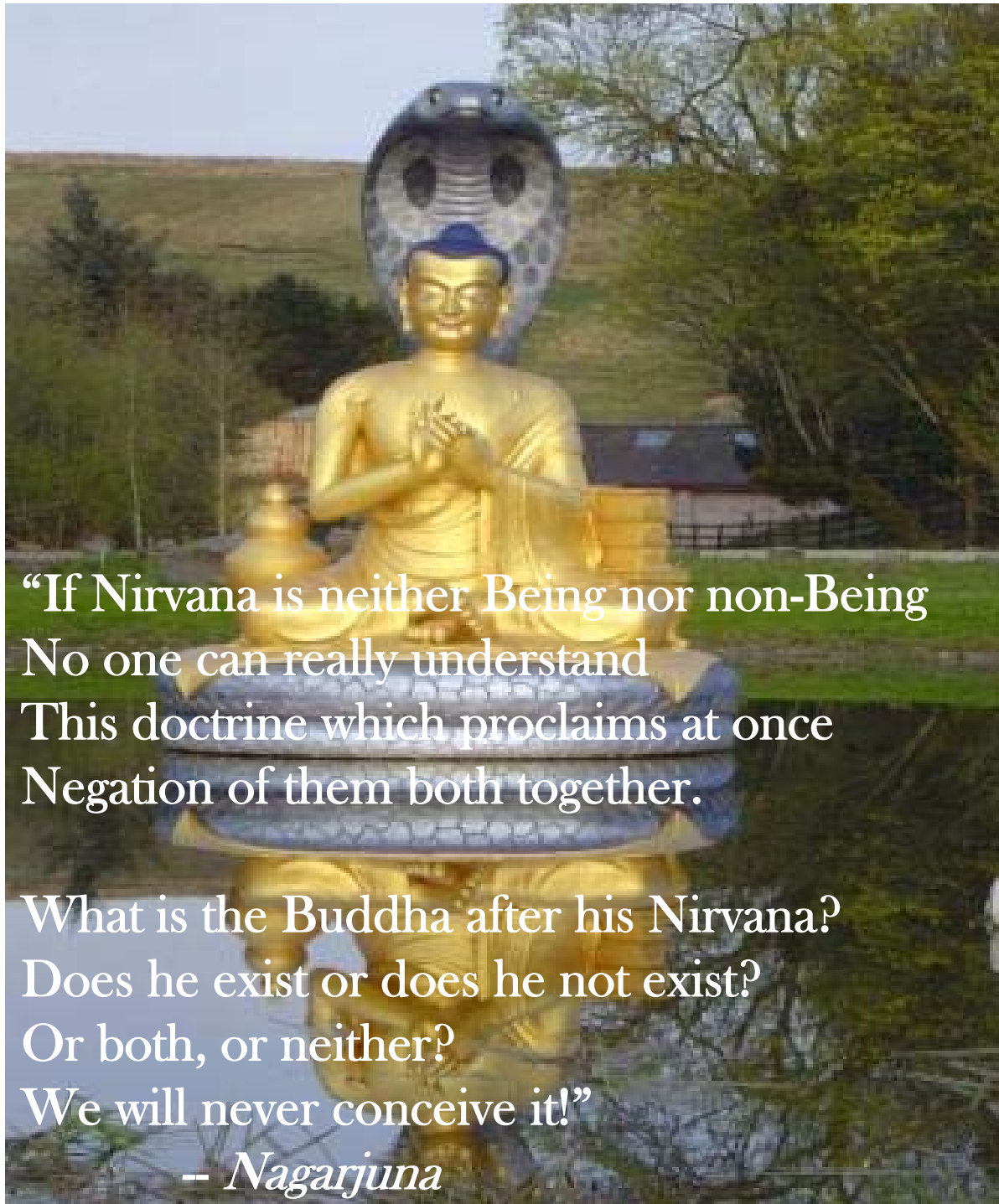
# Buddha's Astonishing Philosophical Move

- *Reduce the dimension of logic to Zero*
- No distinctions → no suffering
- Use words only as pointers beyond words:
  - “detachment, centering, compassion, emptiness, the void, gates of awakening, enlightenment, impermanence, inner longing, letting go, mindfulness, universal mind”
  - *Take a deep breath ...*

