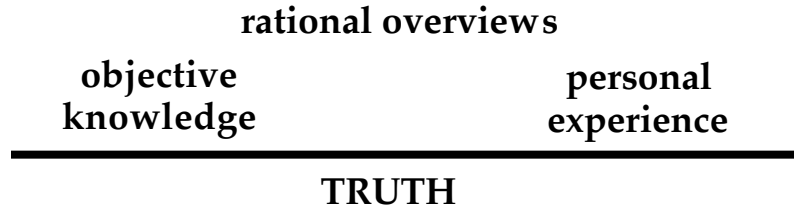


Chapter 1

Three Approaches to Truth

There are three ways that we approach the truth about our lives. Objective or scientific knowledge is one. Inward personal experience is another. Thirdly, we create rational overviews of our objective knowledge and our personal experience.

Here is a diagram illustrating these three approaches to truth:



Notice that in this diagram objective knowledge and personal experience are placed in closer proximity to TRUTH. Our rational overviews are constructed out of our objective knowledge and personal experience. Too often we simply take our overviews from our culture rather than developing them for ourselves on the basis of our own objective knowledge and personal experience.

By “**objective knowledge**” I mean to indicate the scientific approach to truth. Here is a simple illustration of the scientific method. Let us say that a man has the hypothesis that he can fly by jumping off a building and flapping his arms. So he tests that hypothesis. If he crashes into the ground, that hypothesis is not true. If he soars through the air, it is true. That is how we arrive at objective knowledge. All scientific research is a sophisticated version of this way of approaching truth: we guess, we create a test for our guess, and then we test our guess. The results of the test give us objective feedback that enables us to guess better the next time.

By “**personal experience**” I mean what each of us knows within our own interior world through the direct experience of living our own life. For example, the statement “I love my cat” cannot be explored by the scientific method. I have to look inside my own life and see what I mean by “my cat” and by “love” and then discern whether I really do love this particular cat. Perhaps I only tolerate this cat. Something is true, but this truth is not attainable through the path of objective knowledge.

By “**rational overviews**” I mean the thinking we do in order to pull together into useful overviews what we know scientifically and what we know personally. Continuing to use the illustrations above, a useful overview would be: If I love my cat, I should not throw her out of a ten-story window.

Consciously or unconsciously we have rational overviews for everything in our lives: what it means to be a citizen of our nation, what it means to be a person, what we understand our own personality to be, what we understand our true nature to be. This chapter about the three approaches to truth is an example of a rational overview.

Typically, our rational overviews have been passed along to us from others. We have not thought them through for ourselves. Thinking for ourselves means learning to practice all three of these approaches to the truth. We can become skilled in using the scientific method to seek *objective knowledge*. We can become skilled in inquiring into our inner being and reporting *personal experience*. And we can become skilled in building our own *rational overviews* based upon our own personal experience and our own objective knowledge.

Further, we can learn to test the rational overviews of others on the basis of our own knowledge and experience. Thinking for ourselves includes listening to the overviews of others, but it also means checking out those overviews against our own personal experience

and our own objective knowledge of the facts. For our widest and most meaningful overviews, we need to think for ourselves along with thousands of other people who also think for themselves.

It, I, and We

Ken Wilber has enriched my understanding of these three approaches to truth with his “It,” “I,” and “We” terminology. He calls objective knowledge the “It” approach to truth. Personal experience he calls the “I” approach to truth. And rational overviews he calls the “We” approach to truth. The following elaboration is mine, not Wilber’s; but I credit him for his terminology and inspiration.¹

Objective Knowledge as the “It” Approach to Truth

Objective knowledge is objective because we attempt to set aside our subjectivity and simply observe the “things” around us. We actually use our minds to form recognizable things out of the flow of our ongoing perception. An infant does not see a breast or a woman: it only sees a blur of wholeness not yet differentiated into breast and woman and so forth. The infant perceives and begins to order those perceptions in terms of genetically provided images that direct attention toward that nourishing nipple. But scientific research is not required for that. All that is required is the image-using intelligence that the infant has in common with all animal life.

Science requires creating symbols that stand for differentiated aspects of our surroundings. Categories such as “cat,” “tree,” “woman,” “man,” “child,” are all creations of the human mind, rational forms that we associate with recognizable aspects of our ongoing flow of perceptions. Of course, we can meaningfully say that there are cats in our experience; nevertheless, “cats” is a rational form that we have created. Depending on how we have constructed this rational form, “cats” may or may not include “hyenas.” Are hyenas dogs or cats or neither? We have to define our rational forms more carefully in order to answer that question. Our minds discriminate the common features of cats and dogs and then see which of these apply to hyenas. It is clear that some of each apply, so perhaps we decide that hyenas are neither cats nor dogs but something else. We can also notice that all three are what we call mammals. Again, we have created the symbol or rational form “mammals.” We have other symbols like “reptiles.” We notice that there are a few creatures in the archeological record that might be dubbed transition animals between reptiles and mammals. We may not know which they are. We have to decide or create a new category. We accomplish this by further defining the rational forms with which we are giving order to our ongoing perceptions.

