

Appendix

This textbook was largely a “how to” book only touching on some of the deeper issues of the significance of critical thinking. This appendix is intended to provide material that will take the “why” of critical thinking much more fully into account and place critical thinking in the larger context of the meaning of human life.

Section I addresses the most basic question from which all other questions can be raised: “What is it to be human?” or more directly, “What is human experience?” Everything comes to us in our experience, what we discover in science, our religious impulse, practical affairs, etc., everything we think, feel, say, and do. The crucial role of critical thinking must finally be seen in this most fundamental context.

Section II provides an account of the self-formation process of a human being, “Bildung” which is usually translated as “education.” The term education is much too narrow and is not a synonym. So we will use the much richer and more adequate term “Bildung.”

Sections III and IV deal with **philosophical hermeneutics**. Philosophical hermeneutics is the most significant development in thinking about what it is to understand anything at all. It deals, not with the attempt to understand ourselves or the world through religion, science, history, or common sense, but rather the attempt to understand understanding itself. What is understanding? That obviously is more basic than any understanding we arrive at through our explanatory theories in social or natural sciences, in literature, sacred texts, etc...

Section IV also provides actual exercises for developing skill in phenomenological seeing and hermeneutical awareness. This immediate awareness of meaningful experience itself through these exercises makes it immediately apparent just how much we live in completely abstract meanings that we mistakenly take to be concrete realities. It is a shock and a revelation to find out they do not show up in experience at all, only in our habits of meaning and they often

do great damage in the form of beliefs we live by that have no basis whatever in experience.

The nature and limits of theoretical thinking is the topic of Section V and further reveals why philosophical hermeneutics is more fundamental than any theoretical explanation. This section examines theoretical thinking in terms of its conditions of possibility, namely linguisticity, the human capacity for making sense. Intelligibility arises only within language. This is why Aristotle calls humans the speaking animal, the animal with language and concept use (“rational animal” is the usual inadequate translation of “zoon logon”). Without language, there is no meaning and without meaning, there is no thought (see Chapter 4 of this text). This prepares for a better understanding in Section VI of the difference between science, religion, and philosophy (ways humans engage in meaning and language to make sense of the meaning we are already engaged in). A better understanding of these quite distinct human ways of understanding (religion, science, philosophy), can bring far more benefit to us when we understand their limits, what they can and cannot do and realize they are not fundamental and not mutually exclusive. There need be no conflict between genuine religion and science (as opposed to dogmatic religion and scientism which are at odds).

Section VII carries forward with an understanding of the nature of the sacred and its relation to religion and doctrine. This section offers insights that could potentially do more to reduce unnecessary conflict in the world than anything else in this book. But it certainly will take most people out of their comfort zone. That is always what is required in a genuine Bildungs-process.

The final two sections VIII and IX, offer insights with regard to the nature of concepts, intelligibility, and formal systems of thought including logic. The insights provided completely undermine the assumptions and beliefs most people have about language, meaning, and reasoning. This frees us up to rethink and better understand the nature of ourselves and our habits of meanings.

1. CRITICAL THINKING and HUMAN FREEDOM

It is pretty obvious that human freedom involves the exercise of our choices and the ability to pursue what we want and what we think is best. It is also pretty obvious that without being informed on what possible choices we could make and the skill to make good judgments about this, freedom is impossible. But the question of human freedom is even more profound than this and this essay is an attempt to move further in that direction.

First, humans do not merely live in “the world,” they live in their meanings. We are sense-making or meaning-making beings who interpret and make sense of things. These meanings are only possible in the context of human society and language, that is, a way of life that we learn from our families and others from infancy. Without this, there is no possibility of pursuing our freedom. A way of life is an organized system of meaningful engagements with our environment and any “environment” is not merely there, but also something we make sense of. Our meaning is habitual and not noticed. It is the context and means by which we pursue our identity. The emergence of one’s individual identity can only arise in this meaningful environment of habits that makes life possible, but only begins to be a journey toward freedom and autonomy or self-governance with the development of the skills to carry this out.

Second, freedom is not merely pursuing what we want. To paraphrase Rousseau, to merely pursue what one wants is slavery to impulse.¹ The ability to make skilled judgments that guide our actions and use this ability to reflect on our identity, on our relation to ourselves and others, is where the movement toward our freedom emerges. Our capacity to feel and be affected by our environment is the motivating source of action, but judgment is where we move toward autonomy. Autonomy is the ability to govern our lives and move toward our possibilities. That is a process of overcoming the enabling

