

What is Truth?

Part I of *The Enigma of Consciousness*

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A draft copy of a yet to be published
Philosophy of Religion

The January 2015 Version

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Introduction to Part One

My best friend in high school was a fan of President Harry Truman. He liked Truman because he talked bluntly and stuck with what he had to say no matter what others thought about it. Truman had a reputation for uttering hard sayings. “Give ‘em hell, Harry!” was a popular saying going around at the time. Some interviewer asked President Truman what he thought about that saying. Truman replied that he thought the saying was a bit misleading. Here is his famous reply, “I only tell them the truth, and they think it’s hell.”

I count this as a profound theological statement, applicable to the Final Reality. Reality is not wrathful or angry with us. Reality only tells us the truth and we think it is hell. A fuller truth is always a hell of an experience because it challenges some lesser truth to which we are still clinging and using to organize some portions of our lives. Furthermore, there is the humiliating fact that we never know the full Truth. The Truth with a capital “T” is a mystery, an almighty unknown that is pushing against us, but is unknown by us and unknowable to us. In the Gospel according to John, chapter one, verse eighteen, we see the words, “No one has ever seen God.” This applies to Jesus, Moses, Isaiah, Mohammed, Gandhi, Einstein, Joseph Smith, or whoever. The above-mentioned Johannine verse goes on to say that Jesus has made God known. This is not a contradiction with the first part of the verse; it means that Jesus has made the Final Mystery’s love for us known to us. This does not change the fact that the Final Reality or Truth is still a Mystery.

This enigmatic nature of Truth is not just a religious belief or a theological idea: it is a secular fact. Even the word “fact” is too weak. The Truth is this: the more we know about Reality, the more we know we don’t know. The more we know, the more we know our limitations, including the limitations of our finite minds to comprehend the Truth. This is a hard saying that feels like hell to anyone who is clinging to what they currently think.

Nevertheless, it is also true that there are approaches to Truth, and that in terms of these valid approaches to Truth, it is true that some statements about Reality are more true than other statements. Einsteinian physics is more true than Newtonian physics. And the philosophy of Truth that I am going to articulate is more true than what I used to believe, and it is more than true what many people still believe. So if you, my reader, hold to the notion that you already have the full Truth, or that Truth is such a distant topic that any statements you choose to hold are just as good as any other statements, prepare for a bumpy ride, yes “one hell of a trip” into the enigma of Truth.

Chapter 1

Beyond Consilience

Consilience: agreement between the approaches to a topic of different academic subjects, especially science and the humanities.

I came across the following quote as I was reading an article entitled “The Decider” by Tom Siegfried in the December 6, 2008 issue of Science News:

“Perhaps” write neuroscientists Alireza Soltani and Xiao Jing Wang, “we are entering a new period of consilience between the science of the brain and the science of the mind.”

The article is interesting in its news about the amount of new insight in brain research and how various parts of the brain relate to our inner mental experience. But the phrase “science of the mind” raises deep philosophical issues that are central to this book. Millions of smart people do not understand that there can be no such thing as a science of the mind. The word “mind” points to a subjective experience. Empirical science does not deal, and cannot deal with subjective experiences. There can be a science of the brain. There can be a science of human behavior, but the mind cannot be an object of scientific study. Why? Because the mind cannot be an object.

I will use the word “mind” to mean what we see with the inward “look” of consciousness concerning what we believe to be the workings of our brain and nervous system. This inward looking is not science so there cannot be a science of the mind. Scientists may look inwardly at their own mind’s process of hypothesis creation, but the test for the truth of a scientific hypothesis is found only in outward experiences that a group of scientists can all observe. The inward look is not a group experience. It is a solitary experience: one consciousness looking at its own conscious processes.

This inward looking approach to truth can be intelligently done, and systematically related with an objective science of the brain and nervous system. And my inward looking can be compared with the inward looking of others and these conversations can result in a body of communal wisdom. Inward looking is an approach to truth. But the inward looking approach to truth needs to be clearly distinguished from empirical science. Let’s call this approach to truth “contemplative inquiry.” Contemplative inquiry is not empirical science. It is different from science, when we define science carefully. As I will explain in the following chapters, there can be no consilience between science and contemplation. Science and contemplation indicate two different approaches to truth. Both approaches to truth are approaching truth about the same overarching Reality; nevertheless, these two approaches to truth need to be distinguished from one another in order to maintain philosophical clarity about what we mean by truth, consciousness, wonder, religion, realistic behavior, and more.

So what is scientific research and what is contemplative inquiry? And how are these two different approaches to the truth related to one another? I will show that without clear answers to such questions, an adequate understanding of consciousness is not possible. And if an adequate understanding of consciousness is missing, then we are also without an adequate understanding of religion. In the following chapters I will explore all this in some detail.

Further, if we do not know what we mean by “consciousness,” we do not know what we mean by “mind.” And, if we do not know what we mean by “mind” we do not know what we mean by “scientific research” or “contemplative inquiry,” for each of these approaches to truth is a function of the mind. Each are approaches to truth that the mind can be used to perform. The mind is a tool of our consciousness. The mind

never contains or reaches the fullness of truth, but it is a tool that can be used to approach the truth. And what is truth? This is an important question, a question that underlies many other key questions.

Consilience

I first met this word reading a book by Edward O. Wilson entitled *Consilience*. I read this book because I highly respected Wilson's earlier book *The Diversity of Life*. But I found *Consilience* disquieting. I saw that Wilson was putting too much faith in the scientific approach to truth and manifesting too little awareness of the contemplative approach to truth. In his book he seeks a way of explaining in terms of the scientific approach to truth, those experiences of truth commonly sought through the humanities, the arts, and religion. By "consilience" Wilson means a pulling together into one scheme of thinking this wide scope of human experience and thought.

Later, I read Wendell Berry's book *Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against a Modern Superstition*. The "superstition" Berry focused on was Edward O. Wilson's attempt at consilience. Berry encouraged me in my disquiet over Wilson's book. Berry satirized Wilson's effort to contain this broad scope of experiences within a single rational system. Berry maintains that Reality is a Mystery that is ultimately incomprehensible to any possible scientific overview. I join Berry in dismissing all hope for a Wilson-type consilience. And I am going to explore why this is so, why the scientific approach to truth is limited and why the contemplative approach to truth, which is also limited, is a necessary companion of the scientific approach. I will also explore how the contemplative approach to truth is limited, and why it cannot take the place of the scientific approach to truth. I am going to show that we need both approaches to truth, but that neither can provide a consilience that encompasses the other approach to truth.

Some will recognize this discussion as a new version of the old struggle between science and religion. And so it is. Many current forms of authoritarian religion have made conflict with science inevitable. And some forms of scientific philosophy have sidelined or dismissed religion entirely. I will explore how a full understanding of the scientific approach to truth and a full understanding of the contemplative approach to truth bring a fresh level of clarity to this old struggle. I will show that both science and religion are necessary parts of our life and how there need be no conflict between them. I will show that religion came into being to perform an essential function in human society, as essential as economics, politics, or education. There exists, of course, corrupt and obsolete religion, just as there is corrupt and obsolete economics, politics, and education. In Part Four of this six-part exploration, I will explore the proper function of religion and how that proper function can be illuminated by an exploration into the enigma of consciousness. These formidable tasks of clarification have long intrigued me. I hope they also intrigue you, and that you find the following efforts of clarification resonating with your own experience in these areas.

Chapter 2

The Scientific Approach to Truth

The scientific approach to truth yields what we often call, “objective knowledge.” 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.

The Nobel-prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman is a philosopher of science that I deeply admire. Here is my summary of his colorful description of the scientific approach to truth: (1) you guess a new “law” of nature; (2) you devise a test for that guess that can show to a community of observers in an outwardly observable fashion a “Yes” or a “No” to that guess; (3) if that test says “Yes,” the law stands for now until some test says “No”; (4) if that test says “No,” you guess again and continue this process. Furthermore, if there is no test that will test your guess, you are not doing science; you are doing speculation.

If we accept this definition of the scientific approach to truth, we find that scientific truth is both approximate and progressive. It is approximate, because scientific truth is never more than a human guess that works well for now. It is progressive, because once a “No” has been observed to a previous guess; there is no going back. For example, once the Einsteinian guesses were documented by the community of physicists, there was no going back to the Newtonian guesses as the normative postulates of physics. The science of physics went forward, guessing and testing new guesses on the foundations that the Einsteinian revolution had established.

As Feynman pointed out in his book *The Character of Physical Law*, the Einsteinian law of gravity was “discovered” in this way: Tests raised doubts about Newton’s formulation of the “law of gravity.” Einstein guessed something else. Tests were conducted. Results were better. A new law of gravity became our tradition. Observations of the orbit of the planet Mercury provides an example of how such a new theory is tested. The Newtonian theory of gravity did not account for the seemingly odd nature of that orbit. But when Einsteinian theory spelled out how gravity is a change in the nature of space rather than a force operating at a distance, the orbit of the planet Mercury was accurately predicted. Even more dramatic, the Einsteinian prediction about the equivalence of mass and energy was made obvious to the entire public when that first nuclear bomb blew a small Pacific island to smithereens.

