

Part One

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, 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 can be no science of the mind. Scientists may look inwardly at their own mind's process of hypothesis creation, but the test of a scientific hypotheses 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 can be intelligently done, and systematically related with an objective science of the brain and nervous system. My inward looking can be compared with the inward looking of others and 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 concilience between science and contemplation. Science and contemplation indicate two different approaches to truth. The truth of each approach is truth about the same overarching Reality, but these two approaches to truth need to be distinguished from one another in order to maintain philosophical clarity on what we mean by consciousness, Wonder, and religion.

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; it is but a tool that can be used to

approach the truth. And what is truth? This is an important questions with which I will begin in Part One.

Consilience

The quote cited above contains the word “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 brings 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 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.