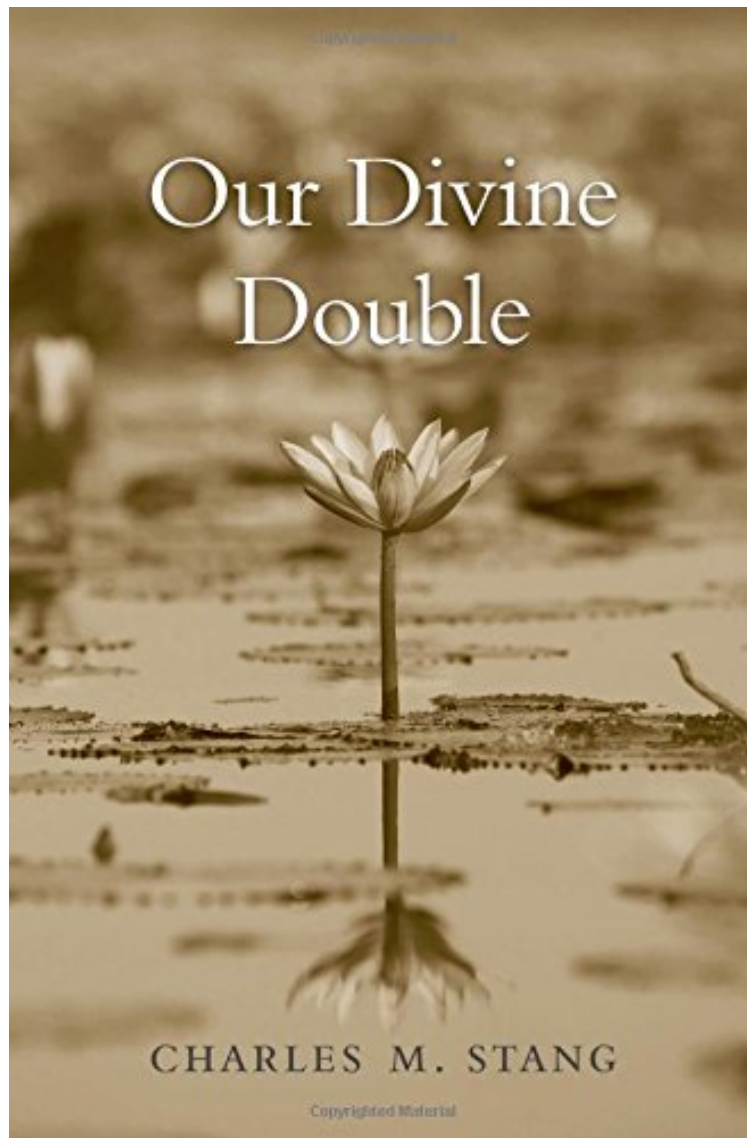


## Our Divine Double

*Charles M. Stang*

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**Charles M. Stang : Our Divine Double** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Our Divine Double:

What if you were to discover that you were not entirely you, but rather one half of a whole, that you had, in other words, a divine double? In the second and third centuries CE, this idea gripped the religious imagination of the Eastern

Mediterranean, providing a distinctive understanding of the self that has survived in various forms throughout the centuries, down to the present. Our Divine Double traces the rise of this ancient idea that each person has a divine counterpart, twin, or alter-ego, and the eventual eclipse of this idea with the rise of Christian conciliar orthodoxy. Charles Stang marshals an array of ancient sources: from early Christianity, especially texts associated with the apostle Thomas the twin; from Manichaeism, a missionary religion based on the teachings of the apostle of light that had spread from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean; and from Neoplatonism, a name given to the renaissance of Platonism associated with the third-century philosopher Plotinus. Each of these traditions offers an understanding of the self as an irreducible unity-in-duality. To encounter ones divine double is to embark on a path of deification that closes the gap between image and archetype, human and divine. While the figure of the divine double receded from the history of Christianity with the rise of conciliar orthodoxy, it survives in two important discourses from late antiquity: theodicy, or the problem of evil; and Christology, the exploration of how the Incarnate Christ is both human and divine.

Our Divine Double is intellectually rich and historically detailed. Stang asks readers to contemplate a theological and philosophical road not taken, one that might challenge various Christian orthodoxies of the self and the divine. The book is a triumph; Stang has uncovered an unacknowledged but vital strain of thinking about God and the cosmos that generated centuries of productive thinking about the I and the Other. (Andrew Jacobs, Scripps College) In this lively, insightful book, Stang tackles a major problem in the history of ancient religion, and sheds much light on a forgotten chapter in the archaeology of the person. Major instances, such as Thomas, Jesus's twin brother, and Mani's heavenly twin, are studied in the context of a Platonic tradition going from Socrates's daimon to Plotinus. (Guy Stroumsa, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and University of Oxford) Stang breathes life into scholarship and provides a new understanding of traditions about which we thought there was nothing new to learn. There is something wild, infectious, even mad in this book. Stang embraces cognitive and existential impossibilities under the rubric of our divine double, and yet, through his careful and cadenced presentation of these paradoxes, Stang tames the madness and leads his readers in; he offers us a taste of bi-unity; he allows us to feel the touch of Plato's heaven-sent madness. (Gregory Shaw Bryn Mawr Classical) This work is a top-class piece of scholarship and Stang is to be commended for his hands-on approach to primary materials. Coptic, Syriac, and Middle Persian are just a few of the languages he employed to bring this study to fruition. Our Divine Double can truly be called an original contribution to scholarship and it is a most captivating read. (Daniel J. Tolan Reading Religion) Stang's book is compelling in its devotion to an ancient search for a way to our higher self. Opening his own creative process in formulating Our Divine Double has proven a distinctive and valuable achievement, partly because it also lays open philological disintegrations, and significant reorientations in the house of intellect. (Karl F. Morrison Medieval) About the Author Charles M. Stang is Professor of Early Christian Thought at Harvard Divinity School.