Chapter 5
Commonality, Singularity, and Intimacy

Social Processes are not the only essential processes in the lives of human beings. We also have processes that go on within our interior consciousness. I will name these "Singularity" or "Personal Processes." And we have still other processes that go on between two persons or among a small group of persons. I will name these "Intimacy" or "Interpersonal Processes."

Commonality or Social Processes

"Commonality" is a word that is useful for distinguishing social processes from the singularity of personal processes and the intimacy of interpersonal processes. A social process is practiced in common with millions (or at least scores) of people. For example, language usage is a commonality processes. Economic processes are the common processes we create for Earth-use, production, and distribution of goods and services. Cultural process are the common processes we create to form our common sense, common style, and common symbolization. Political processes are the common processes we create for common decision making, common social order, and common geographical delineations. Commonality is not intimacy. And Commonality is not singularity. But commonality is an important third of what goes on in human life. This quality of commonality distinguishes social processes from singularity processes and intimacy processes.

I am assuming that human social processes are different from the social processes that characterize the life of other species. For example, all mammalian species have a strong social life. Even bears, who are quite independent solitary hunters, are social in their sexual and cub-raising activities. They even play with each other on rare occasions. Wolves, lions, and horses are all intensely social species. Humanity is another intensely social mammalian species. But this basic mammalian level of social existence does not contain what I am pointing to with the term "social processes." Social processes are human made not instinctual or genetically determined. There are, of course, instinctual and genetic foundations in human life that good social processes need to honor, but this does not contradict the fact that human societies are human made. The vast variety of human societies is proof for the human-made quality of human societies.

This human-made quality of human societies is both a great benefit to the human species and a potential for great evil. This flexibility has made possible the development of deeper and deeper consciousness and more and more power for survival and enrichment. At the same time this flexibility has made possible the creation of societies that are out of sync with the foundations of human nature and the limitations of the natural world. This flexibility has also made possible the creation of forms of oppression and injustice that are destructive for both the oppressing and oppressed members of a society. Further, this flexibility has enabled the fueling of conflicts between human societies that are wildly destructive, permitting a degree of violent slaughter that is unprecedented in the life of any other species.

Herein lies the reason why the members of every human society need a social ethics. The makers of any next edition of human society need to know how to choose between those forms of society that maximize the constructive advantage of flexible social structures and minimize the destructive potential of this same human capability.

Singularity or Personal Processes

Singularity processes differ from commonality processes. Singularity processes go on within the interior life of the human individual, and they condition the behavior of that

individual person. Human singularity includes dynamics that are similar to many other species. All the following types of feelings we share with other mammalian life and to some extent with all animal life: sensations of pain and pleasure, touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight; desires for food, drink, and sex; emotional signals that guide us in our relations to specific types of life challenges.

There are also levels of mental intelligence that we share with other animal species. The use of remembered images or reruns of past experiences characterizes the intelligence of all animal life. This quality of intelligence reaches very high levels of capability in cats, dogs, chimpanzees, and many other species. But humans possess a quality of intelligence that adds capability to this "image-use" intelligence. I call this uniquely human type of intelligence "symbol-use" intelligence. Human language, art, and religion are made possible by this quality of intelligence. No other species can match the human species in building cultural memory banks, libraries of wisdom, and knowledge of the story of the entire cosmos. The intelligence of a human being is vast, and this difference between humans and other species is not merely a matter of degree. The uniquely human quality of intelligence is a qualitatively different from animal intelligence.

Thirdly, human singularity differs from the singularity of other animals in the quality of our basic consciousness. Humans are capable of being conscious of consciousness. This capability provides us with a quality of awareness that is unique.

So, in this chapter I am using this word "singularity" in a very specialized sense. Cats and dogs also have an inward singularity that manifests in their behaviors, and sensitive human beings do indeed honor that general animal singularity and realize that the singularity we humans experience within ourselves has much in common with the singularity of other animals. But when I use the word "singularity" in this chapter as a category holding one third of what goes on in human life, I mean *human* singularity. I am assuming that human singularity is something unique that has recently emerged in the unfolding of the cosmos.