It may seem to some that something more obscure than these simple dynamics is happening when physicists set up a multi-mile diameter circle of machinery to accelerate protons to near the speed of light and then crash them into one another. But here what they are doing: they are testing some guess about the elemental structure of the cosmos. It does not matter that these tiny subatomic particles are unimaginable to the human mind. For example, the electron is a picture in the human mind that no one has seen directly. Scientists have only seen signals on a screen and other observables. These observations tell us things about the elemental structure of the cosmos. Indeed, they tell us that this electron, this invisible “particle” also acts like a wave. Not only have we not seen the electron directly, *we must picture it in a manner that is contradictory to our common sense.*

Nevertheless, the scientific approach to truth is the same in the most complex arenas of scientific work: guess, test, and guess again. The fact that many of the elemental “objects” that physicists discuss can never be directly observed does not alter the essence of the scientific approach to truth. These “objects” are sense-validated bits of

human imagination. Their test for truth may have to do with visible streaks on a screen or visible movements of a dial or some other sensory experience. The factuality of scientific truth has to do with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile feelings entering into a human psyche. Though the love of mental order pervades the scientific method, its tests for truth are not found in the mind, but in the human senses of outward experience. It is experience that tests theory. A scientific theory is in need of improvement or abandonment if it does not pass these sensory tests. Any departure from this elemental understanding results in a bogus theory of scientific truth.

The “objective” nature of scientific knowledge is objective because in this approach to truth, we attempt to set aside our subjectivity and simply observe the “things” around us as they impact us through our senses. Such conscious noticing of our environment includes the functioning of our minds. The “things” of science are mental abstractions; we use our minds to form recognizable pictures of chosen aspects of the flow of our ongoing outward perceptions. An infant does not see a breast or a woman: it only sees total multi-sensory experiences and reruns of those experiences 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 these genetically provided images are still human creations by the human organism. They are theories that need to be tested in sensory experience. Scientific research is not required for testing at this infant level of living. All that is required is the image-using intelligence that the infant has in common with all animal life. The infant will find that nipple without the aid of sophisticated science. But the pattern is similar.

Sophisticated science requires the use of our abstraction-inventing minds to create clarified mental entities that point to and stand for differentiated aspects of our surroundings. Categories such as “cat,” “tree,” “woman,” “man,” “child,” are all creations of the human mind. Each of these words identifies rational forms that we associate with recognizable aspects of our ongoing flow of perceptions. Though we can meaningfully say that there are cats in our experience, the symbol “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 can 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 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 works with objective reality, but it also works with these rational forms that humans have created in order to point to the “reality” of our outward experience more usefully – that is, more related to what we already know or think we know. 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 scientifically. The “I” is not an “it” and therefore the “I” cannot be observed in the sense that science “observes.” The scientist is an “I” observing “its.” But the scientist as scientist is focused on the “its” not the “I.” This is true even though the scientist may spend considerable time in the subjective mind formulating theories to be tested. But the truth that the scientific approach is testing is not the truth of the subjective “I,” but

the truth of the environment of the “I”, an environment that the “I” has mentally formulated into objective “its.”

What I have just described is a 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. In a later chapter I will look in detail at the contemplative approach to truth that does deal directly with the “I.”

Let us examine further what we mean by a scientific fact. Science deals with facts, but 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.” Facts are indeed tested with these objective perceptions, but even these objective perceptions are carefully defined and humanly crafted mini-experiments. A perception is not simply there. Perceptions are also intellectual creations pointing to what we who are the community of scientists agree is there. Sensory signals are indeed coming into our brains; but when we mentally perceive those signals, we have created that perception. We have ordered it into a mind item. Facts are assemblies of such perceptions. Our facts change as our perceptions change, and our perceptions can change as we observe more carefully or in some way view more clearly our incoming signals.

The definition of a “fact” is further illuminated by distinguishing *historical facts* from the *facts* used in *natural science*. An historical fact is assumed to happen only once. Did Booth shoot Lincoln? Such a fact is not repeatable. It did or did not happen. And if it did happen, it happened at a particular place and time only once. But the facts used in the natural sciences are repeatable. We can run experiments over and over to see if we get the same results. This awareness that there are two types of facts warns us that facts are created by the human mind to fit within frames of reference known by that mind. Though this is clearly true, this does not mean that the human mind is the sole creator of a fact. The factuality of a fact is based entirely upon the sensory inputs coming into the mind. Though the mind creates the forms of factuality, the scientific mind defines factuality as a validity determined by sensory inputs from an “objective” world.

Good science includes a willingness to look beyond the inherited current theories and factual definitions. Good science is open to other facts that do not fit into the current consensus of objective knowledge. Indeed, the 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 an older theory. This is the great gift of science: it does not allow factually ungrounded superstitions to reign in the common mind of society. Science can and often does challenge every commonly held tenet to the test of factual verification. This does not mean that scientists cannot turn some of their discoveries into new dogmas and even new superstitions. For example, the clockwork or mechanical view of the cosmos turned out to be a superstition, not a factual truth. The mechanical quality of nature is only one small part of what nature factually is.

Science is a progressive movement toward ever-greater knowledge of the objective surroundings. There is no final scientific knowledge. There is always the possibility that more will be learned that will transform current scientific conclusions. Scientific knowledge is always approximate and tentative, never ultimate or final. But this does not mean that scientific truth is arbitrary. Rather it is an ongoing dialogue with what is factual, and this dialogue has a progressive nature. Once an objective truth is clearly seen, we cannot un-see it. We can improve it, but we cannot undo the advance. For example, once Darwin’s theory of evolution has gained traction through the work of many documenting scientists, we cannot reject evolutionary theory because we don’t like its implications for some of our cherished convictions. In other fields of study this

is even more obvious. When we fill our prescription for antibiotics at the doctor's advice, we are assuming a germ theory in biology that took the place of previous theories that we now easily dismiss even though there was some truth in them, but the whole truth applicable to our cure of an infection has been expanded. Scientific knowledge is continually expanding its comprehension, but that does not mean that we can take lightly the new vision it continually brings. There is no justification for the views of the antiscientific dogmatists who want to live in a world unformed by a Darwin or an Einstein or some other key scientist in the ongoing progression of scientific knowledge.

The truth that scientific knowledge is progressive is also the truth that it is approximate. No current theory is an end-of-the-road truth. Current theory is vulnerable to change though the assault of new facts. Yet, the past theories that have been so transformed were not wholly wrong. They too were approximate truth. These past theories may even hold fragments of truth better than the newer and more powerful theories that have replaced them. The best scientists know this and continue to mine past theories for clues for better theories to be tested for future knowledge.

Approximate and *progressive* can be seen as serious limitations on the veracity of scientific truth, but they do not undermine the basic truth quality of the scientific approach to truth. The scientific method is not illusory or wrong because its results are constantly proved wrong. Empirical science is a life method that is built into the nature of being human. Science is a sophisticated version of one of the natural and normal aspects of human thinking. The roots of science preceded the human species and the human symbol-using form of intelligence. A dog is a sort of scientist in its trial and error learning. The dog can venture assumptions, try them, and if they fail, try something else, until some "theory" actually works for its intended purpose. Both dogs and humans simply do not live their lives without this trial and error process of learning. In order to live better, we need truth; and trial-and-error science is one of the ways we seek truth.

But when we choose to view science as the all-inclusive pathway to truth, then we are living in an illusion. I will examine in a subsequent chapter how the "I" approach to truth (which I will also call "contemplative inquiry") is another approach to truth, an approach that is distinctly different from the scientific approach to truth. Nevertheless, I will show how and why the contemplative approach to truth is equally valid as the scientific approach to truth, and equally necessary for living our lives.

In order to see that both scientific research and contemplative inquiry are equally valid approaches to truth, we have to give up the notion that Reality is rationally understandable by the human mind. The word "Reality" with a capital "R" will be used in this book to indicate that Reality is a mind-assaulting Mystery that becomes ever more mysterious the more we know about it. As many good scientists have asserted in one form or another, "The more we know about nature, the more we know we don't know." If we resonate with such a statement, we are recognizing the Mystery (the yet unknown and finally unknowable) that surrounds and penetrates all our knowing. If we dream of someday discovering a scientific theory that explains everything, then we do not accurately understand science or Reality. We have entered into an illusion, an illusion about the capabilities of the human mind and the unfathomable quality of Reality.

In summary, empirical science is an approach to truth that yields a body of knowledge. The current body of knowledge is vulnerable to change. To conduct the approach to truth called "empirical science," the scientist creates overviews or theories to be tested by facts that have been humanly formulated from the flow of sensory experience. It is the sensory experience (sights, sounds, tastes, smells, feels) that gives facts their factuality. The human mind does not contribute factuality, it relates sensory

factuality to the rest of what the human mind already knows, or thinks it knows. The scientific approach to truth yields an objectivity about our surroundings that is true and yet approximate and progressive. The truth of science is approximate because it can be improved. It is progressive because once a new era of scientific research has been entered, you cannot go back to the previous era. Once we have a well-documented germ theory, we cannot go back to “demons” or “humors” as if bacteria and viruses are not real. Since Einstein’s theory of gravity has now been documented by the physics community of scientists, we cannot go back to the Newtonian theory, even though the Newtonian theory can still be used in special cases. Yet in spite of this progressive nature of scientific knowledge, no final scientific knowledge is possible or expected. Each new documented theory is still vulnerable to transformation as further sensory experience enters the scientific discussion. Part of the meaning of “objective” when applied to scientific knowledge refers to the communal nature of science. A factual formulation is viewed as objective if the community of scientists, who are versed in this topic, can independently test the formulation and come to the same conclusions. In the following chapters, I will dig deeper into the limitations of the scientific approach to truth, but these limitations do not mean that empirical science is not an approach to truth. Indeed, the process of empirical science defines part of what we mean by the word “truth.”