Science purports to work with objective reality, but it actually works with these rational forms we have abstracted from reality. These rational forms have made an “It” out of that actuality of which they are rational forms. Science deals only with “Its.” In the scientific method of truth, subjectivity is assumed as the “I” who is observing these “Its,” but the reality of the “I” is not observed. “I” is not an “It” and therefore “I” cannot be observed in the sense that science observes.

It is important to understand this severe limitation that characterizes the scientific approach to truth. Science can construct objective knowledge about any topic, but such objective knowledge is only a partial view of that topic. The entire truth cannot be apprehended through the scientific approach alone.

Let us examine this still further. What is a scientific fact? Science deals only with facts. A fact is a creation of the human mind that has a credible level of correspondence with the ongoing flow of perceptions as those perceptions are currently formed into thinkable “Its.”

¹ Wilber, Ken; *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (Shambhala 1995) I have refashioned Wilber’s fourfold model to three.

Facts are indeed tested against objective perceptions, but those objective perceptions are carefully defined and crafted experiments. Good science is willing to look beyond its current theories and factual definitions. Good science is open to other facts that do not fit into current objective knowledge. Indeed, those facts that do not fit are the most interesting facts of all, for they challenge the scientist to create a better theory that includes those new facts as well as the facts already included in the older theories. This is the great gift of science: it does not allow factually ungrounded superstitions to reign in the common mind of society. It challenges every commonly held tenet to the test of factual verification.

Science is thus a progressive movement toward ever greater knowledge of the objective surroundings. There is, therefore, no final scientific knowledge. There is always the possibility that more will be learned that will transform the older scientific knowledge through and through. Thus scientific knowledge is always approximate and tentative, never ultimate.

Scientific knowledge is a progressive and approximate formulation of the "It" formulations of ongoing human perception. It does not deal with the "I" of interiorly contemplated human consciousness. As long as we realize this, the scientific method is not illusory; science is just a sophisticated version of one of the natural and normal aspects of human thinking. But if we choose to view science as the all-inclusive pathway to truth, then we are living in an illusion. Objective knowledge is one of three pathways. Each of these three pathways or approaches to truth enriches the other two without in any way conflicting with them. But this absence of conflict can only be seen when we have given up the notion that Reality is rationally understandable to the human mind. Reality is a Mystery that becomes ever more mysterious the more we know about it. If we are scientists who know that mystery surrounds and penetrates all our knowing, then our scientific knowledge is taking place in the context of Reality. If, however, we dream of someday discovering a scientific theory that includes or explains everything, then we do not accurately understand science. And we have also entered into an illusion, an illusion about the capability of the human mind and the unfathomable quality of Reality.

Personal Experience as the "I" Approach to Truth

In addition to the objectification of our perceptions into "Its" and the ongoing scientific knowledge of those objectifications, there is also an approach to truth that focuses on interior consciousness, on the "I" of interior living. Clear scientific thinking does not exclude the "I" approach to truth; it even clarifies its existence. Being strictly objective in its approach, science is silent about interior truth; thereby, science renders the "I" approach even more obvious.

Take the field of psychology as an example. The strictly scientific approach to the human psyche confronts the actuality that only human behavior and human reports of interior experience can be scientifically studied. There is no way to objectively look inside a human being. When we think we do, we are actually only looking inside our own beings and making comparisons with what we observe about another person's behaviors and reports. Psychology is a field of study that straddles the "It" and "I" approaches to truth. The "It" aspects of psychology are glorified in the behavioral schools of psychology, and the "I" aspects of psychology are glorified in the depth psychology schools. But all schools of psychology use both approaches to truth. If they did not, they would have no way to study the human psyche.

When we read psychology, we find it meaningful to the extent that it illuminates our own interior experience. Art and religion are also aspects of human culture that came into being to illuminate our interior experience. Art and religion need not pretend to be scientific. They need to be free from objectified reason. They need to feel free to use wildly expressive forms of symbology, myth, ritual, dance, song, poem, painting, sculpture, architecture, etc. The truth of religious and artistic expression is not the truth of science. Christian fundamentalists are confusing these two approaches to truth when they claim to be scientifically objective and yet

insist that everything was created in seven days. To start with doctrinal statements for which factual support is sought is not science; it is pseudo-science or bogus science. True science allows the facts to challenge its theories. Even more important, the fundamentalist approach avoids the personal meaning of the creation story. Liberal Christians also avoid the personal meaning of the creation story when they go no further than saying that everything was not created in seven days but in 14 billion years.

The creation myth of the Bible becomes meaningful only when we employ the “I” approach to its meaning. The myth of creation is a story about the meaning of being here and the meaning of being here along with land and water and sun and stars and fish and birds and beasts of every kind. According to this story all this wide drama of beings and the actuality of our own “being here” is good. Every single being and process is part of one general movement towards us humans of a final Power and Goodness that is the appropriate focus for our primary adoration. This story is not about a literal supernatural being who literally “got stuff started.” The story is about the appropriate focus of adoration needed for human consciousness to be healthy. Whether any one of us agrees or disagrees with such an assertion about human life, we can easily agree that such an interpretation of the creation myth is using the “I” approach rather than the “It” approach to truth.

