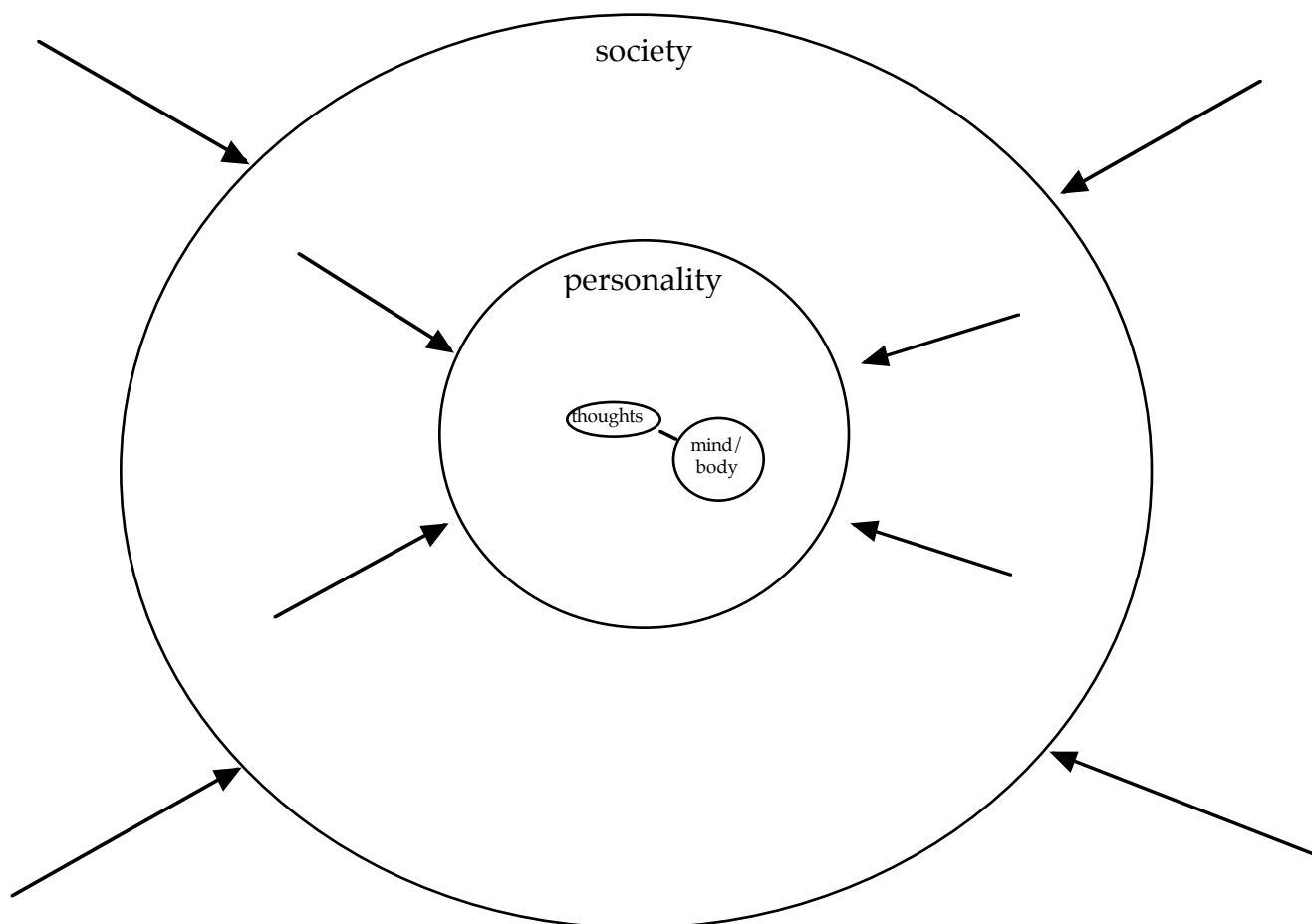


Chapter 3

Human Essence and the Social Cocoon

In the last chapter I suggested that we picture the finite human person and his or her personality as entities appearing on a blank page of paper that represents REALITY. Our true self is not any of these parts of our life but a relationship with the whole sheet of paper. The Spirit Self, The Awed One, is not the same as our personality; rather, the Spirit Self is a mysterious Presence standing before the Awesome and filled with Awe. Even when we identify fully with being this Awed One, we notice that we are also living within a personality that we have developed since babyhood. And we can also notice that we are living in a still larger circle, our society. Our personality is conditioned by that society. Society, like personality, is not Spirit, not Human Essence. Society is a wider circle of useful habits on the full page of REALITY. Society is the wider cocoon in which the cocoon of our personality has been constructed.