Chapter 3

Cause, Chance, and Choice

Cause, chance, and choice are three ways of interpreting our experience of Reality. In our ordinary living all of us use all three modes of interpretation. All three modes of interpretation appear in playing a game of cards. We explain the hand we are dealt with the story of *chance*. We explain the various plays that we make with the story of *choice*. And we use the story of *cause* to explain the movement of our hand that pulls a card and places it on the table. Notice that I am simply describing what we do. I am not making an argument on the basis of some philosophical system. Nevertheless, these three modes of interpretation, once we notice them, do indicate deep insight into the philosophy of truth.

First of all, the word "truth" presupposes that there is something to be discovered that is beyond the current content of the mind. Indeed, the mind does not contain the truth somewhere in its internal recesses. The mind is simply a tool we can and do use for approaching the truth. Cause, chance, and choice are three mental games we use to approach the truth. We assume that cause, chance, and choice are qualities to be found in Reality. But we need to check that out. We need to notice if the correspondences between our mental pictures and Reality are true to our experience. Cause, chance, and choice are processes of the mind, and all processes of the mind are creations of our species or perhaps creations of the evolution of our species. At any rate, it is not obvious that any of these mental contents correspond with Reality. To discern whether a mental process corresponds with the operations of Reality, we have to look and see. So let us look first of all into the discipline of physics and its attempts to approach the truth, the truth we seek through the sensory inputs from our environment.

Newton's laws of motion use the story of cause. First of all, he used the story of local cause – one billiard ball bumping into another. In his theory of gravity, Newton also used the story of cause from a distance – the sun of great mass attracting the planets. Einstein also favored the story of cause, but he rejected cause from a distance. All cause is local in Einstein's special and general theories of relativity. In his view of gravity, the sun does not attract the planets; the sun's great mass alters the character of space around the sun. The motion of the planets is "caused" by their interaction with the space they are touching. Einstein sought to extend the story of *cause* to explain the phenomena of quantum mechanics, but he never succeeded. No one has ever succeeded. It appears that the story of *chance* has proved necessary for our human minds to account for the activities of a photon of energy or any sub-atomic-sized particle of matter.

We might say that Einstein sought a consilience within physics and sought it in terms of the mental imagery of causal relations. He rejected probability or chance as an ultimate explanation of the physical realm. As he once put it, "I cannot believe that God plays dice with the universe."

Other physicists have been more sanguine with the probability mode of thought, but we amateur and professional philosophers of science may still be amazed that these two conflicting modes of thinking still reign in the discipline of physics. What are we to make of this? If we simply notice and accept that both cause and chance are no more than models of thinking located in the human mind, we find some illumination of our puzzlement.

When we play a game of pool, we are using the model of cause to judge what will happen as balls strike one another, bounce off rails, and enter pockets. Reality in this

limited sphere seems to agree totally with our causal thinking. We may use the probability story to explain the errors in our stroking of the cue ball, but we do not expect any uncaused options to happen among balls and rails. This is true in many, if not most, areas of our lives. We typically assume that every change has a cause that happened before that change happened. When we say, "Why did so and so happen?" we are assuming "causes" as the answer to that question. To speak of uncaused changes that are due to chance is a departure from our customary causal mode of thinking.

Probability thinking is also deterministic thinking: that is some probability number determines the outcome of the happenings we are talking about, but in this case the outcome is viewed as an array of options each of which is an uncaused occurrence. When we throw a dice we assume that each of its six sides is equally likely to turn upward. When we play a card game we assume that each of 52 cards is equally likely to be drawn. This notion of randomness is clearly in our minds, and we use the story of chance to predict outcomes. In the real world, one particular dice may not be perfectly cubical, and thus its faces may not be equally likely to turn upward. Similarly, the cards in a particular deck may not be equally slick or sticky. So the probability or likelihood that our mind assumes for the real world are in most instances approximate – that is, probable. When we figure poker hands, we assume that three of a kind is less likely than four of kind, and we can put a number to this probability or likelihood.

The probability mode of thinking has been developed into a complex mathematics we call "statistics." We answer many of our questions with estimates of probability. We drop our causality thinking and simply assume a randomness in reality that is loaded one direction or another, which "loading" we assume can be approximately measured with a probability number. Take the example of a poll taken on some political issue. The pollsters use a carefully selected sample of the population that has a high probability of matching the whole population with a predictable margin of error. But even this margin of error is probable. And even though the margin of error is highly probable, the specific truth about the whole population is not being predicted with an exactitude similar to balls and rails on a pool table. Chance is a different interpretive story than cause.

I am using simple illustrations to call our attention to the ordinary and well-known truth that both cause and chance are well-practiced modes of human thinking. Their correspondences with Reality are actual and useful to us, but we simply do not know whether Reality as a Whole is finally causal or finally random or neither or both. And the plot thickens still further with the introduction of a third interpretive story I am calling "choice."

Neither cause nor chance can explain the existence and the functioning of that enigmatic something we are calling "consciousness." The reality of consciousness presupposes a mode of explanation that we typically call "choice." ("Freedom" and "free will" are other terms we typically use to describe this aspect of our experience.) "Choice" is a mode of human explanation that we use to interpret those aspects of our lives that appear not to be handled with explanations of cause or chance. When we rise to go to the bathroom, we say that we choose to do this. There are causal factors involved. Our bladder is stretched by the presence of an accumulation of fluid. The coffee we drank earlier is being processed by causal factors in our biology. Nevertheless, we choose to go to the bathroom. We could pee on the living room floor, but we choose the bathroom instead. We explain these alternatives of future outcome with the story of choice. Choice is one of our useful explanations of real world happenings.

So what is choice? Choice is an action of consciousness that is not determined by any cause. Choice is an uncaused happening. Also, choice not a random event – that is, a choice is not the result of some chance, measurable and predictable by some

probability number. Rather, you or I, the conscious being, choose something based on a raw freedom that exists alongside of all the causes and probabilities. We choose with an infinite degree of arbitrariness. If this arbitrariness is not there, choice is not there. If there is any cause that totally explains an outcome, then choice was not operative. If so-called "choices" are caused, they are not choices. Choices are chosen. Also, choices are not outcomes that can be explained with the story of chance. No probability explains my choice to play my ace of hearts rather than my queen of hearts. I choose that. No probability explains my cat's jump upon the table. This cat chooses that. This cat might have chosen differently. And my cat has "learned" that the alternative choice is the one that is approved by me. We might use probability thinking to talk about the likelihood of the cat jumping on the table or the likelihood of my peeing on the living room floor, but we do not really believe that chance rather than choice is operating in these instances. We commonly expect cats and humans to make choices that are not based on any probability number. We intuit that conscious beings operate differently than photons, electrons, and other subatomic entities. These tiny foundational aspects of our physical being operate in a manner that is accurately predictable with probability numbers. We may not know what a particular subatomic particle is going to do, but its range of options is highly predictable. Statistically, though not causally, we know how these entities behave. We could know more, of course.

Biology, the study of living beings, uses (indeed needs to use) the explanations of cause, chance, and choice to cover the scope of our experience of these beings. We see causal relations in the mechanics and chemistry of the physical bodies of living beings. When we explain the survival of a specific species within its environment, we employ both cause and chance. When we explain the fertilization of an egg by a particular spermatozoa, we typically employ chance. When we explain mutations in the genes of a species, we typically employ chance. It might be that some mutations are caused. It might even be that some mutations are chosen. We don't know. But most biologists prefer to assume that mutations are chance happenings. Many biologists also assume that many happenings in the behaviors of conscious beings, especially humans, are chosen.

Choice is most obvious in our own human lives, but it is also quite obvious in the lives of the more complex multi-celled animals. Our cats and dogs clearly make choices. We demean their existence if we assume that all of their behaviors can be explained by cause or chance. Living beings are not machines – that is, not machines only. To some degree each living being is conscious. Living beings make choices that are not "caused." And they make choices that are not "random."

Some might say that humans make choices, but animals do not. But even simple microbes appear to make choices. When we watch amoebas under a microscope, we can notice that they take in signals from the environment concerning food or danger and make appropriate responses. Somewhere inside that amoeba's skin, a determination is made about the "meaning" of the incoming information, and a "response" is initiated by that organism. We can try to explain those observations with our mental story of cause, for there are causal relations among the chemicals and electrical signals as well as in accord with genetic patterns created in the past. But these amoebas are not rocks, and they do not operate like rocks. Nor are they dice or electrons with fixed sets of probabilities determining their actions. An amoeba can make mistakes, do unpredictable things, learn from experience, or so it seems to those of us who watch them carefully. To we human observers the amoeba appears to be alive in ways that are analogous to our own inwardly experienced aliveness. So for purposes of this discussion, let us simply assume that being alive includes choice as an aspect of being alive.