This topic of singularity is important for social ethics. The U.S. Declaration of Independence and the preamble to the U.S. Constitution recognize this importance. These documents affirm that the human individual is endowed with inalienable rights, including the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In other words, as we humans seek to give form to our social processes, we need to keep in mind that a society that does not honor the validity and importance of human singularity is inappropriate. Indeed, such a society is unrealistic and oppressive.

There are democratic constitutions and legal systems that are less than clear about honoring the singular individual. Arundhati Roy claims that in her native land, India, the democratic constitution and legal system are inadequate because they does not provide sufficient protection for the rights of the human individual. Therefore, it becomes possible for the Hindu majority to oppress the Muslim minority almost without restraint. Important legal restraints are missing in this particular attempt at democratic government. In other words, majority rule, when unrestrained by a system of law and order that protects the singular individual, is an inadequate social system.

Intimacy or Interpersonal Processes

Intimacy processes are more difficult to describe than singularity processes or social processes. Intimacy presupposes singularity and commonality, but it is neither. Intimacy processes take place face to face, body to body, soul to soul, or at least letter to letter or perhaps e-mail to e-mail. Intimacy processes presuppose an "I" and a "Thou" who mirror to each other the selfhood experiences that are being experienced by each. I will explore intimacy processes

using these three categories: "**conversation**," "**contact**," and the "**meeting of souls**."

In order to see what I mean by "**conversation**," imagine two women who are best friends and who have not seen one another for many months. They are sitting together for lunch in a restaurant. Words fly back and forth between these two friends. Stories are told. Tears are shed. Emotions are felt. Understandings are acknowledged. A refreshing good time is had by both people. This is an intimacy process. Such a conversation makes use of the English language or some other language, but language usage is not the essence of an intimacy process. Language can be used to enrich an I-Thou relationship, but language use itself is a social process. A language is held in common with millions of people, but an intimate conversation is a consciousness to consciousness exchange of far more than words.

In order to see what I mean by "**contact,**" imagine a hug or a handshake. Or imagine a wordless bodily engagement between two lovers.   Intimate contact is more than sexual engagement, but sexual engagement is part of what intimate contact might include. Many authors and lovers distinguish between "good sex" that is part of a larger sensual and emotional contact experience and "mechanical sex" which might be defined as orgasms without intimacy. Bodily contact need not involve touching at all. Contact can be made by simply watching each other move.   Looking into one another's eyes can be a very deep contact.

This brings us to my third category of intimacy, the "**meeting of souls**."   In order to see what I mean by this, imagine two persons who are complete strangers stepping off a public bus. Imagine that these two persons catch each other's gaze and realize that the inner life of each is being mirrored by the inner life of the other. They know very little, in a rational sense, about each other, but they still know each other and they know that they are known. The fact that this sort of thing happens shows that humans can touch each other soul to soul. Such deep touch happens most frequently among those we know intimately, but even then it seems rare and beautiful and mildly strange to our customary living. The point here is this simple truth: we humans recognize the consciousness of consciousness in each other, and we know that the other's consciousness is potentially a conscious of our own consciousness of consciousness.

All these aspects of the processes of human intimacy take place between two persons or among persons in a small group using effective group processes. A group of three to twenty-four provides what we might call "the optimal situation" for group intimacy processes. When groups become larger than about 350, intimate associations throughout the group become impossible. In groups larger than 350, commonality processes rather than intimacy processes become primary. This is an important bit of knowledge for designing genuine consensus building within our democratic businesses and governmental institutions. Where democracy is characterized only by individual voters choosing media-presented candidates for public office, we are omitting the dynamics of intimacy and thus omitting true consensus building among the people. At some point in the life of a fully democratic society, small groups of people need to discuss together the full implications of the social decisions that are being made. And such groups need to feel empowered to the extent that their discussions and conclusions make a difference in the outcomes of social development.

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Human life consists not only of commonality or social processes but also of singularity processes and intimacy processes. The conclusion we must draw from this realization is this: realistic and thus appropriate social processes are those social processes that provide space, honor, and effective empowerment for singularity and intimacy. Current industrial civilization is not only warped within its common social processes, but also social processes dominate the

processes of singularity and intimacy. When commonality dominates, the citizenry are not properly honored as a source of truth. Solitary human experience is devalued. Intimate discourse between truth-seeking persons is neglected. Instead, truth is understood to come from the top of the society. Such "truth" has become a social position. Discourse has become a battle of ideologies. Ethical behavior is then discussed as obeying some standard definition of right and wrong taught by some institution. In our current society singularity is devalued in this manner, and true intimacy is even more deeply neglected. The following chart pictures this warping.