Contemporary Western society has been invaded by “I” approach religions of Eastern origin. Unless we open ourselves to the “I” approach, no sense can be made of the rising interest being taken in Buddhism by thousands of scientifically trained Westerners. Meditation is a means of inquiring into the inner life. Meditation presupposes that we will discover important truth if we remain awake and yet look openly upon our own interior being – watching the rambling of our mind, watching the actuality that our mind is rambling, and watching the actuality that we can directly observe our mind’s rambling as well as our body’s feelings and the palpable presence of our immediate awareness of being aware.

“Inquiry” has become for me a key word in describing the “I” approach to truth. This word has been developed in a sophisticated fashion by A. H. Almaas.² I will share some of my own thinking about inquiry which has been inspired by Almaas’ work. I sometimes use the term “contemplative inquiry” to distinguish what I mean from scientific inquiry. Contemplative inquiry is not about a subject observing an object. Contemplative inquiry is about consciousness being conscious of consciousness itself and the contents of that consciousness. In this context, the subject doing the inquiry is also the object of the inquiry. And the object of the inquiry is the subject doing the inquiry. Talking in this manner means that we are noticing an actuality about consciousness that would be strange from the point of view of a strictly scientific approach. For the processes of inward inquiry there is no firm line of separation between subject and object. We might say that the dualism of subject and object has been replaced with a subject that has the ability to inquire into the nature of that very same subject that is doing the inquiry.

The scientific approach assumes a subject who observes objects that are not the subjective person doing the observing. Science does not study consciousness directly. It correlates the reports or the behaviors of conscious beings with the brain functions that can be studied in an objective laboratory. Scientific theories can be formulated to say which functionings of the human brain correspond with which reports from a sample of brain owners about feelings of fear or joy or whatever. But in the “I” approach to truth there is no inquiry into the brain as an outward object, and there is no interest in correlating inward reports with brain functions. Rather, the “I” approach focuses on the direct experiences of solitary consciousness. In the “I” approach to truth one simply notices the dynamic of something we might call “mind” handling images and symbols and how these elements of thought correlate with sensory inputs that are directly impressed upon the inner being as contents of consciousness. Feelings are movements in the field of consciousness. Thoughts are movements in the field of consciousness. The word

² Almaas, A. H.; *Spacecruiser Inquiry* (Shambhala 2002) Parts I and II

“brain” in this context does not point to billions of firing cells, but perhaps to some very subtle feelings in the head area. The entire field of what we might indicate with the word “Reality” is ripples in the field of consciousness. Or we might say that consciousness is a ripple in the field of Reality. We do not have consciousness and then Reality. We do not have Reality and the consciousness of Reality. There is just one Reality, a Reality that includes consciousness. And consciousness (in being conscious of that one Reality that includes consciousness) is being conscious of consciousness and the contents of consciousness as provided by Reality.

In the “I” approach, the essence of “time” is also experienced differently than we experience time in the “It” approach. In the “It” approach, time is pictured as a line with past, present, and future. This line is divided up into years, hours, seconds, milliseconds, and other measurable “lengths” of time. Time is a dimension of Reality in the same sense that there are three dimensions of space. The scientist can locate events as occurring at some space/time coordinate. The most mysterious aspect of time from a scientific point of view is the present. The past can be ordered into plausible stories. The future can be predicted in terms of plausible or implausible, likely or unlikely outcomes. But the present seems to be a single point, an infinitesimal nothingness.

In the “I” approach the present is the only time that exists. The past is only memory, memory experienced in the present. And the future is only anticipation, anticipation experienced in the present. The time is always NOW. Our inquiry is inquiry into the NOW of consciously being conscious of the contents of consciousness. This does not mean that there is no time. Rather, flow or change is an obvious aspect of our contemplative inquiry. Flow means the coming into being and going out of being of each moment of experience. Flow means the relative continuation of some aspects of experience and the relative abruptness of other aspects of experience. Consciousness is a flow. Consciousness of consciousness is a flow. And this flow is taking place through the enduring still point of NOW. Consciousness is not only a passive attentiveness to the flow of the NOW. Consciousness is also an intentionality that chooses aspects of Reality to focus upon, chooses memories of the past to interpret and use or not use, chooses anticipations of the future to interpret and use or not use. Consciousness is an intentionality that makes decisions in the present to move the flow of Reality in chosen directions employing the powers of consciousness, intelligence, body, and presence allotted to the “I” who is doing these intentional inner movements that lead to whole body actions. All this attention and intention takes place in the NOW of consciousness. For the “I” approach the time is always NOW.

When we are using the scientific approach, we view time objectively as a line extending backward into the past and forward into the future. But, we do not have to choose between our scientific knowledge of time and our personal experience of time. Both are valid approaches to the One Reality in which we participate. We confront a seeming contradiction between these two approaches because the finite human mind is attempting to describe a truth that is beyond either approach. Neither of these two approaches is wrong; nor is either all-inclusive in the sense that it can dismiss the validity of the other. Perhaps the situation here is similar to light being viewed as both waves and particles. Time, like light, is beyond human imagination.