And let us notice within our own experience that choice is not the same as cause or chance. Choices are not caused; choices are uncaused selections by an enigmatic something that we will call "consciousness." And this choosing aspect within the fabric of the universe is not explainable with the story of chance or the story of probability. A choice is not random; rather it is a guess, a risk, a try that may or may not produce the expected result.

I am concluding that the capacity to choose is part of the basic meaning of the term "consciousness." A conscious being makes choices. A conscious being is attentive to its environment. A conscious being is sensitive and responsive. A conscious being is both gifted with attentionality and intentionality. A conscious being pays attention, and a conscious being takes initiative or intends responses. This does not mean that all human actions are chosen. Even though we humans have a highly developed form of consciousness, we do most of our actions unconsciously. For example, our childhood conditioning may, in many situations, "determine" our behavior rather than our paying attention and taking initiative through conscious choice. But we also have the potential to pay attention and take initiative, and we sometimes do. If we insist on reducing choice to cause or chance we are violating our own experience of being a conscious being. We are playing a mental game with our experience that does not fit our experience. If someone tells you that every happening is totally explained by its causes, that person is selling you a theory that is contradicted by your and my experience. If someone tells you that probability is the final and most basic of all explanations, that person is substituting the useful mental game of probability for our whole experience of Reality. Upon a close inspection of what is actually going on in the process of Reality, we can see validity in all three of these interpretations: chance, cause, and choice. The test of truth in with regard to these interpretations is not found within our minds, but within our experience of Reality.

Most important for the content of this book is our view of consciousness. Consciousness is not all that is going on within a living being. There are causal processes within our organism and its behaviors. There are also chance processes. But in addition to cause and chance there is consciousness. And consciousness makes choices. Choice is part of the description we need to make about living beings in order to have an adequate understanding of them.

Nevertheless, we will encounter some scientific-minded philosophers who will insist that both chance and choice are merely ideas in the human mind, but not ultimate factors in Reality itself. Probabilities, they will say, are only a convenience of the mind for use with complex systems: the ultimate explanation of which is still causal. A dice turns up as it does through a complex series of tiny causes. These strict determinists also say, that we only seem to make choices, the ultimate explanation is causal. Those causes, they say, are deeply hidden from consciousness; our seeming choices are merely the result of our genetic make up, our social conditioning, our personal history, or something else. But let us each ask our own consciousness if these assertions are actually so. Is it actually so that cause is the ultimate explanation for the living operation of our lives? Indeed, is it not more likely that cause, like chance and choice, is merely one of three mental modes of explanation invented by the human mind? It is not more likely that Reality is so vast that all three modes of explanation (cause, chance, and choice) have their relevance? Why do we prefer that there be one mode of explanation that is the ultimate mode? Can we not simply conclude that we do not have (nor need to have) an ultimate explanation of the operation of Reality? Is it not more realistic to admit that cause, chance, and choice are all three modes of explanation in the human mind that assist us to relate to a Reality that is beyond all three explanations? It may be that our mind or ego prefers simple answers, and there is a value for simple explanations over excessive elaborations where the simple will do, but there is also such

a thing as “oversimplification.” We commonly indulge in oversimplification in order to escape from disagreeable portions of our real experience.

If we choose to simply give up our unsubstantiated “need” to possess an ultimate rational consistency for Reality, we can say all three of these things: (1) Our beings are caused. (2) Our beings are an accident. And (3) our beings are chosen. All three modes of explanation are valid. We need not insist that one of these modes of explanation must cover our entire experience of Reality. Indeed, when we insist on the ultimate consistency of causality, we are choosing this mode of explanation! And we are probably choosing it in order to believe that the human mind has a capacity for a full correspondence with reality that it does not actually have. So let us choose the more “obvious” truth that the human mind is a finite development and that Reality is only fragmentarily understandable by this amazing and yet puny human capability we call “mind.” Our mind uses cause, chance, and choice because all three of these modes of explanation help us perceive and predict our sense of reality, our sense of past and future, our sense of present living, and the choices we might make today and tomorrow.

In the final analysis the human mind confronts Mystery (both in the currently unknown and in the Unknowable). The human mind is only a tool of a consciousness that is also mysterious, unknown in its fullness, unknowable except in that direct sense of knowing we experience when we consciously contemplate our own consciousness. And though Reality and consciousness remain mysterious, we are still curious; we seek to know with our minds what can be known in order to live our lives more consciously and fully. Part of what we can know with certainty is that our minds are only a meager tool in the quest for truth. With the use of our minds, our consciousness seeks a more useful hold on Reality (Reality with a capital “R” means the all encompassing THAT – a There-ness that is forever beyond our full comprehension).

Chapter 4

The Contemplative Approach to Truth

Scientific research entails an objectification of our perceptions into impersonal “facts” that are then ordered into ongoing knowledge. In addition to science, there is another approach to truth that focuses our consciousness on the processes of consciousness itself as experienced in our interior being. Ken Wilber calls this the “I” approach to truth and distinguishes it from the scientific approach which he calls the “It” approach.¹ In this reference “It” is a symbol for the outward, impersonal, and rational formulation of the scientist’s objective facts.

Clear scientific thinking need not dismiss the “I” approach to truth. By being objective in its approach, science is intentionally *silent* about interior truth. This vow of silence about the subjectivity of the scientist reveals the presence of and the need for another approach to truth. Ken Wilber called this approach the “I” approach to truth. I like that, and I will also use the phrase “the contemplative approach to truth.” The term “contemplative inquiry” is also useful.

The psychologist A. H. Almaas has given considerable clarity to the term “inquiry.” “Contemplative inquiry” can be defined as consciousness viewing the dynamics of consciousness itself. If we define “mind” as what consciousness experiences of the brain’s workings from the inside, then contemplative inquiry means consciousness using the symbol-using mind to point beyond those symbols to the process of consciousness itself.

The field of psychology illustrates the presence of both the scientific and contemplative approaches to truth. In a strictly scientific approach to the human psyche only human behavior and human reports of interior experience are studied. There is no way to objectively look “inside” at the consciousness of another human being. When we think we see another’s consciousness, we are actually looking inside our own consciousness and making comparisons with what we observe about another person’s behaviors and that person’s reports about their inner experience. Psychology is a field of study that straddles the scientific approach to truth and the contemplative approach 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 is another aspect of human culture that came into being to illuminate our interior experience. Unlike psychology, art does not need to even pretend to be scientific. Indeed, art needs to be liberated from objectified reason. Artists need to feel free to use wildly expressive forms of symbolism – myth, ritual, icon, dance, drama, story, song, poem, painting, sculpture, and architectural design. The truth of artistic expression is not the truth of science. It is part of an approach to truth I am calling “contemplative inquiry” or the “I” approach to truth.

Outer and Inner Time

In the contemplative approach to truth, the essence of time is experienced differently than the way we experience time in the scientific approach. In the scientific (or “It”) approach to truth, time is pictured as a line representing past, present, and

¹ Ken Wilber; *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995). I am not following Wilber’s models exactly, but I credit him with inspiring me in constructing the models I will use.

future. This line is divided up into years, hours, seconds, milliseconds, and other measurable “lengths” of time. Time is viewed as 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 the scientific point of view is the present. The past can be ordered into plausible stories. The future can be predicted in terms of more plausible or less plausible, likely or unlikely outcomes. But the present is viewed as a point on a line that divides past from future – an infinitesimal nothingness that is neither past nor future.

But in our contemplative approach to truth, we do not experience the present as nothing. Indeed, from the contemplative perspective the present is the only time there is. The past is only a memory – a memory experienced in the present. And the future is only anticipation – an anticipation experienced in the present. In the contemplative approach to truth, the time is always NOW. (I will capitalize NOW in order to symbolize the felt lastingness of our conscious experience of time.) Our contemplative 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, time is experienced as a flow, as a ceaseless changing of content. This flowing content is coming into being and going out of being in each moment of experience. This flow can include the relative continuation of some aspects of our experience while other aspects of our experience begin or end with relative abruptness. Consciousness is a flow. And our consciousness of consciousness is a flow. And this flow is taking place through an enduring stillness we call “NOW.”

Further, consciousness is not merely a passive attentiveness to the flow of the NOW. Consciousness can interrupt or redirect this flow. Consciousness is a capacity for taking initiative, a capacity for intentionality, a capacity for choosing aspects of reality to focus upon. We choose memories of the past to interpret. We choose anticipations of the future to embrace or avoid. Consciousness includes making decisions in the present to move the flow of Reality in chosen directions through employing the powers of consciousness, intelligence, body movements, as well as our social accumulation of historical power that is currently allotted to the subject doing the contemplating. All this attention and intention takes place in the NOW of consciousness. The future NOW is being affected by conscious choices, and also that future is going to be a surprise beyond the control of consciousness.