limits that allow our identities to continue to emerge. Without this movement our habits of meaning become disabling and prevent the movement toward our possibilities. That is what freedom is, the ability to move toward our possibilities. This process of self-overcoming allows perspectives on our previous limits of meaning that are only seen when we transcend those limits of meaningful orientation to life. It is easy to see this development when we reflect on any 20 years span of our lives. We no longer operate in the meanings we once did. Many of the “facts” of our lives remain, but their meaning has significantly changed or transformed. With better skills of judgment and new perspectives, some of what we took to be facts no longer are seen as such. Facts are only facts within our meaningful engagement in life and we can only recognize and interpret something as a fact within the shared linguistic cultural context from which we emerge. As we become more skillful in making judgments and gain in autonomy, we also become much more skillful in judging what is factual. Many so-called “facts” turn out to be false under examination with higher level skills and new perspectives. But we never outrun limits, our finitude. We can gradually come to see what it is to be finite fallible beings who operate in the limits of one’s family, society, language, and way of life. Nothing outruns this, not science, not religion. This is why wisdom that may arise in one’s engagement with these gives rise to humility. Insofar as one thinks one has found any final truth, one is denying the manifest finitude we always operate in. So freedom finally moves toward wisdom, a kind of seeing rather than knowledge and any fixed truth. The journey eventually elicits wonder, awe, and humility. The movement toward freedom is a process of overcoming one’s previous limits or horizons of meaning but only by progressing to new horizons. One’s identity is merely a point of orientation and departure in this process and it is in self-transcendence that we move toward our always unknown possibilities, our freedom.

¹Discourse on Inequality and Social Contract (1.8)

Finally, it must be recognized that without others, we are nothing. We depend utterly on our relationships for everything we are. Ethical consideration of others and their own potential movement toward freedom, is unavoidable if we have genuinely moved toward our own freedom. To recognize one's own status as a human being, one's own implicit and potential movement toward freedom, toward ones possibilities, implies the same basic status of

others however well or badly it is carried out. This fundamental recognition and the ethical consideration it implies has long been revealed in philosophy and is expressed in the Golden Rule that we find in virtually every major religion.

Here is a summary of the process of movement toward one's freedom, one's possibilities:

A. Human Experience (Draft)

What is human experience? How is it constituted? How do we deal with the reflexive paradox that the very instrument (human experience and thought itself) that we would use in this inquiry is in fact the object of our inquiry? The very act of using thought as we typically do to "objectively" explain something would seem to immediately distort what we are trying to examine. How do we get to a point of view where the examining process does not utterly determine the outcome? When we undertake a rigorous inquiry to explain something, this typically requires distance from the object of inquiry in order to achieve objectivity. But in this one unique case, we cannot distance ourselves from meaning/awareness/language. These three are inseparable. To examine human experience is to be already intimately caught up in the very object of our inquiry. How can we achieve the objectivity we seek that is achieved in scientific enquiries with a whole range of phenomena via the testing procedures of experimental design if we try to apply it to conscious awareness that is the basis of everything we think, say, or do including science, religion, common sense? How can we best approach this unique inquiry?

Science is so successful due to its narrowness. The methods of science can isolate the independent or experimental variable to be tested and abstract out all phenomena so that we can isolate cause and effect relationships between the independent variable and the dependent variable or

experimental outcome. When applied to human consciousness itself, the scientific method cannot be in principle be used. Science requires a certain type of objectivity based on mathematization of space and time to count as science. However, in our attempt to be "objective" must we always pursue this via theoretical scientific explanation? Is rigorous objectivity possible in some other way than scientific methods? Measurement and the highly valuable narrowness of science is simply inapplicable in this case. To ask about the nature of human experience is to implicitly ask: "How are science, religion, commerce, etc. and ordinary human awareness possible?" It is NOT because there is a world of our experience. That experience is intimately bound up in our meanings. So we must examine the basic features and pre conditions of meaning that make scientific explanations and religious belief and faith possible at all. What are the conditions of possibility of human awareness that can be read off the very appearance of any objects of experience that can provide the only path to a more encompassing objectivity?

Once we find a rigorous approach to understanding human experience that provides an objective understanding of the essential features of human experience, how can we then **apply** these insights so it makes a difference in our lives? These are the most fundamental and profound questions we can ask. Everything is predicated on the *concrete* fact of meaningful human experience for us. Human experience is presupposed in

everything we think, say, or do. What is the best way to approach this most basic understanding of experience and of understanding itself?²

We must not attempt to separate or abstract ourselves from human experience and meaningful awareness via scientific methods to examine these. That simply is not possible since any such objectification remains within the limits of thought and awareness. Such explanations may be useful, but do not finally explain the fundamental nature of human experience. What we need is something that is NOT abstract and theoretical, but something concrete, immediate, and non-theoretical since no distance from this unique object of inquiry is possible (human experience/awareness). We must enter into, rather than distance ourselves from what we are attempting to understand. If we take such an integral and concrete approach through phenomenological observation and description, can we still achieve objectivity? Are these two approaches to explanation and understanding (theoretical-abstract vs phenomenological-concrete) compatible or even complimentary? Or are they mutually exclusive ways of understanding? Does one provide greater objectivity than the other? Are there different kinds of objectivity? Does one approach provide greater understanding than the other? What is the difference between explanation and understanding? Does all understanding reduce to explanation or is there another kind of understanding? Is one approach more fundamental than the other or derivative from the other? Do we need explanation to arrive at understanding or does understanding precede the possibility of explanation? Thus the question about the nature of explanation and understanding cannot be avoided.