Nevertheless, each of these two approaches to time and to truth has its view of other approach. When the “I” approach views the “It” approach, it sees the scientific method of seeking truth as simply one of the processes conducted by the interior mind. The “It” approach is simply a sophisticated mental tool for evaluating memories, assessing anticipations, and making decisions. The whole of science is viewed as an activity of the conscious mind.

When the “It” approach views the “I” approach, it sees such contemplative inquiry as a means of providing reports that can be objectively evaluated. These reports can be viewed as “Its” for scientific theorizing. For the scientist, consciousness itself must be conceived as an “It,”

a special quality that exists in every living animal. Yet, good science knows that science cannot say anything about consciousness directly, for science has no direct access to consciousness. Science can only observe the behaviors and reports of conscious beings. The “I” approach is the only direct access to consciousness. So good science must simply be respectfully silent about consciousness and wait for consciousness to make its reports. Some scientists and philosophers of science have presumed to tell us how consciousness emerges from the material body or how consciousness is able to initiate the actions of the physical body. But such issues are beyond the competence of science, for consciousness is not an “It,” and only “Its” exist in the realm in which science is competent.

Rational Overviews as the “We” Approach to Truth

The human mind does not rest with having only the “It” approach and the “I” approach. The human mind builds inclusive and practical overviews of Reality that are founded upon these two approaches. Such overviews constitute a third approach to truth. This essay is an example of that third approach to truth. I am creating a rational overview of these three approaches to truth. In human culture, philosophy and history are the two disciplines of learning that are most dedicated to constructing overviews. In the opening sections of this chapter I have been doing overview-building philosophy.

Since philosophy and history are written by individual philosophers and historians, why do we call “overview creation” the “We” approach to truth? We do so because philosophy and history are written for cultural groups to enable those cultural groups to have whole pictures for the practical living of their lives. Also, the great philosophers and historians are individuals who are stating a consensus for this larger body of people who have already been thinking about the matters being discussed. For example, the most renowned overview builders of ancient Greece were Plato and Aristotle. Socrates was not so much an overview builder as a critic of previous overviews and an inspirer of dialogue that was accessing the “I” approach to truth in a fresh manner. Inspired by these fresh questions of Socrates, Plato constructed overviews that pulled together wide-ranging whole pictures for his times. Aristotle found Plato, his teacher, inadequate in some ways: so he pulled together his own wide-ranging whole pictures.

We could tell the story of Western intellectual history as a series of deconstructions and constructions of rational overviews. Augustine, for example, pulled together the heritage of Plato as communicated to him through Plotinus with the heritage of the Old and New Testaments as communicated to him through three centuries of Christian theologizing on Greek cultural soil. This overview deeply influenced the overview of almost everyone in the Mediterranean area for many centuries. In Europe, Aristotle was largely forgotten during this period; but in the vigorous cultural upheaval spawned by Islam, Aristotle was recovered. In the twelfth century a European Christian teaching order, the Dominicans, learned Aristotelian philosophy from the Islamic world. The most famous Dominican, Thomas Aquinas, used the Aristotelian overview to construct a fresh and, at that time, controversial overview for the understanding of religion and ethics for the societies of Christian Europe.

Aristotelian philosophy provided the ground from which modern science arose. Modern science itself was a fresh breakthrough of the “It” approach. As modern science became powerful in the culture it broke through the framework of Aristotelian philosophy. Then the newer so-called “scientific philosophies” were also broken through by fresh expressions of the “I” approach in existential philosophy, modern art, and the importation of Eastern religions. We have been for several decades now in a time during which overview building has been difficult and provisional. Perhaps many philosophers today are seeing more clearly than earlier times that rational overviews are always provisional. Today we are continually anticipating the next challenge, the next deconstruction, and the next construction of more meaningful and useful overviews.

This brief history of Western intellectual overview building illustrates these points: (1) Overview building is an always-present and necessary part of the human quest for truth. (2) Overview building is a “We” approach focusing on the common mind of an entire culture of human beings. And (3) Overview building is provisional – that is, life moves on and the overviews change to include the new elements of truth brought into play by the also ongoing efforts using the “It” approach and the “I” approach.

The “We” approach, though always dependent upon the other two approaches, is a genuinely third approach to truth that needs to be differentiated from the other two. The “We” approach has a different view of truth. It is not inward looking nor outward looking. It is both and it is neither. One of the most illuminating ways to see the unique qualities of the “We” approach is through an examination of that democratic process we call “consensus building.”

Picture a dozen people sitting in a circle seeking to find practical statements of wisdom by which they can build a vital movement for social change. Picture each of them using his or her scientific knowledge and personal wisdom to make proposals to the group. After all have spoken, someone in the group attempts to sort out the relevant insight from the dross and to put forth a statement that contains the best of what everyone has said. If the group says “Yeah” to this statement or does not say “Nay,” the group has a consensus, its practical truth upon which it will operate. If some members of the group find the consensus proposal inadequate they will say so, and perhaps propose another statement that includes their truth. Eventually, the group can build a statement that is good enough for now to guide the action of the group. This truth is the sort of truth that the “We” approach to truth is seeking. Though such rational overviews are built with selected elements of objective knowledge and personal experience, they constitute a third approach to truth. All meaningful ethical guidelines are derived in this fashion. Scientific knowledge does not tell us what is ethical. Contemplative inquiry does not tell us what is ethical. The ethical has to be determined through the consensus building of a sociological body of people. Ethical conclusions which violate scientific knowledge can be judged as not valid, and that is an important principle for building an ethical consensus. Ethical conclusions which violate the personal wisdom that derives from contemplative inquiry can also be judged as not valid. This is another important principle for building an ethical consensus. But even with these principles in place, neither scientific knowledge nor personal wisdom nor a combination of the two can tell us all we need to know to construct our ethical guidelines. For that we need the “We” approach. We need the process of group consensus building that can build practical ethical overviews that are useful for ongoing living.