When we are using the scientific approach to truth, we view time objectively as a line extending backward into the past and forward into the future. Strange as this may seem, we do not have to choose between our scientific knowledge of time and our personal experience of time. Both are valid in their own way. We confront a seeming contradiction between these two approaches to truth because the finite human mind is attempting to describe a truth that is beyond the mind’s capacity. Neither of these two approaches is wrong; nor is either all-inclusive in the sense that it can dismiss the validity of the other approach. Perhaps this situation is similar to how contemporary physics views light as both waves and particles. We have these contradictory images of light because the actuality of light is more than what can be contained in either picture. Similarly, the actuality of time is more than what can be pictured by the human mind in one consistent picture.

Outer and Inner Space

Our three-dimensional picture of outer space works well for our navigation in the world, but here again we have a different awareness when we focus on the contents of contemplative inquiry. In contemplative inquiry we do not have a subject viewing an

object that is external to the viewer. The “subject” doing the inquiry is also the “object” of the inquiry. Some philosopher might argue that the “subject” is seeing his or her consciousness as an “object” that existed in the past, but this view is inadequate, for memory and anticipation are parts of what is happening NOW to the “I” of consciousness. This means that when we have opted for the process of contemplative inquiry the dualism of subject and object has been replaced. A subject (“I”) is inquiring into the contents of an inner space known only to that “I.” Further, that inner space is present only NOW. There is no “objective experience” in the scientific sense. Inner space is a construction of the “I” in the here and now.

The scientist, using the scientific approach to truth, can realize that he or she is a subjective “I” that observes objective inputs that are not the subjective person doing the observing. But this scientific observer keeps a distance from the things observed. That is part of what it means to call science the “It” approach. Science does not study the conscious “I,” even though the scientist is clearly a conscious “I” studying some specific realm of “Its.” Science can correlate the reports and behaviors of conscious beings with the brain functions that can be studied in an objective laboratory. Scientific theories can be formulated to say which functioning entities of the human brain correspond with which reports from a sample of brain owners who are reporting their feelings of fear or joy or whatever. Note that such scientific work does not entail a direct experience of consciousness. Only the brain owners looking into their own inner experience have a direct experience of consciousness.

In the “I” approach to truth there is no inquiry into the brain as an outwardly experienced entity, and there is no “need” for correlating inward reports with brain functions. Rather, the “I” approach focuses on the solitary person’s experience of his or her own consciousness. If the word “brain” is used in the contemplative context it means inwardly noticing subtle feelings in the head area. The word “mind” is the word most used for our inward experience of brain functioning.

In the “I” approach to truth we can notice the operation of something we call “mind” handling images and symbols. We can notice how mind correlates these elements of thought with sensory inputs that are directly impressed upon the inner being as contents of consciousness. “Sensory inputs” is a scientific metaphor. When we use the term “sensory inputs” as contents within the field of consciousness, we are pointing to an inner experience of specific sounds, sights, smells, tastes, and touches. These sensations are movements within the field of consciousness. Thoughts are also movements within the field of consciousness. Emotional feelings are likewise movements within this field of consciousness. Everything in inner space is part of a flow though the ever-present NOW.

As we attempt to describe how different the “I” approach is from the “it” approach a confusion also arises about the meaning of the word “objects.” Neither scientific research nor contemplative inquiry observes objects. Scientists observe sensory inputs. Objects are mental creations that give meaning to these sensory inputs. No one has actually seen an electron or a proton or an atom. These are all inventions of the human mind to hold some very carefully gathered sensory inputs. We could say the same for the object “cat.” We have created “cat” to hold in our minds our experiences of a certain set of moving, jumping, meowing sensations. Similarly, when the contemplative approach is observing our interior subjectivity, we have only our conscious noticings. We are inventing with our minds whatever interior “objects” we say we notice. For example, states of feelings or patterns of thought are just a set of noticings to which we have given defining names. This is a surprising insight only because our mind is always at work to help us with our inputs and noticings. We have to slow our mind down to a very slow walk to notice how much of what we assume to exist has been created by our busy minds. Obviously, we intend for our mental creations to have

helpful correspondence with what we actually experience, but we can notice that we create this correspondence and recreate it again and again. Unless we pay attention to this dynamic, we will drift into some humanly invented unreality from which perspective we then flee or fight with what is Real.

The Limitations of the Contemplative Approach to Truth

An experienced contemplative inquirer, Rupert Spira, inadvertently helped me see more clearly the limitations of the contemplative approach to Truth. Focusing on our experience (by which he meant “inner experience”) Spira noted how we cannot discern where a line is located within the experience of conscious knowing between what is known and its knower. Conscious knowing includes consciousness, mind, body, and the beyond body inputs as one functioning whole within our inner “space.” Where does the knower leave off and the known entity begin? Spira concludes that our experience reveals something strange to our widely accepted idea that there is a subjective knower and an objective something that is known. Our experience reveals, according to Spira, that there is no such separation. That is, there is no separate self that knows and there is no separate object that is known. The knowing and the known are all one process of reality. Spira applies this to the whole of Reality. Our conscious knowing of the Mystery of it all does not imply a separate self that is knowing the Final Reality. Therefore, who we ARE and what Reality IS is one unity. Self and Reality are one cloth. “Separate Self” is just an idea in our minds that we have devised, but which idea has no real reference in our experience.

I can see that Spira is consistent in his reflections, provided that we restrain ourselves to our inner experience – that is, to what I have called the contemplative approach to truth. My critique of his conclusions boils down to this question: Why restrain our approaches to truth to the contemplative approach? There is in human history another well-developed approach to truth that concludes that even a cat has a separate self, that a worm has a separate self, and that a human certainly has a separate self. Do we actually need to or want to dismiss this approach to truth? However weird it may seem to have two contradictory approaches to truth, let us look at how we, as scientists, do find it useful to begin with the basic understanding that I as a human being am a subjectivity that can be objective about inputs to my organism. This approach to truth is also limited as we have seen, but let us be open to the notion that it is no more limited than the contemplative approach to truth. Seeing myself as a distinguishable organism with an interior subjectivity that is viewing other distinguishable realities reflects an experience of some sort. Also, reflective of some sort of experience is intuiting a Final Mysterious Reality that encounters my organism as a Wholly Other that audits all my subjectively arrived at fragile conclusions. In other words, this separate-self model of thought contains some sort of connection with Reality that the contemplative approach to truth omits.

I think one reason some contemplatives prefer excluding the scientific approach to truth (or at least limiting it to a somewhat useful mind-game) is that the separate self-imagery implies the finitude of our consciousness. That is, it implies that our consciousness dies dead along with our body and its mental functioning. Even to the honest scientist, it may seem true that consciousness is a mysterious force in the cosmos (something that we do not understand), but that need not mean that human consciousness is, in any way, immortal, or in some way of One essence with the Final Reality.

I find it plausible to conclude from my experiences that consciousness is finite – that when consciousness confronts Final Reality, the encounter is like hitting a STONE WALL or TOTAL BLACKNESS that the light of consciousness cannot penetrate.

Furthermore, I can imagine that the very existence of my consciousness is dependent upon that Final Reality for each moment of its existence. It is not an immortal soul or a monad due for further incarnations, but is more likely a dependent something that will require a resurrection of the body, mind, and consciousness if it is to enjoy a post-death existence. Yes, it seem most likely to me that immortality, reincarnation, and resurrection are all three myths of the mind that each witness in their own way to the truth that the human does have a conscious relation with the Eternal, that consciousness is indeed a stretch between experience of the Eternal and experience of the temporal. And that such a consciousness is a like a “third term” neither exclusively Eternal nor exclusively temporal but a mysterious something that is conscious of its itself as conscious of both the Eternal and the temporal. More on this paradox later.

Living with Contradictory Approaches to Truth

While the scientific and contemplative approaches to truth are quite different and contradictory in many ways, yet each of them includes a view of the other approach. When we opt for the “I” approach, we view the scientific approach to truth as one of the useful processes conducted by the interior mind. Within the contemplative approach we see that the scientific line of past and future, divided by an infinitesimal point called the “present,” is merely a concept in the mind. This line of time can be viewed as a useful concept for organizing memory and anticipation, but this organization of memory and anticipation takes place in the living NOW. The “It” approach to truth is seen as a sophisticated mental tool for evaluating memories, assessing anticipations, and making decisions. From the contemplative view, the whole of science is seen as an activity in the NOW conducted by consciousness using the facilities of the mind.

When we use the “It” approach to truth to view the “I” approach to truth, we see 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, these reports about states of consciousness are “Its” – objectively conceived states that exist in living animals. A clear scientific philosophy will assert 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. Within such an understanding, good science is respectfully silent about consciousness and waits 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 topics are beyond the competence of science, for consciousness is an “I” not an “It,” and only “Its” exist in the realm of research for which science is competent.

If a scientist attempts to minimize or dismiss altogether the contemplative approach to truth (as some philosophers of science tend to do), the actual scientific person faces an enigma. As a human person the scientist is a subjective being, but in the *dedication* to be objective, the scientist must be *silent* about his or her own subjectivity. This intentional silence is a witness to the existence of subjectivity and to the need for an approach to truth that deals with it. This “other-than-scientific” approach to truth is what I am pointing to with the term “contemplative inquiry.”