²There are many books that show why science or at least science alone cannot be adequate for such an investigation and that an even more rigorous hermeneutical approach is required. Among the better known are Karl-Otto Apel: *Understanding and Explanation*, tran G. Warnke, MIT Press: 1984, and Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised ed., *Continuum*, 2002 and *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, University of California Press, 1977.

A serious treatment of these issues would take multiple book length treatments. The point here is to introduce the challenge of these issues and questions. The purpose of this essay is primarily to achieve some preliminary and preparatory insight for the following section on how to apply some of these insights so they can make a difference in our lives.

MEANING AND THE LIMITS OF THEORETICAL INTERPRETAION OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Human beings are fundamentally interpretive beings who live in their meanings. Humans cannot be fundamentally theoretically explained. Rather, they are the source of theoretical explanations which only arise in the context of more fundamental interpretive processes that underlie any and all human thought. Human beings must be interpreted differently than any other phenomena we encounter. This is a reflexive investigation in that it is the interpretive being that seeks to understand the interpretive being itself. This requires a different approach and a different kind of understanding. It requires an interpretive or hermeneutical approach rather than an explanatory theoretical approach. A theoretical approach is itself a kind of interpretive process whose mathematical narrowness makes grasping the interpreting human being impossible with that type of method. So instead of attempting to apply a theoretical approach, which can only be misleading, we must look at the very nature of what it is to be an interpreting being to begin with that can come up with theories, religious myths and rituals, commerce, and lives in what we call ordinary awareness. Interpretation is more fundamental than any interpretations we create, any theory or anything else in human experience. Human experience is interpretive in the very moment of meaningful awareness. Below we shall see that there are three levels to this, one we are familiar with, and two that are more fundamental that will require a hermeneutical examination to reveal.

So it is with the nature of interpretation that we much begin but at the same time interpretation takes place in the context of or by means of human experience. If there is no experience, there is no thought and if there is no thought there is no interpretation. And we shall see that without language, in a deeper sense than we normally understand language, there is no thought or meaningful experience. Human experience is constituted by its interpretive processes and those processes are inseparable from language. We do not always experience things in overt language, but it is being brought into language from infancy that sets up the condition of possibility of meaningful experience. The famous example of Helen Keller mentioned in the previous essay makes it clear that without language, there is no meaningful awareness, no self-awareness. Language-Interpretation is the condition of possibility for human experience and human experience is fundamentally interpretive-linguistical.³

The meanings we are most committed to we call "truth" and "reality". These are usually well tested meanings that reflect the norms that make a society functional. We make sense of things in an already meaningful context of collective human life. There is a world that we make sense of, but that world is not independent of our meaning. As Wittgenstein says, "The limits of my language are the limits of my world." Or as Quine puts it: "We can only talk about what we say there is." There is no independent reality or truth that lies outside

language and meaning. So our most fundamental investigation can only be to examine the limits of interpretation and meaning. Everything else, any scientific, religious, practical understanding, is a form of understanding that only arises as an interpretation of what we experience. And what we experience is meaningful if it comes to awareness at all. It is already brought into our world of meaning. So what is it to have a world? What is it to understand? The conditions of possibility for having a world, an understanding, are the most fundamental of investigations. That endeavor is called philosophical hermeneutics which will be discussed below.

Each of us only has a "world" because we have been brought into meaning and then can make sense of things as individuals within a collective meaning-tradition-world. Meaning is inseparable from language which is far more subtle than the surface features of written and spoken language we normally think of when we think of language. Language and meaning cannot be fundamentally theoretically explained. Interpretation is more fundamental than any particular approach to making sense, theoretical or otherwise (poetic, mythopoetic, literary, etc.). Theories only scratch the surface. Humans are the source of theoretical explanations which only arise in the context of a more fundamental interpretive-temporal process and meaningful engagement in everything meaningful. So human beings must be approached and interpreted differently than any other phenomena we encounter because we are the meaning making beings. We don't just exist. The idea of existing is itself a meaning. Human are beings to whom things matter always within a meaningful situated engagement with that meaning. This is a reflexive investigation in that it is the interpretive being that seeks to understand the interpretive being itself. This requires a different approach and a different kind of understanding than what theorizing can provide. It requires an interpretive or hermeneutical approach to understand an interpretive being rather than an explanatory