It is also important to notice that the “We” approach precedes as well as follows the “It” approach and the “I” approach. Before beginning scientific exploration, the scientist is always part of a community of scientists and a cultural consensus on the topics being explored. A new scientific theory is always a shift from some older theory. And the new theory becomes “natural law” only when the community of scientists becomes convinced by the data that doing further scientific research within the new theory is better. A similar story applies to the pioneers of inward inquiry. Some poetry, psychology, religion or other collections of personal wisdom carried by the general culture preceded the discovery of any new insight. Such new insight is intensely personal, but other persons find their lives mirrored by it, and thus begin to participate in making this new insight part of the next cultural consensus.

Finally, I want to say a bit about the view of time that arises in the “We” approach. The “It” approach views time as a line on which the present is an infinitesimal point. The “I” approach views time as always Now. In the “We” approach, these two views blend into something else. Let us call it “story” or “narrative.” Some group, some “We” tells their story. In a story the time is not always now nor is time in a story limited to a mathematical line. Story, if it is good story, accesses inner experience as well as relates events that happen or might happen outwardly in a common world in which more than one person dwells. Story can

include mythic beings or personified dynamics. Stories express and create intimacy and meaning among people. Story is a third way of viewing time, an attempt to integrate the mathematics of the outward clock with the ever-present experience and decision making of the singular interior person. The purpose of this integration is to build community or express meanings held by a community or to address a community with new meanings. Story is part of the “We” approach to Truth, and it allows individuals and communities to integrate the other two views of time into meaningful wholes that can ethically guide our living.

* * * * *

The “It,” “I,” and “We” approaches mingle together as one threefold journey toward truth. No valid quest is accomplished without all three being present. And the most destructive untruths become operative when one or two of these approaches are neglected.

In the absence of the other two, the “It” approach tends to depersonalize the individual and foster social anarchy. This is illustrated when corporations make their choices on the basis of a measurable abstraction like profit. Such overemphasis of the “It” approach has allowed modern science and the contemporary owners of technological improvements to consciously and unconsciously build a consumer culture, a wasteful and ecologically destructive culture, and a culture that turns human individuals into slaves of meaningless work for the sake of meaningless purchases. This continues to be a core malady of modern life, and this malady cannot be corrected without more emphasis on the other two approaches to truth.

In the absence of the other two, the “I” approach becomes some form of escape into mystical timelessness or into some form of sociological sentimentality. We see this in the books of some Eastern mystical writers. Such an overemphasis of the “I” approach may correctly see the limitations of scientific knowledge, but it tends to neglect seeing the necessity and usefulness of science. It tends not to see that science is a sophisticated means of doing an entirely natural human function. And an overemphasis of the “I” approach tends to see social ethics as limited to the healing effects of realized persons rather than also including organized group efforts toward the creation of political movements, economic reconstruction and cultural transformation.

The “We” approach, in the absence of the other two, becomes a form of sociological hegemony like fascism. Such an overemphasis of the “We” approach is manifest when a social group assumes that its formulation of truth and righteousness is the final authority that cannot be challenged by new scientific discoveries or fresh contemplative realizations. At the other extreme, an overemphasis of the “We” approach can lead to the view that there is no ground for ethics but that ethical truth is merely a tradition which some group has opted to embrace. Such thoroughgoing relativism denies the importance and even the validity of scientific exploration. It also denies the truth claims that arise from inward inquiry into the “true nature” of being human.

All three approaches to truth are valid and needed; each enriches the other and protects it from perversions.

The Three Approaches and the Christian Trinity

In the remainder of this chapter, I will describe how each of these three approaches to truth leads to one of the three dimensions of Reality pointed to by the Christian Trinity. I will describe how the “It” approach, pushed to its furthest limits, confronts human consciousness with the Impersonal Absolute, the Almighty Creative Ground that is the first face of the Christian Trinity. I will describe how the “I” approach, pushed to its furthest limits, infuses human consciousness with Awe, with Personal Essence or Holy Aliveness that is the third face of the Christian Trinity. I will describe how the “We” approach, pushed to its furthest limits, focuses human consciousness on the Everlasting Vanguard, that community of transformative

living known in Christian theology as the Body of Christ, the second face of that one experience of truth expressed in the threefold unity of the Christian Trinity.

Let me say at the outset that I am not implying by this description that Christianity is the best religion or that many other religions do not express these same three aspects of truth. The truth is the truth no matter who discovers it or how they express it. I do wish to assert, however, that the development of the triune Christian heritage was a result of a valid inquiry into truth, indeed, into a universal truth that is applicable to all human beings and discoverable within any religious culture.