On the other hand, if a dedicated contemplative inquirer attempts to minimize or dismiss altogether the scientific approach to truth (as some mystical philosophers tend to do), this contemplating person faces this enigma: his or her memory and anticipation would be without content if the objective (scientific) approach to truth were not also operative. The contemplative inquirer commonly accepts patterns of objectivity about past memories and about future anticipations. For example, notions about a Big Bang beginning or about galaxies, stars, planets, species of life, evolution, or human history

could not have entered consciousness without the operation of the scientific approach to truth. I am using the phrase “scientific approach” very broadly. Humanity has always been “scientific” in the elemental sense of ordering sensory inputs. Contemporary science is a sophisticated version of a truth-seeking process that is essential to human mental functioning. Also, other species also do trial and error learning with what I will call “images” rather than word and mathematical symbols.

Humans also use their image-using mind in trial and error learning. Let us use the illustration of attempting to bat a baseball. Our image-using mind turns the sensory inputs of the approaching ball into a sequence of memories – into an imagined path that is curving or not curving and is heading toward some anticipated location as it passes me, the batter. This elemental experience of the mind’s working is a primitive aspect of the human mind’s evolution, an aspect of mind functioning that we share with the dog catching a Frisbee. The conceptual complexity of contemporary scientific research is a sophisticated enhancement of the experience of that dog, or of that batter watching a ball approach the batter’s box. Science is a sophisticated operation with symbols of this more primitive mental process present in both dogs and humans. From a memory of sensory inputs, science fashions theories about the behavior of reality and thereby anticipates the future in meaningful ways.

There is no escape from the scientific approach to truth. The most accomplished and dedicated mystic of contemplative excellence is still participating in the scientific approach to truth. Each human being is both scientist and contemplator. These two approaches to truth are unavoidable – even though many humans persist in a foolish attempt to make one of them their whole quest for truth.

Chapter 5

It, I, and We

The distinction between the “It” and the “I” approaches to truth has been thoroughly explored for many decades,² but the concept of “We” needs much more attention. The reality of “We” is something more than can be explored with contemplative inquiry. And the reality of “We” is something more than a complicated object that is understandable through scientific examination. A “We” is at least two “I”s, which makes it more than an object. And because “We” is at least two, it is more than an “I” inquiring into that person’s own inner “I.”

Intimacy

Let us start by examining an intimate relationship between two persons, two conscious “I”s. Neither of those “I”s can see into the inner being of the other. Each needs the reports from the other and the behaviors of the other to intuit what is taking place within the inner life of the other. The guesses or “intuitions” about the life of the other are based on the inner knowing of one’s own inner being. Sensing the inner life of another is based on the resonance that I experience through knowing my own self. Of course, we can be mistaken about another person. Such mistakes are usually rooted in blocks we have to paying close attention to the other person or in mistakes about our own person that we are projecting upon the other. Mistakes can also be based on the primal fact that we never understand any aspect of Reality fully. Nevertheless, we do often intuit (or guess) quite well elements of truth about the lives of others. Sometimes we are closer to knowing the truth about these persons than these persons are of knowing their own being. This limited, but real, knowing of one another is the foundation of intimacy.

Much more could be said about the nature of intimacy, but my concern in this chapter is simply to call attention to the fact that an interpersonal relationship between two persons cannot be understood through contemplative inquiry alone. The wisdom derived from contemplative inquiry helps, but is not sufficient. Wisdom about interpersonal relations comes from experiences with interpersonal relationships. And this learning is something different from contemplative inquiry. We are observing our own responses to the other, and we are observing the other’s responses to us. There is a scientific element in such observing, but interpersonal learning is also something different from scientific learning. Interpersonal learning requires interior sensibility as well as outward observation. As we reflect deeply on the nature of intimacy we learn that we have a “We” approach to truth going on that needs to be distinguished from both the “It” approach and “I” approach.

Martin Buber helped us with this topic in his discussion of “I-Thou” relations. The “I-it” relation that we have with a hammer is different than the I-Thou relationship we have with another human being. In the latter we are aware or can be aware that there is another “I” looking back. Even though we do not experience the other “I” directly, we are somehow aware that the human other is not a hammer or any other inanimate object. In the I-Thou relationship there is a conscious being who has a perspective on my conscious being. Unlike a hammer another person has another sense of reality agreeing or disagreeing with my sense of reality. This constitutes a boundary to my

² I am thinking of the work of Martin Buber in *I and Thou* as well as the work of Lewis Mumford in *The Myth of the Machine*. These older writers have been followed by a raft of contemporary psychologists, religious teachers, and philosophers of consciousness. Among those I most treasure for exploring this difference between the “It” and “I” approaches to truth are A. H. Almaas and Ken Wilber.

being that a hammer does not provide. And there is a potential inspiration and benefit provided to me that a hammer cannot provide. The interpersonal relation can assist me to know my own being better. A hammer cannot do that. I do not seek out a hammer for counseling.

We somehow know that it is a reduction of what is real to treat our "I-Thou" relations as if they were "I-It" relations. Very few other persons tolerate being treated as a mere thing in "my" perceptive world. And each of us can sense distaste when we are being treated as a mere object in someone else's world. We can experience something uncanny about looking into another person's eyes for a sustained period. We can realize that there is another "I" looking back. In such an experience we can experience a disquieting contradiction to any belief we may harbor that we are the only consciousness in the cosmos.

While we can understand Sartre's remark that hell is other people, we also know that when we surrender any need we have for being the one and only person, other persons are a blessing to us. When another person challenges my illusions, that may be painful, but it is also a blessing in terms of enabling my more truthful living. Two perspectives on Reality can be experienced as better than one. Like seeing with two eyes, two people can often see more clearly than one.

Also, encountering another "I" is often needed to inspire me to contemplate further the enigma of being the "I" that I am. While I must view my own "I" with my own solitary eyes of consciousness, the behaviors and reports of another "I" can call my own inner reality to my attention and can correct some of my misunderstandings about myself and others. Indeed, intimacy with others is not something established by me. When I awoke to being an "I," other "I"s were already there offering intimacy to me.

Intimacy is an enormous topic that it would require a whole library of books to fully describe. My purpose here is call attention to how exploring the nature of intimacy between two "I"s requires something more than exploring the "I" we explore in the contemplative approach to truth. It is also something more than what we explore in the "It" approach of scientific research. Furthermore, this approach to "We" realities is not simply a combination of the "I" and "It" approaches. We are viewing a third approach to the wholeness of Reality: the "We" approach to truth.

Commonality

In addition to intimacy, commonality is another aspect of the "We" approach to truth. Every relationship between two people or among many people includes something we can call "commonality." The language we use to speak to one another is an example of commonality. We also have common modes of association, common customs and moralities, common styles of living, common methods of doing things, common educational systems, commonly inherited wisdom, as well as common religious symbols and practices. We also have common political and economic systems in which we live. We may be critical of much of this commonality, but we would not be human without some sort of commonality. It is seldom true that anyone would want to discard all inherited commonality. Most of the time we simply want to repair part of the commonality in which we live. The forces of a change movement will use much of the inherited commonality to make their desired changes. In a word, we conduct all our intimate relationships and all of our participation in social change within some aggregate of common social designs.

Our interpersonal relations take place not only within a cultural commonality but also within a common political environment and a common economic environment. The "We" approach to truth includes attention to cultural, political, and economic commonality. Such attention is aided by both scientific research and contemplative

inquiry, but neither of these approaches to truth is enough to fully understand the experience of social commonality. For this we need the “We” approach to truth.

The Consensus Process

So how does commonality arise and change? Commonality comes into being through the consensus of a group of human beings. We are born into but also choose to function within a given social commonality. Many artists, inventors, organizers, teachers, writers, activists, leaders contribute to the advent and development of this commonality. Intentionally or willy-nilly, each group of people chooses to operate within inventions of commonality. It may be that our particular commonality was chosen by a small, powerful group who more or less forced it upon the rest of us. Perhaps persuasion was used rather than violence or the threat of violence. Perhaps we were just born into this commonality and were compassionately indoctrinated into it by parents who were mostly concerned to prepare us for living in the real social world that we have on our hands. No matter how our participation in a given social commonality came about, we joined it – to some extent willingly. We may also be rebellious or critical of elements of this commonality. We may be dedicated to improving it or changing it or perhaps leaving it and finding another, better commonality. However that may be, what we need to understand is that every commonality came into being and comes into being through the establishment on an operating consensus among those participating in it.

So what is consensus? Properly understood, consensus does not mean everyone in a group agreeing on something. Nor is consensus some ideal like-mindedness that never entirely exists among any set of unique human beings. Consensus simply indicates a willingness of a group of humans to go along with some common mode of living together. Disagreements can still exist about what this means, or how important this is, or when and how it needs to be changed.

Consensus can also mean the willingness of a group of humans to join together in a movement for changing the common mode of living with which they started. Humans who devote themselves to a project of economic, political, or cultural change must consent upon some sort of vision, strategy, and group commonality in order to carry out their change project. Perhaps it is a troupe of actors putting on a play. Perhaps it is a group of protesters shutting down a coal-fired power plant. Perhaps it is a group of disciples following a particular teacher. Perhaps it is a group of devotees practicing together some religious ritual or discipline. In whatever human beings willingly do together, the dynamic of consensus is operating.