In the above diagram the arrows indicate that REALITY is challenging our society as well as our personality. Society is a human-made format of well-established habits; therefore, it can be out of sync with REALITY. Even societies that were, at one time, somewhat in sync with REALITY can become out of sync in changing times. Social forms are constantly becoming obsolete. REALITY is constantly challenging us to alter our social forms. Doing this is difficult because our social forms are agreements that we count upon to give order and stability to our common living. Also, we have internalized these social forms and made them parts of our personalities. So the demands of REALITY to change our societies are also demands to change our personalities. If we are identified with our personality and thus clinging to our personality as if it were the “real me,” then we are going to resist social change as well.

This dynamic of resistance to social change is what gives strength to reactionary movements. A movement like the Ku Klux Klan in the United States is a clear example. Why is such passionate hatred toward racial justice even plausible for a human being? It is plausible for Klan members because they are identified with their personalities which were constructed under conditions in which being "white" had a meaning of importance, status, or worth. This worth is being challenged by the social drama of giving a new status to African Americans. It seems to these individuals that their very self is being negated. It seems to them that they are being asked to enter into the deep void of no longer being a self they recognize. And this is true. They are being asked to disidentify with the only personalities they have ever known.

This basic dynamic applies not only to Klan members but to all human beings. For example, African Americans recovering from centuries of slavery have had to disidentify with the personalities they built to survive under slavery. As many African American writers have witnessed, after slavery was abolished in the outer society, slave attitudes still tended to persist in the inner being of the ex-slaves.

The civil rights movement, led by Martin Luther King Jr. and others, created a social drama that called to everyone's attention how deeply these old attitudes still resided in the lives of all U.S. citizens. These protests and the reactions to them showed us how irrational and contradictory our behaviors were. On one hand we upheld a constitution that proclaimed justice for all, and on the other hand we were trapped in old personalities which held black Americans in contempt or at least played it safe by knuckling under to the meanness of racism or perhaps pretending that it did not exist.

Understanding the dynamics that characterize U.S. racism gives us insight into all reactionary movements. It is easy to see that the Muslim extremists who are making such news today are a reactionary movement, but it is not so easy to see why such passion is operating in these people. The modern world has been a deep challenge to conservative Muslim culture. In some ways Muslim culture preserves values that express human authenticity, values that are being neglected by the typical industrial society. But in other ways current Muslim culture is out of sync with its own best heritage as well as with current experiences of REALITY. All this has to be sorted out, but it can only be sorted out by individuals who are transcending their identifications with both their inherited Muslim culture and the newer industrial culture. Only such persons are capable of being appropriately critical of both cultures and appropriately creative of social forms that reconcile and integrate the wholesome features of each culture into social forms that are viable for the future.

A reactionary movement cannot and does not do this. Instead, it fans into flame the resistance to change that is being experienced by the obsolete personalities of a wide swath of people. Muslim individuals who feel that their very selves are being held in contempt by the entire modern world, can even become convinced that noble suicide is preferable to making do in a world where, as they see it, they are held in contempt.

Few U.S. citizens have empathy for this inner struggle of Muslim people. They cannot empathize because they do not notice that similar struggles are taking place in their own personalities relative to their own national or regional cultures. Many U.S. citizens cannot fathom why so much hatred is directed toward their government, their economic institutions, and elements of their culture. They cannot fathom this because they will not face the extent to which U.S. foreign policy has been hardhearted and foolish. Similarly, most U.S. citizens do not want to know how destructive of economic justice our corporations have been, how weak and ineffective our democratic practices have become, how delusory so much of our education has become, how naive and sterile our buy-and-buy consumer attitudes have become, how inappropriate and rigid our moral values have become, how obsolete our religious practices

have become, and so on. When REALITY crashes into our lives, “America the Beautiful” is not so beautiful as our unexamined viewpoints claim.

To even talk honestly in public forums about these matters can get one booed off the stage, or called unpatriotic, or dismissed as too gloomy. Why is there so much passionate reactionary feeling in the U.S. at this time? It is because REALITY is challenging our current social cocoon and the personalities that have been developed within this wider cocoon.

The above discussion illustrates how any deeply transformative social change will have a Spirit component. When we are asked to disidentify with our inherited society and the personalities we have developed within that society, we are being asked to discover our Spirit Being, to discover that we are more than our personalities. We are being asked to discover that we are **Trust** of REALITY, a Trust that we can live abundantly in the full glare of REALITY. We are being asked to discover that we are the **Freedom** to create anew our lives and the social fabrics in which we live. We are being asked to discover that we are **Compassion** for all persons in our own culture and in every other culture. Indeed, we are being asked to discover that we are compassion for the entire biological system of our planet and every species of living beings.

Accessing our Spirit Being is not only a horrific challenge, it is also a birth of hope. If we were not Spirit Beings, there would be no hope. But because we are Spirit Freedom, our personalities can change, and our societies can change. Personality and society are just habits inherited from the past. Most well established habits are not easily broken. Most new habits are not easily constructed. Nevertheless, the Freedom to do so is our realistic hope. While it may seem at times easier to continue our old habits, these habits also tend to become stifling, obsolete, destructive, and even suicidal. The glory of breaking old habits and creating alternative disciplines of living (new habits) is the glory of Freedom, the glory of Spirit. Doing the fresh disciplines of a new society is an expression of Spirit and a path toward deeper Spirit.