The "It" Approach and the Impersonal Absolute

Perhaps there are still a few philosophers of science who hope for the day when scientists will come up with the scientific theory that explains everything. But the empirical evidence within the actual practice of modern science implies a conclusion that is disturbing to this vain human hope that the universe is rationally understandable to the human mind. "The more we know, the more we know we don't know" is the conclusion of those I rank as the most perceptive scientists. Mystery, not answers, is the final result of scientific exploration. There are also answers, but these answers are all approximations doomed to be transcended one day by better answers. Science as science can say nothing about Mystery, but scientists as human beings can confront the limits of their science and in doing so, they can confront fresh actualities of Mystery.

These confrontations with Mystery are objective confrontations. Mystery is plainly and simply actual, just as trees and birds and humans are actual. Mystery might be described as that incomprehensible NO-THING-NESS out of which all things come and into which all things return. Science is the study of things. Through the empirical study of physical things, physicists have come to the highly probable conclusion that all things began some 14 billion years ago with a massively energetic flaring forth from a single infinitesimal point. This flaring forth was not only the flaring forth of mass and energy and their laws of unfoldment but also of space and time. This beginning has no "before," because it is the beginning of time. How can one say what was before the beginning of all "befores"? Physics has evidence for this beginning, but the very idea of a beginning confronts us with NO-THING-NESS. This experience of NO-THING-NESS appears to physicists not only in the contemplation of the origin of the cosmos but also in the constituency of the cosmos. Why are the factors and qualities of the cosmos as they are? Why, for example, do objects when set in motion coast unless some force changes their speed or direction? Science, as science, can not answer such questions. But the scientist can see that he or she stands before an incomprehensible EVERY-THING-NESS in which all things cohere. The scientist in us all can contemplate the truth that this EVERY-THING-NESS which is also NO-THING-NESS surrounds us and penetrates our lives at every single point of experience. Our lives are not just things and the study of things, but in our every moment of living, we actually confront or can confront an inclusive IT-NESS beyond all the humanly delineated "Its."

This experience of Mystery is what the Christian Trinity is summarizing in its reference to the Almighty face of God. This Mystery is not a big person in some adjacent cosmos; it is an actual aspect of every moment of earthy, human experience. This Mystery is indeed Almighty; it is the Power that powers all powers. And this Mystery is impersonal – its ways are not our ways, its purposes are not our purposes, its understandings are beyond our scope of understanding. We can, however, have a personal relationship with this Mystery. That is implied when we call this IT-NESS "our God." The personal names Christianity has given this Mystery – father, mother, friend, lover, protector, defender, savior, ancient of days, etc. – express a personal relationship of trust toward this Impersonal Absolute. And trust is not the only relationship a human being can have with this Mystery. In truth, distrust is the typical relationship human beings have with this inescapable Mystery. But the Christian tradition

contains an insistence that the trust relationship is our true nature, the nature we are constituted to be. Distrust is a result of a human misdirection, a departure or “fall” from our true nature, a self-constructed estrangement from this enduring Ground of being.

The “I” Approach and the Personal Essence

In the closing paragraph of the preceding section, we have already entered into an examination of the Personal Essence that the human person was constituted to be. I have already used the “I” approach in the foregoing discussion of trust and distrust. Trust and distrust are not topics for study by science. These topics can only be accessed through a contemplative inquiry into the inner life of being human. We must each look within, using the strange eyes of our own enigmatic awareness. We are not looking for scientific proof or for cause and effect or even for developmental explanations. We are looking for actuality as directly experienced by our consciousness of our own consciousness and its dynamics and contents.

What makes inward inquiry worthwhile and ultimately rewarding is not discovering how freaky we all are, how neurotic, how addicted, how warped and strangely developed. These commonly painful discoveries are certainly part of the inward journey. But the allurements or draws that make us curious about the inner world is the potential for realizing our Personal Essence. This is part of what “trust” means. Trust means that the inward journey will be rewarding in spite of whatever pains may be encountered along the way. Recognizing our estrangement from the Ground of our Being may be painful and humiliating, but beyond these “dark nights” or “little deaths” we have the hope of satisfying enlightenments or resurrections of aliveness.

These enlightenments, these resurrections are what good Christian theology has been pointing to with the term “Holy Spirit.” The word “Holy” means many things: whole, complete, awe-filled, perfect, real. And Spirit does not mean something “spooky;” it means experiences of profound aliveness, liberated self, essential freedom, authentic presence. Holy Spirit is the appearance in our actual living of our Personal Essence, that human nature we were constituted to be, that human nature we have misplaced or buried in the swamp of our self-constructed estrangement.

“Holy Spirit” also means the Spirit of God, the Almighty. “Holy Spirit” means the Awe of true personhood, and the “Almighty” means the Awesomeness that occasions that Awe. Awe and the Awesome are one experience with two faces. It is in this sense that the Holy Spirit is the presence of the Almighty God acting within us.