Again, it must be clarified that a group can embrace consensus in spite of having serious disagreements. Those disagreements are simply part of the consensus within which that group consents to continue functioning. As an extreme example, the peasants of a dictatorship may have serious disagreements with the policies of their king but, nevertheless, consent to be part of this kingdom rather than some other kingdom or trying to build a society on their own. Two political parties may disagree vigorously about many things, but nevertheless consent to operate within the same political system. Among practitioners of a religious organization there may be disagreements that are simply part of the ongoing consensus to be members of that religious organization. Even the smallest groups of consensus builders have disagreements. Sometimes people do what the Quakers called “stand aside” from supporting certain directions of consensus taken by the group. Standing aside means that one disagrees with the direction chosen, but nevertheless consents to remain part of the group and thus allow the undesired direction. If a group values the active participation of everyone, they will take dissenting persons seriously and make every

effort to include their dissenting insights as much as possible. If a person truly believes that the entire worth of the group is destroyed by a proposed consensus, making that known means stating the possibility of leaving or splitting the group into opposing factions.

I will not discuss the details of good methods for facilitating consensus-building discussions. I am only trying to define “consensus” in a general way in order to point to something universal within the conduct of building, being, and rebuilding social commonality.

When consensus does not exist to any degree whatsoever, a group typically breaks up into two or more opposing groups. That may be two or more religions, two or more political parties, two or more nations, even two or more warring factions. Where there are two or more classes within one society, the most powerful class may be enslaving the other classes (or races or cultures or genders). Even where serious oppression exists, a weak consensus may exist across those harsh boundaries, but such a society is vulnerable to revolution or fragmentation. If conflicts among opposing aspects of a group or society are to be overcome, a new truth must be found that all the factions can more fully consent to live within. The strength of a society ultimately depends upon the fullness of the consensus with which it is operating. The search for such a practical, workable truth by which to socially exist is the process I am calling the consensus approach to truth. Along with the intimacy approach to truth, the consensus approach to truth is part of the “We” approach to truth.

Voting and the principle of majority rule provide only a rough approximation to finding consensus. Democracies that count on majority rule often realize that the majority’s options need to be limited by a constitution-based legal system that protects the human rights of minorities from the majority. Consensus processes provide the minorities with more influence and more adequately honor the fact that fresh truth is always a minority position.

Workability Verification

The “We” approach to truth is verified in part by the factual empiricism of scientific research. It is also verified in part by contemplative wisdom from the “I” approach to truth. But additional verification is needed to complete the “We” approach to truth. “Workability” is a word for that something more. We are employing the “We” approach to truth whenever we are asking this core question: “What actually works as a truth for directing this social group at this time in history in directions that this group must, needs, or wants to go to meet its challenges?” Such truth is not a rigid ideology or a directive from some supposedly divine source. It is the result of hard work by intensely thoughtful persons respecting one another and struggling with one another for a truth to live by that deals with an appropriate social response to existing natural and social challenges. The employment of some sort of consensus process to find a workable truth for a common social life together is a truth quest that is intrinsic to the social life of humanity. It is a third approach to truth. Both the reality of intimacy and the reality of commonality in human life make possible and necessary this “We” approach to truth.

Chapter 6

The “We” Approach to Truth

In this chapter I will examine further what constitutes truth in the “We” approach to Truth. “Truth” can mean: (1) the Unknown Unknown that humans face, and (2) a knowledge that humans possess in their minds. The phrase “The ‘We’ approach to Truth” implies both meanings. A capitalized “Truth” can indicate the still Unknown Objectivity, distinguishing this meaning of “Truth” from the “truth” of a specific group consensus. As spelled out in the last chapter, a group “consensus” is not some sort of absolute certainty. It does not even mean an articulation with which everyone in the group agrees. Consensus means an articulation with which a group is willing to operate for the time being. A consensus can be said to be “true” to the extent that it “works” as a pattern of operation that carries out the values of the group.

Let us examine more closely the test for truth that I am calling “workability.” Some social designs just do not work in relation to promoting the sanity, survivability, and other values and purposes of the members of the consensing group. Some social designs are without the minimum beauty for nurturing the human spirit. Some social designs are without the minimum justice for holding the group together as a cooperating body. Some social designs destroy the environment on which this or other groups depend. Some social designs just do not work well for a complex of reasons. In social affairs the pragmatic value of workability is important: it is the very essence of the social or “We” approach to Truth. As the above illustrations imply, there is a degree of arbitrariness in our workability tests for truth. Any given society has numerous roads to workability. Nevertheless, this is the aim of a reality-affirming consensus process: to design guidelines for operation that are workable for this group’s members and for the impact of this group upon the whole human species and upon the planet on which all groups and societies must live.

I have already noted the communal aspect of scientific research and the communal aspect of contemplative inquiry. The “We” approach to truth is something more than the communal components of these other two approaches to truth. It has to do with pulling together into an overarching social consensus the scientific findings and the contemplative discoveries currently operating within that particular society. All systematic philosophers – Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, many others, including you and me – do this kind of pulling together in dialogue with others. Such systematic thinking is a “We” approach to truth. This book is a “We” approach to truth in the sense that I, in dialogue with others, am seeking to make a contribution to the overall social consensus about what is workable for human life on Earth at this time.

The “We” approach to truth is also present in the mundane aspects of our lives. Here is a simple illustration. Let us say that we have learned by empirical testing that throwing a wingless body off a high place results in a rapid descent to the ground below – that is scientific knowledge. And science cannot determine whether or not I love my cat – that requires contemplative inquiry. 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 scientific knowledge. Let us suppose that I discover that I do love my cat. Then, the “We” approach to truth might be illustrated as a pull together of these two bits of awareness. A useful overview of truth would be: “If I love my cat, I would not be wise to throw him out of a tenth-story window.”

Human culture is made out of millions of such bits of pull-together of what we have found to be scientifically true, contemplatively true, and workable. Human culture is a

We-construction. No one person creates it. We create culture through our capacities to share with each other our awareness about what is so and what patterns of wisdom and association enable us to live together in the most lively fashion.

This process of culture creation is very old. It reaches back hundreds of thousands of years. It probably preceded the evolution of our species. It is probably true that our enlarged brain evolved in order to do the ever more complex culture building that our sequence of species in the hominid line were doing. Surely many of those primitive experiments in culture building failed: perhaps their design did not maintain sanity, inspire motivation, deal with economic realities, handle crisis, or whatever. Some societies were simply unlucky. But only those societies that maintained *workable* sanity and survival skills were able to pass on to following generations their communal wisdom. This process continues today. The inherited traditions of past cultures are valuable to the extent that they have indeed maintained sanity, survivability, and other critical values. I am not implying here that survival implies that a society is good. Perhaps a surviving society is exceedingly mean in its patterns of injustice. Social workability includes surviving, but it also includes remaining sanity enough to operate humanely.

Fresh challenges to sanity, survivability and other workability values arise with each change in social circumstances. Fresh scientific knowledge enters the discussion. Fresh contemplative wisdom enters the discussion. Fresh pull-togethers are assembled, taught, and used with the hope of fostering further sanity, continued survival, and quality living. This is the "We" approach to truth – the consensus-building approach to pulling together ever-fresh articulations of truth that promise to be socially workable.

Works of art, philosophy, sociology, history, etc. pull together our fragments of truth. Each of these disciplines of thought can illustrate the "We" approach to truth. Socrates was a breakthrough thinker, a contemplative innovator. Plato and Aristotle were his systematizers, writing for the "We" of their culture and the future of their culture. Archimedes, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Einstein were breakthrough innovators in scientific research. They were followed by their cultural systematizers. The Buddha was a contemplative innovator followed by his systematizers. Jesus was a contemplative innovator. Paul and the Gospel writers were the initial systematizers of this breakthrough in contemplative awareness. Augustine was the grand champion of a long series of systematizers of Greek and Biblical heritage. Whatever obsolescences, omissions, and flaws we find today in Augustine's overview, we can still honor him for the power of his work, a work that laid cultural foundations that lasted eight hundred years before meeting major overhaul.

Thomas Aquinas was another systematizer, discerning the gaps in the then-existing overviews and constructing a new overview that both incorporated the more objective, scientific, Aristotelian heritage being recovered at that time and preserving the juice he found in his inherited Christendom. Recent science and contemplative thought have moved us well beyond the Thomistic synthesis. For example, Thomas' physics has been revolutionized by Newton and then again by Einstein and others. Biology and psychology have also undergone far-reaching transformations. Contemplative thought today is taking place in a whole array of new ways. We cannot go back to the Thomistic synthesis; nevertheless, we can honor Thomas as a hero of his era and take inspiration from him for facing our challenges to serve the sanity, survivability, and other crucial values that enter the consensus building of our existing and future human cultures. Indeed, we face enormous challenges to pull together the many partial truths of our era into workable guidelines for sanity, survival, beauty, equity, democracy, and other values of general well-being for this generation and its deeply altered planet. This is the "We" approach to truth. This is the consensus-building approach to the truth of workability.