# Readings

- Theravada school
  - *The Nirvana of the Buddha*
- Mahayana school
  - Nagarjuna: *Examination of Causality*
  - Nagarjuna: *Examination of Nirvana*
- Zen school
  - Stories
  - Koans





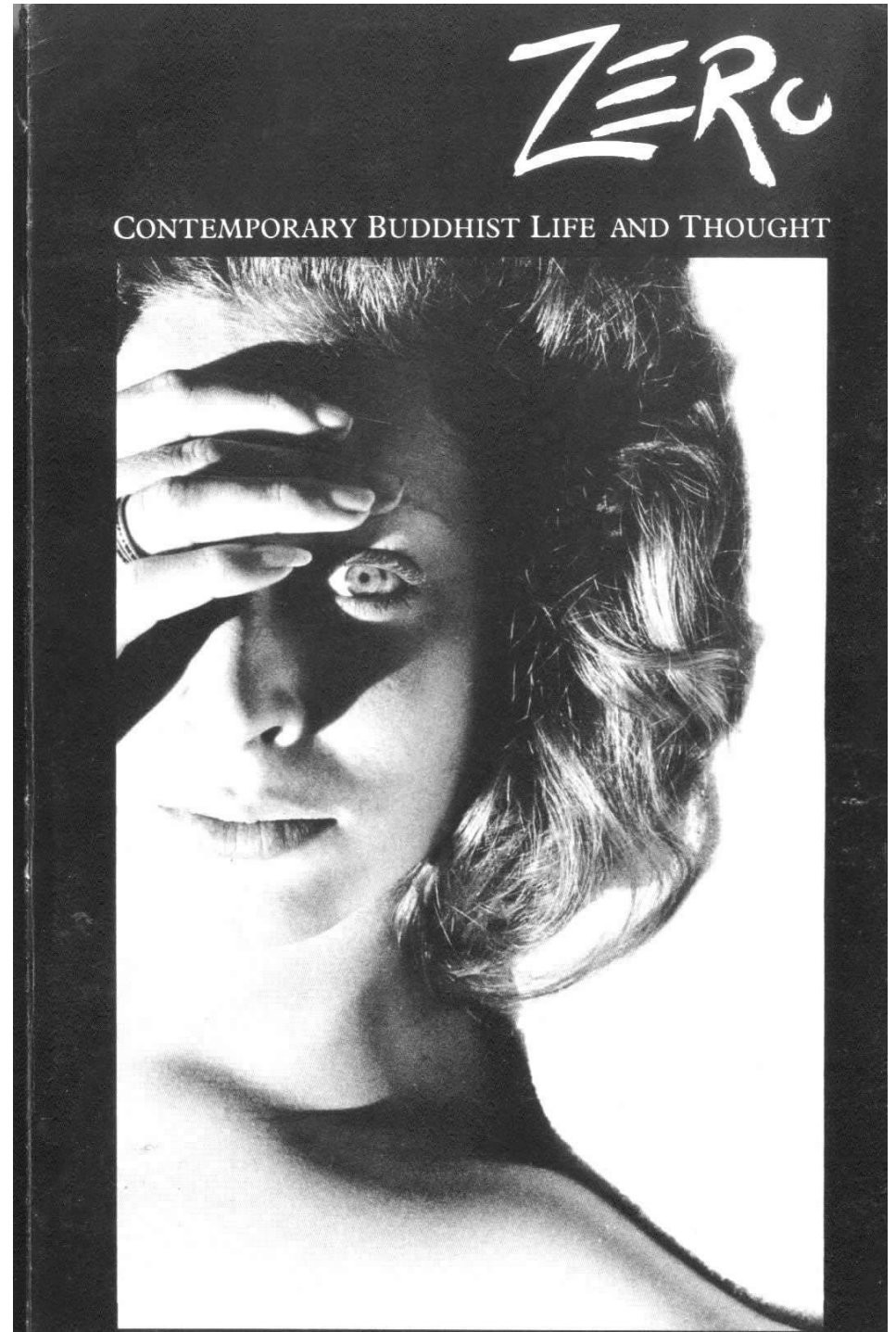
“If Nirvana is neither Being nor non-Being  
No one can really understand  
This doctrine which proclaims at once  
Negation of them both together.

What is the Buddha after his Nirvana?  
Does he exist or does he not exist?  
Or both, or neither?  
We will never conceive it!”