The Holy Spirit has many aspects. In Christian theology Trust, Love, and Freedom are the most inclusive and most used terms for summarizing these aspects. But other terms are also used to further describe Holy Spirit: hope, peace, rest, joy, and wisdom are examples.

The “We” Approach and the Everlasting Vanguard

The “It” approach can be said to lead to an impersonal experience of God, God as the absolute Otherness. The “I” approach can be said to lead to a palpable, personal experience of God, God the Awe or Spirit-Essence, the Personal Essence of being human. Finally, the “We” approach can be said to lead to a sociological experience of God, God as a body of people manifest in human history. The Christian Bible might be described as one long, continuous commentary on the “people” who trust and serve God. These people are led out of slavery, socialized in a new kind of law, deepened and trained by prophetic figures, led to new places, challenged in new ways. And in all these sociological situations, these people are challenged to see themselves as called by the God of history to be servants of all humanity. In other words, the Bible is primarily preoccupied with what it means to be the Everlasting Vanguard of human history. This “We” face of God, this second face of the Christian Trinity, is also associated with

the singular person, Jesus. Strange as it may seem to our overly individualistic era, Jesus, seen as the Messiah, is understood to be more than an individual. He is the historical dawning of a new humanity. He is the new Adam. He is the first fruit of a new harvest. He is the seed that is planted to grow a huge tree. He is the strange king of an invisible everlasting kingdom. He is the food that feeds a larger sociological body that itself becomes the food that feeds even larger multitudes of people. Those who are the fed (who thereby become the ongoing feeding and the food itself) are called "the Body of Christ." The Body of Christ is a sociological reality. This second face of the Trinity is not about the Awesome Mystery, nor about the Awe within us. It is about the Awed Ones who stand in trust before the Awesome Otherness and are inwardly filled with the Awe of Trust, Love, and Freedom.

The Everlasting Vanguard is a universal term for the People of God. It is important to make clear that the biblical view of the People of God does not only refer to those who espouse a Christian or Jewish religion. The People of God are those of whatever religious heritage (or lack of one) who are the Vanguard in openness and trust toward the specific presence of the Impersonal Absolute and who are likewise open and trusting toward the realization within their own inner beings of the Personal Essence of being human. The Everlasting Vanguard is a healing presence among the total body of humankind, enabling its restoration from its estrangement from the Ground of Being. And this Vanguard also leads that total human body in becoming aware of what is inappropriate in current social practice and in what might be better practice for the future. This Vanguard provides leadership in building the new social consensus that shall enable new directions in response to the Impersonal Absolute that confronts all humanity in the actual events of immediate history.

This sociological experience of God, this second person of the Christian Trinity, is weakly understood in typical individualistic Christian thinking. Even more weakly understood is its universal application for all people of all religious backgrounds. So I need to say more about it before I conclude this chapter.

Historical events are potentially healing events –healing for the human spirit. Human life is not a static pattern of cycles: human life is eventful. Human life includes events of falling away from realistic participation in the flow of time. And human life includes events of being restored to realistic participation in the flow of time. Reality itself is the power which restores us. We ourselves are the power that is responsible for the falling away. Human beings can participate with Reality in being part of the power that restores humanity. Such participating human beings have been known by many names: prophets, seers, master teachers, shamans, bodhisattvas, saints, visionaries, mentors, and the list goes on. Whatever name we use, the role I am pointing to is the role of being on the side of Reality over against the social commonalities that have become obsolete, delusory, reductionistic, inappropriate, or in some other fashion falling away from Reality.

Meeting one of these aware human beings who brings deeper awareness of Reality can be a healing event for a fallen-away human being or social group. In a healing event, it is Reality that is the healing power, not the human mediator of Reality. Nevertheless, the human mediator of Reality is important. The human mediator is that part of Reality which makes plain to a given group how Reality is confronting that group. But the healed person is restored to Reality not by the mediator but by Reality itself. The restored person then lives his or her own independent relationship with Reality without further need of the mediator. Nevertheless, the role of human mediators in Reality restoration is an important part of history and of the making of history.

Reality restoration takes place as an event in the life of a person who has fallen away from Reality. This fallenness is a tragic and unhappy state because we cannot actually get away from Reality. Reality is an all-powerful opponent of all flight from Reality. So a person in delusion or flight from Reality is in a hopeless state, for such flight is impossible. So the attempt to flee

becomes a form of suffering that has been well named with the word “despair.” Despair means being entirely hopeless. Escape from Reality is entirely hopeless. This state of abject hopelessness can become the reigning state of a human life to such an extent that suicide seems the most viable option. More often we suppress our despair into our unconsciousness so that we can go on living. The healing of our lives takes place when historical events bring that despair to the surface and thereby enable us to depart from the unrealism that is the cause of the despair.

Restorative events happen in individual lives and to whole societies. A restorative event can be said to happen to a society or a large segment of a society when a large number of individuals are restored by that event. An event can be said to be restorative when three things happen: (1) Despairing/delusory living is brought to the surface of awareness. (2) Living realistically is seen as the positive option. And (3) The option of realism is decisively chosen.