Commonality
Social Processes

Intimacy
Interpersonal Processes

Human Processes

Singularity
Personal Processes
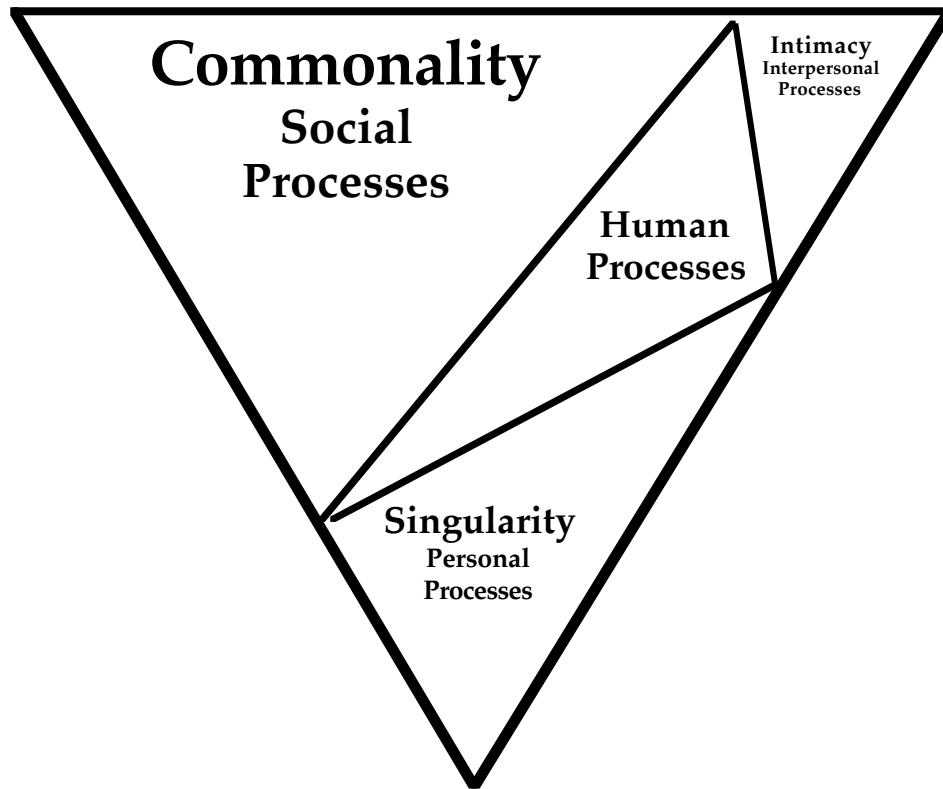
So how might this warping be corrected? We might begin by encouraging depth conversations between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and among the citizenry who live in a local neighborhood or a local region of the planet. Democracy would be much improved if we revived the town meeting. Also useful could be the establishment of what Jim Rough in his book *Society's Breakthrough* calls "vision councils." Such councils might consist of a random selection of twenty-four registered voters who meet for a week or longer and construct position papers for their political region. These papers would then be published and discussed by the voters of that region. The gift of such a proposal is that it gets small groups of people together who seek truth not from the established institutions, parties, or governments but from the interior experience of the singular individuals who are meeting together.

Also effective in correcting the pictured imbalance would be further emphasis on retreats, trainings, workshops, and weekly-meeting circles that emphasize personal discovery, Spirit maturity, and singular enrichment. These activities are already happening, but for the most part they are activities for maverick inquirers rather than for the mainstream population. Every child, every women, every man needs intimacy processes that encourage the enrichment of their singularity processes. Only if such personal attention is paid to each and every individual can the imbalance in favor of the formal social processes be corrected.

Correcting this imbalance does not mean, however, a contempt for commonality. It is understandable that many sensitive people tend to reject most current social processes and perhaps flee to a hermitage or to some small alternative community. But the appropriate response to our challenges is not to walk away from our inherited social processes but to transform these social processes so that they honor and provide adequate space for intimacy and singularity to function in an optimal fashion for everyone.