– *Nagarjuna*

# Zero-Dimensional Logic

- No antitheses (1-dimensional logic)
- No distinctions
- No parts
- No definitions
- No beliefs
- No arguments



# American Buddhist Authors

Religious authors also include:

- Thomas Merton
- Henri Nouwen
- Robert Wicks

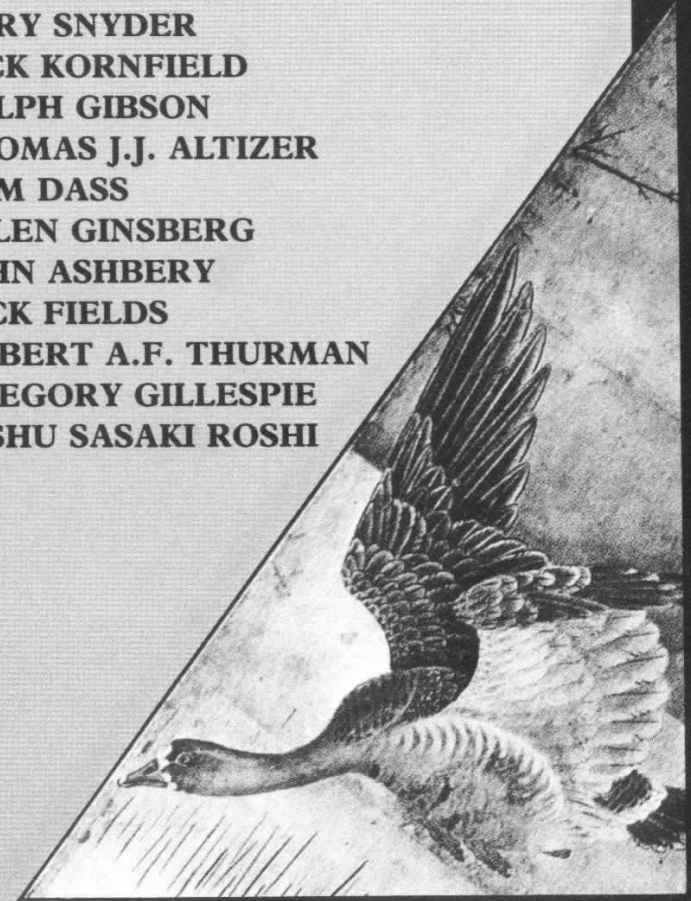
*“The Buddha preached for 49 years and in all that time found it not necessary to speak one word.”*

-- Ikkyu

*“Subtle understanding of glad emptiness of our lives  
American Earthly saves us from Apocalyptic pain,  
the ‘Suffering of Suffering,’ so a XXTH Century  
Literature of Dharma Bums and Ladies & Gentlemen  
rises in Capitals & Provinces, exemplified herein Zero.”*

—Allen Ginsberg

KENNETH REXROTH  
LEONARD COHEN  
GARY SNYDER  
JACK KORNFIELD  
RALPH GIBSON  
THOMAS J.J. ALTIZER  
RAM DASS  
ALLEN GINSBERG  
JOHN ASHBERRY  
RICK FIELDS  
ROBERT A.F. THURMAN  
GREGORY GILLESPIE  
JOSHU SASAKI ROSHI







# Philosophically Speaking: One-Dimensional Logic

- Propositional logic is based on antithesis, or pairs of opposites
- The Laws of Thought:
  - 1. Identity: A is A
    - Something cannot both be and not be at the same time, in the same way.
  - 2. Antithesis: A is not non-A
    - If something is A, it cannot be non-A at the same time.
  - 3. Excluded middle: A or  $\neg A$ ; there is no third alternative
    - Something is either A or not A.
- All philosophical assertions presuppose the laws of thought

# One-Dimensional Logic in Religion

- **Makes stark contrasts between opposites:**
  - **Law**
    - *Torah, Psalms, Talmud, Mishnah*
  - **Proverbs:**
    - Righteous / wicked
    - Wise / fool
    - Rich / poor
    - Cheerful / discouraged
    - Us / them







# From Islam

- “As for those that strictly observe the Scriptures and are steadfast in prayer, their reward shall not be lost.”
  - *The Heights, Qur'an*
- *Hadith* – records of Mohammed’s statements or judgments, as opposed to revelations in the *Qur-an*.
  - By a chain of narrators (*sanad*) of increasing distance from the Prophet.