Restorative events often have Reality-mediating persons as part of the overall historical event. These persons may be remembered for centuries, or they may be forgotten entirely. Examples of remembered persons associated with restorative events are: Moses, the Buddha, Amos, Isaiah, Lao Tzu, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jesus, Mohammed. Such persons are peaks on the mountain range of persons who were Reality-mediation presences within restorative historical events. Each of these persons mediated Reality to others as part of a larger eventfulness taking place in social history. None of these persons was without clay feet. It was not perfection that made them Reality-mediating persons. Rather it was because, in their moment of history, they participated in enabling the three restorative dynamics listed in the last paragraph.

Let us reflect on Moses as an example: he was part of an overall event in which a few thousand people escaped from slavery within a typical hierarchical civilization. The people under Moses’ leadership accepted a series of fortunate accidents as evidence that living more boldly, freely, and realistically was the happy option. They somehow hung together through many temptations to quit until they came at last to the oasis of Sinai where they reflected with Moses’ help on the meaning of their journey together into this challenging wilderness. The result of these considerations was that they made a decisive group choice to organize their lives in accord with the realism that they had experienced together rather than the delusions that had characterized their lives as oppressed pawns in a hierarchical system. Moses was a key Reality-mediating figure in this whole drama, but the restorative event was larger than Moses, and the restoration of humanity that happened in that event was correctly credited to Reality operating alongside and through Moses rather than to Moses only.

Any event may be a restorative event. For example, the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in New York City and the attack on the Pentagon in Washington D.C. have become for many people a restorative event. The terrorists did not intend these happenings to be restorative. Nevertheless, the delusions and despairing living of many U.S. citizens have been brought to the surface by this event. And the event will be restorative to the extent that greater realism about the world is seen as a positive option and is decisively taken. By greater realism, I mean a long list of things: understanding how deeply modern industrial culture is hated by many people, understanding how obsolete the standard images of common defense have become, understanding how self-destructive U.S. policies favoring the wealthy and business corporations have been, understanding the need of the United States and other highly-developed nations to partner with realistic groups around the world in effectively resisting the reality-defying backlashes of people that want to return to the past, understanding the need of the United States and other highly developed nations to see that their own self interest and the well-being of all people everywhere is one tapestry. Such reality restoration is not happening to everyone, but to whomever it is happening these horrific happenings of September 11, 2001 may be seen as a restorative event.

Both of these examples illustrate that restorative events become restorative when decisions are made by the individual people to be restored. The option of realism has always been moving towards us and challenging us to participate in it. A restorative event is an event in which the push of Reality makes contact with our actual delusions and the option of realism is seen, favored, and taken.

Even though Buddhism has tended to focus on the awakening of individual persons rather than historical processes, the dawn of Buddhism was a restorative event within its originating culture, and it continued to be restorative as it adapted to other cultural settings throughout Asia. The current flourishing of Buddhism on the North American continent is a restorative event for many persons living in this historical setting. Contemporary Buddhism is exposing suppressed delusions, signaling realism as the positive option, and enabling thousands of persons to decisively embrace the option of living their lives more realistically.

Restorative events are happening all around us all the time. Some of them are quite invisible, happening only to a very few people. Some of them are vast sea-changes shaping the lives of almost everyone for centuries to come. Some of them include Reality-mediating persons who will be remembered for centuries. Some of them are happening to groups in which no one person stands out as a key factor in the restorative event.

History is not just facts about the past. History is not just meaningful stories. History is not just visions of the possible future. History is not just processes of change in our social commonality. History is also restorative events in which our despair is healed and our lives are restored to the happy living of our real lives. And wherever such restoration is taking place, the Everlasting Vanguard is present playing their part.

The Everlasting Vanguard is a dynamic of history itself. This Vanguard is the Awed Ones who are Awed by the Awesome Impersonal Absolute that is the Power of history and that confronts us in every event of history. History, when inspired and led by this Vanguard, is an unending process of restorative events, constantly moving from despairing relationships with the Reality that confronts us to relationships with that Reality that are happy, tranquil, enlivening, spirited, exhilarating. Such restorative eventfulness in the deep being of many persons undergirds and makes possible the outward processes of appropriate social change – the movement from obsolete social commonalities that are **no longer** relevant to the **not yet** of commonalities that are appropriate for our present and future lives. The Vanguard is key to appropriate social change as well as individual realization.

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The Impersonal Absolute, the Personal Essence, and the Everlasting Vanguard are three faces of one experience. When the “It,” “I,” and “We” approaches to truth are pushed to their fullest extent, human consciousness is opened up to this threefold experience: the Awesome Impersonal Absolute filling us with the Awe of Personal Essence and rendering us the Awed Ones who are also the Everlasting Vanguard of history.

This threefold experience is called “revelation” in the Christian tradition. Revealed truth is not scriptural statements dictated to a biblical writer by a supernatural being. Like any one of us, the biblical writer found his or her words of truth through having the threefold experience described above. And if any of us understands the biblical writer, it is because we resonate with him or her, and we resonate only if in our actual lives we also are experiencing this “revelation.” The authority of the Bible and the authority of those who through the centuries have interpreted the Bible rest upon such revelation. There are three approaches to truth, the “It,” the “I,” and the “We” approaches. Revelation is what happens to human beings when one or more of those three approaches to truth get pushed to their limits.