While the “We” approach is dependent upon the breakthroughs of scientific research (“It” approach) and contemplative inquiry (“I” approach), it is a third approach to truth (“We” approach). It adds something to the human truth quest not handled by the other two. Perhaps the following chart can help hold this awareness in our minds:

Approach to Truth		Focus	Test for Truth
It	Scientific Research	impersonal objectivity	correspondence with factual formulations of sensory inputs
I	Contemplative Inquiry	personal subjectivity	resonance with descriptions of directly known experiences of consciousness
We	Societal Consensus	cultural integration	workability for the sanity, survival, & other values within a specific culture

A workable consensus will include: (1) the truth of scientific research and (2) the truth of contemplative inquiry. Workability is not a substitute for factuality or contemplative wisdom; workability is an additional test for truth (realism). If a societal consensus is not factual, neither is it workable. The factual truth will at some point reveal that the consensus is unworkable. A similar statement can be made with regard to contemplative wisdom. A societal consensus will at some point prove unworkable if the truth about human consciousness is ignored. But a societal consensus can be honoring of both factuality and contemplative wisdom and still be unworkable. The truth of workability is a test for truth that applies to a specific pull together for a specific group of the first two modes of truth as they apply to this group’s circumstances in historical time. This amounts to an third test for truth – that is, does this pull together of insight and guidelines apply to these circumstances for this group at this time? Any social consensus that does not honor all three approaches to truth is less wise than one that does.

Having three approaches to truth rather than one may evoke distress in some persons – persons who wish to achieve the type of rational consilience described in Chapter 1. But such hope in the rational potential of the human mind is illusory, a “modern superstition” as Wendell Berry calls it. Why is it illusory? The human mind is a finite biological process confronting the Infinite scope of Reality. I am continuing to use capitalization to symbolize this disjunction between the Fullness of Reality and the processes and possessions of finite knowledge of which the human mind is capable.

We need to hold on to the awareness that the human mind is capable of assembling relative truth for effective living. The amazing capabilities of the human mind evolved because these abilities aided the human species to survive and thrive. Human consciousness is in need of realism in order to orchestrate survival and well-being. Nevertheless, the truth available to the minds of human beings is always approximate, partial, becoming obsolete or inapplicable to new circumstances and new experiences of Reality. Truth, for the human being, has a finite quality: known truth never becomes Final Truth. In ultimate terms, the human species will always remain ignorant. No matter how much we come to understand, there is always more. We are on a journey, a cultural journey, a “We” journey into an ever more preposterous Mystery.

Nevertheless, our knowledge is progressive in this way: once we have become relatively aware of some fresh aspect of Reality, we cannot go back to our previous stage of ignorance, even though many try to do so. What happens is that we inflict upon ourselves the psychological pain of knowing that we are denying what we know. But even when we are fully open to a new level of wisdom, we still remain ignorant. Further, we may even focus on some new wisdom to the degree that we, as humanity, forget things that we once knew. For example, most of us know little about flint chipping, even though many stone-age persons were good at it. More importantly, many of us have so focused on the wisdom of living in urban settings that we have forgotten much that humanity once knew about living in the natural world.

Our many forms of ignorance need not lead us to hopelessness or despair. This ignorance is simply our human condition, and this condition can be received as glorious and appropriate rather than as an offense to our unrealistic hope for some absolute certainty and security. Our best-case scenario is to humbly admit this ignorance. Indeed, let us rename such authentic facing of ignorance as “openness to and curiosity about more Reality.” Such openness might even be called “wisdom.”

Chapter 7

Open and Closed Societies

It might be argued that authoritative tradition is a fourth approach to truth. But I will maintain that the so-called authoritative tradition has truth-value only in so far it is in accord with the three approaches to truth outlined so far.

It is true, however, that the notion of authoritarian truth has played a large role in history. For example, Martin Luther's conflict with the Roman Catholic Church of his time was outwardly staged as a conflict between the authority of the Bible and the authority of the Church. In other words, it was a conflict within one overall system of authority: Biblical authority versus recent Church authority. But, within Luther's choice of the Bible as his authority, we can discern a deeper emphasis upon the autonomy of the individual person of faith. Such positioning of the solitary person over against the massive authority of the core institution of that society can be interpreted as a contribution from the pole of contemplative inquiry. Luther loved the Bible because he found in the Bible support for his sense of truth found in his own solitary depths. But quite soon in the history of Protestantism, the authenticity of the solitary person was neglected in favor of new systems of authority. One example of this is the rigid claim for the propositional veracity of the verses of the Bible (with selected verses having greater authority than others).

The authoritarian view of truth plays a role not only in religious communities but in scientific communities as well. Once Sir Isaac Newton's grand pull-together of basic physics had become "authoritative" for the conduct of "normal" science, there was strong resistance within the community of physicists to the revolutionary innovations being initiated by Albert Einstein and others. While the very essence of the scientific method includes an openness to further truth, scientists can feel quite secure within the older formulations and be defensive concerning those older theories, which they take to be authoritative. Once Einstein's system of physics was spelled out and mostly validated, Einstein himself became engaged in defending his new system from certain developments in quantum mechanics that he never accepted.

Such a conflict between authority and innovation goes on in every arena of culture. As an example, I will sketch how authority and innovation operated in pre-civilization tribal societies. Such societies were very slow to change. Their cultural norms and systems of wisdom had been accumulated over centuries of trial and error and were seen to be well-tested truth about which little innovation was needed. Indeed, these societies were slow to adopt innovation. This carefulness had justification, for new things did not have the lived experience and verification of the grandfathers and grandmothers of their society. They realized that human societies are fragile and that new things can have destructive as well as enriching potential. They were aware that nature is a stern Mother who does not put up with innovations that ignore her. The role of the shaman was to live on the edge of society in close contact with nature and nature's mysteries, and from that place of lookout protect individual persons and society as a whole from straying too far from nature's disciplines. In spite of this deeply conservative attitude, these early human communities could change rapidly if their most treasured values could be kept. A new stone tool, a new animal to use, a ritual that healed someone, these innovations could be quickly integrated into the whole. In some measure, ancient tribal societies were open societies, and they had been for thousands of years.

The dawn of civilization was both a radical innovation and a new sort of authoritarianism. It was radically innovative in terms of pulling together many small parochial, conservative tribal groups into a unified whole of greater numbers, greater

scope of consciousness, and brand new patterns of social structure. This closer proximity of formerly separated groups forced dialogue on hither-to-ignored topics. This expanded dialogue fostered elements of openness and fresh innovation of cultural, political, and economic designs. The economic innovations of these hierarchically organized civilizations freed part of the population for an increased scope of creativity in art, architecture, religion, science, technology, and more. At the same time, civilizations were authoritarian arrangements in which a small part of the population was creating these “newer” traditions and forcing them upon the vast majority who had little opportunity for shared creativity or for protest against wrong directions and injustices.

In the context of this hierarchical structuring of human society, innovative pull-togethers often became oppressive “truths” that were actually a class-interested shaping of “truth” into partial-truths and lies that were used to support the empowerment, enrichment, and illusions of the ruling classes. This familiar development has given authoritative truth a bad press among many people today. Indeed, many people have come to fear any useful integration of a cultural consensus to be a threat to scientific research and contemplative discovery (not to mention a threat to people’s own authoritarian dogmas).

This conundrum can find a degree of resolution only if we realize that the authority in and of itself is not a test for truth. The inherited traditions of culture are useful to the extent that they are integrations of wisdom fully supported by scientific objectivity, contemplative authenticity, and consensual workability. These are the only test for truth. Since every society is part of the ever-moving drama of history, we always need fresh reconstruction of the overall social consensus. There is no royal authority, no divine authority, no depth of historical tradition that cannot be changed. The creations of the past are useful studies, not because they were authoritative, but because they were pull-togethers of an earlier culture of people who were facing their own challenges and dealing with them well or poorly. We can learn from the past. We have our memory of the past as a great treasure. But in our present, we have only three approaches for seeking truth to live by: scientific research, contemplative inquiry, and the societal consensus building of workable forms for living within our particular moment of history.

The above thoughts can be summarized by defining what we mean by open and closed societies. A closed society is a society that is locked into past formulations and their current rationalizations. An open society is one in which detachment from the past and openness to fresh futures is present in a numerous and effective portion of the population. An open society need not hate the past or reject every aspect of it. Rather, the past is viewed as a valuable paint palette for painting a significantly new picture. The living NOW is always both a departure and an opportunity. We can depart the patterns of the past when we see clearly our everlasting ignorance as well as the specific foolishness of the currently obsolete teachings that have been handed down to us.

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I am ending Part One of this six-part exploration by pointing out that a truly open society must be open to explore all three of these valid approaches to truth. Until we can form a working consensus on the topic of truth, we will not be able to form a workable consensus about the overwhelming challenges we confront. One of those challenges is the reconstruction of our understanding and practice of religion. In Part Four I will begin exploring how we can usefully discuss religion and see why religion is important. But before doing that, I will explore in Part Two the elemental topic of consciousness, and I will explore in Part Three “Inescapable Wonder,” a foundational understanding for the discussion of religion.