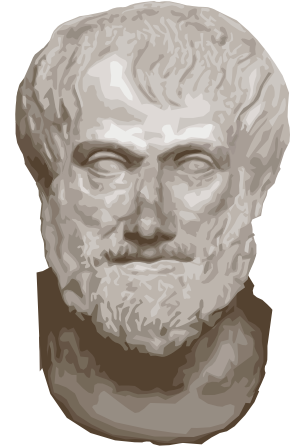
# Next Innovation: Two-Dimensional Logic

- Hints in the O.T.:
  - *Prov. 20:9* - "Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin.'"
  - *Eccl. 7:16-18* - "Do not be over-righteous, neither be over-wise; why destroy yourself?"
  - Do not be over-wicked, and do not be a fool; why die before your time?
  - It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes."
- Jesus: *Sermon on the Mount*:
  - If you seek to satisfy the law, your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees....
- St. Paul (*Romans 1-3*):
  - Religion that pursues legalistic perfection is futile
  - Grace and faith apart from the law





# Two-Dimensional Logic in Philosophy



- **Physical problems facing early Greek philosophers:**
  - The One and the Many, or Parts & Wholes
  - Being and Becoming
  - Causality
- **Aristotle: the innovation of 2-D Logic**
  - The *Synolon*, or composite

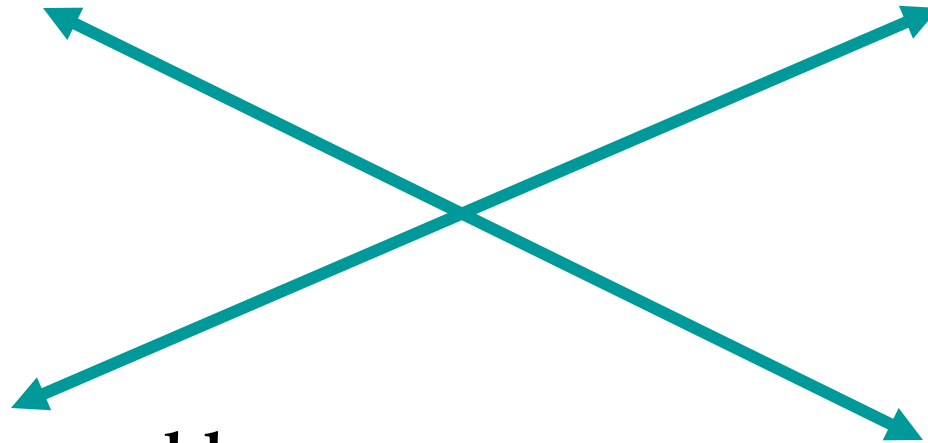
# An Example of 2-D Logic

• In the world

• Not of the world

• Of the world

• Not in the world



# An Example (2)

- *In the world:* Most Christians are called to live in and engage the world.