If Freedom were not the essence of every human life, the history of humanity would be unexplainable and the future of humanity would be unalterable, an inevitable tragic fate. Freedom is part of Human Essence and is foundational for a Spirit-based ethics. Trust and Compassion flow into Freedom and flow out of Freedom. Trust, Compassion, and Freedom blend together into one whole Human Essence that is our hope, our abundant life, and our power to create new social fabrics for ourselves and our descendants.

I want to end this chapter with another flourish of poetry, this time a paraphrase of part of the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John. The New Testament scholars whom I trust insist that the book of John was written by an unknown religious genius at the turn of the first century. It is a theological drama, a poem, a play. The long speeches of Jesus and the colorful dialogues with Jesus are not biographical memories but a creative art form in which the various characters stand for basic dynamics in human life. “Jesus” represents the Essential Human. “The Jews” do not represent a specific religious group but are a symbol for the defenders of the inherited social cocoon. This theological poem is equally valid if the inherited social cocoon is composed of the defenders of Christian teachings or Buddhist teachings or Hindu teachings or Muslim teachings. Whatever the heritage, the inherited social cocoon is not REALITY, and those who defend this cocoon as the core of their living are estranged from REALITY. With these clues in mind, I have constructed this paraphrase of John 8:31-59:

Turning to the defenders of the social cocoon who had put some trust in him, the Essential Human said, “If you dwell within the awakening that I have brought you, you are indeed my followers; you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

The defenders of the social cocoon replied, “We are Abraham’s descendants; we have never been in slavery to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will become free?’ ”

"In complete honesty I tell you," said the Essential Human, "everyone who behaves in an estranged manner is a slave. The slave has no permanent standing in the household, but the son or daughter belongs to it forever. If then the true offspring sets you free, you will indeed be free. I know that you are descended from Abraham, but you are bent on killing me because my teaching makes no headway with you. I am revealing in words what I saw in my Parent's presence; and you are revealing in action what you learned from your parent."

They retorted, "Abraham is our parent." (Others might say "Jesus is our teacher" or Buddha or ...)

"If you were Abraham's children," the Essential Human replied, "you would do as Abraham did. As it is, you are bent on killing me, a man who told you the truth I heard from REALITY. That is not how Abraham acted. You are doing your own parent's work."

They said, "We are not bastards! REALITY is our parent and REALITY alone."

The Essential Human said, "If REALITY were your Parent you would love me, for REALITY is the source of my being and from REALITY I come. I have not come of my own accord. REALITY sent me. Why do you not understand my words? It is because my revelation is beyond your grasp. Your parent, the inherited social cocoon, is a delusion. You choose to carry out the desires of this cocoon of unrealistic habits. The social cocoon was a murderer from the beginning and is not rooted in the truth. When the social cocoon lies, it is speaking its native tongue; for the social cocoon is a liar and the parent of lies. But I speak the truth and therefore you do not believe me. Which of you can prove me in the wrong? If what I say is true, why do you not believe me? He who has REALITY for his Parent listens to the words of REALITY. You are not REALITY'S sons and daughters; that is why you do not listen."

The defenders of the social cocoon answered, "Are we not right in saying that you are an outsider (a Communist, a Muslim, a Yankee, a Southerner, a . . .) and that you are also insane?"

"I am not insane," said the Essential Human, "I am honoring my Parent, but you dishonor me. I do not care about my own glory. There is, however, ONE who does care about my glory, and that ONE is the AUTHORITY. In complete honesty I tell you, if anyone obeys my teaching he or she will enjoy a quality of life that never dies."

The defenders of the social cocoon said, "Now we are certain that you are insane. Abraham is dead; the prophets are dead; and yet you say, 'If anyone obeys my teaching he or she will enjoy a quality of life that never dies.' Are you greater than our father Abraham who is dead? The prophets are dead too. What do you claim to be?"

The Essential Human replied, "If I glorify myself, that glory of mine is worthless. It is my Parent, REALITY, who glorifies me, the one you also claim to obey, but you do not know REALITY. But I do know REALITY. If I said that I did not know REALITY, I would be a liar like you. But in truth I know REALITY, and I obey the words of REALITY. Your father Abraham was overjoyed to see my coming; he saw it and was glad."

The defenders of the social cocoon protested, "You are not yet fifty years old. How can you have seen Abraham?"

The Essential Human said, "In all honesty I tell you, before Abraham was born, I AM."

The defenders of the social cocoon picked up stones to hurl at him, but the Essential Human vanished, leaving the cultural temple.

Part Two

The Presupposition of Essential Society