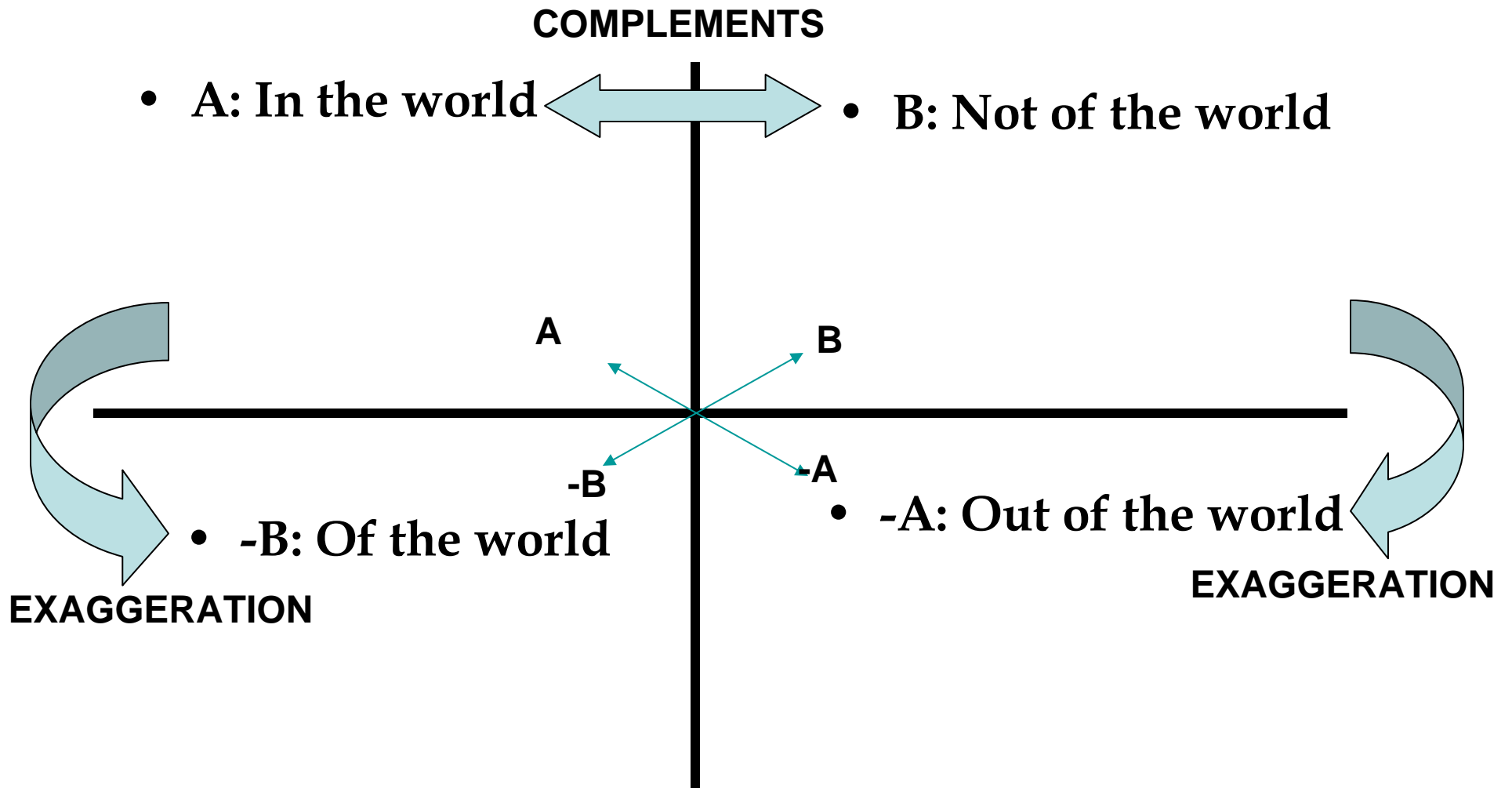
- *Not of the world:* We are to avoid and oppose the evil in the fallen world.

- *Of the world:* Distracted by the cares and pleasures of worldliness.

- *Out of the world:* We should come out of the world and be separate.



# Structure of 2-D Logic



# Transcendence & Immanence

- **A: God is transcendent. The Creator is distinct from the creature.**

- **B: God is immanent. God is present and active in all space and time.**

- **-B: God is “wholly other” and the universe is autonomous. Dualism, deism.**

- **-A: Universe is merely an extension or emanation from God: pantheism.**

# The Two Revelations of God

- **A: Nature is the general revelation that declares the glory of God.**

- **B: Scripture is the special revelation, which is verbal and shows the way of salvation.**

- **-B: Naturalism: all knowledge must come from nature alone.**

- **-A: All knowledge must be derived from Scripture alone: dogmatism, fideism.**

# Justice and Mercy of God

- **A: God is just: no sin can stand in the presence of a holy God.**

- **B: God is love: Christ paid the penalty for sin, so that in him we may be saved.**

- **-B: God's justice leads to wrath and condemnation of all without hope.**

- **-A: God's mercy is universal; God's justice can be compromised. "Cheap grace".**



# Three-Dimensional Logic

- Extends the 2-D logic of [A and B] to [A and B and C]
- Does not lend itself to presentation in books or flat screens
- More suitable for hypertext (HTML), in a “reduced” format of three 2-D pairs
- See details here:
- <http://www.christianmind.org/illus/ht>



# 3-D Logic Examples

- **3-D Logic has been found only in Christian theology**
  - **Doctrines based on Unity & Diversity & Equality**
    - Trinity
    - Christology (the Two Natures of Christ)
    - Church Structure
    - Marriage
  - **Doctrines based on Sovereignty & Creation & Providence**
    - Nature
    - Human Nature
    - Origin of Evil

# Summary

- Pre-Philosophical Background: *Tao*
- Zero: *Buddhism*
- One: *Judaism and Islam*
- Two: *Aristotle to St. Paul*
- Three: *Medieval to Reformed Christian Theology*