³Gadamer introduced the term "Sprachlichkeit" which is translated as "linguistical." This does not mean overt language or linguistics, the appearance of graphemes or phonemes. It refers to being a language user, not that one thinks or experiences only in overt linguistic form. We experience things independently from words or overt linguistic forms, such as images, and other forms of imagination, and meaningful awareness of ourselves and objects of experience without specific linguistic form (see Edward Casey: **Imagining**; A Phenomenological Study (Indiana University Press, 1976; paperback edition, 1979; second printing, 1988; second edition, 2000). But we would have no meaningful experience at all, if we were not language users. Language use sets up the possibility for meaningful self-conscious awareness.

theoretical approach. Theory is necessarily narrow in order to succeed. It must abstract its object of investigation out of an already existing meaningful human context of a pre understanding of the world we live in. "The world" is never immediate but always mediated by language and meaning and meaning is always given in the context of what *matters*.

Theoretical understanding that we loosely call science is NOT value free. It can only emerge because it *matters* to us to achieve an abstract and "objective" understanding of ourselves and our already interpreted standpoint. "Objectivity" is a value, not merely an outcome of well-conducted scientific method. That we can divide experience into mathematical units of space and time in order to explain anything and produce knowledge is itself an interpreted standpoint or *condition* for the possibility of scientific research, *not a given*. There is not just a world out there that we perceive and then measure and theorize about. That "world" arises for us in our interpretations.⁴ Such mathematization is driven by the value of exactitude which is a form of rigor, but not the only form of rigor. Hermeneutics is another form of rigor that can do things the limited exactitude of mathematization and theory cannot. To understand understanding itself requires a hermeneutical approach, not theory, which is a narrow form of understanding that depends on

⁴Arguably the most successful science today in terms of experimental confirmation is quantum mechanics. One of the features of this highly successful theoretical-mathematical approach to understanding reality at the subatomic level is that the very measuring process itself is not independent of the experimental outcome. We can enlarge this idea to say that the very interpretive nature of human experience is not independent from what we call "the world" or "reality" or "truth." These arise only in the interpretive process of human awareness and are not independent from it. But this does not make things merely subjective, as we shall see. There is objectivity and the words "truth" and "reality" are functional meanings, just not what we naively thought they were. Objectivity does not give us something called "truth" or "reality" in themselves. Rather, these meanings are the boundaries within which we have access to further meaning. We can only think and know within limits, the limits of meaning.

abstraction and exactitude. Abstraction means to take some element of concrete experience and reduce it to a conceptual object of particular interest or investigation, to take it out of its larger context for some purpose because we see some value in doing so. In contrast, philosophical hermeneutics and its preliminary examination of experience in phenomenology are concrete and remain always grounded in the concrete which means the immediate world of sensation prior to abstraction, prior to explanation. Of course, it uses the abstraction of language to convey this, but never through theory. It is an examination of how meaning arises in experience or how meaning makes experience recognizable.

So theoretical understanding is not synonymous with understanding. It is a form of understanding which is much more narrow and is subject to something more fundamental, namely, hermeneutical examination, which includes an examination of the conditions of the possibility of theory at all.

Science is a kind of interpretive process itself whose conditions are found in the context of already existing meaning and understanding. As we shall see there are three levels of interpretation and only one of them is graspable without phenomenology and hermeneutics. To understand human awareness these other levels must be exposed in an understanding of the nature of understanding itself. Grasping the fundamental nature of human being via scientific reduction is impossible because science must always abstract its object of investigation out of its larger meaning context. The narrowness theory provides a great deal of understanding via explanation but precludes any fundamental understanding of humans.

Scientific explanation is derivative, not fundamental. Interpretation is fundamental to anything we can think, say or do, not scientific theoretical understanding or any other understanding, such as religious doctrine or mythopoetic interpretation of a founding religious event.

So any theoretical explanation will fall short of grasping the conditions of possibility for

meaning. What is needed is an interpretive approach to interpretive beings. So instead of attempting to apply a theoretical approach, we must first look at the very nature of what it is to be an interpreting being that produces any kind of meaning, including theoretical ways of making sense of things. To make sense of anything is to interpret it. Making sense is more fundamental than any sense we make. Interpretation is more fundamental than theory.

The nature of interpretation requires us to look at the nature of human experience which will turn out to be constituted by its interpretive processes. Human experience is always and fundamentally meaningful. In other words, interpretive. So interpretation is the condition of possibility for human experience.

The Standard View

In order to succeed in this undertaking it will be necessary to identify and then avoid what we can call the “standard view” of human beings that has been given to us in our religious, scientific, and most philosophical accounts. I realize that religious accounts are quite different from scientific ones, but in what follows I will collapse the kinds of “theories about human nature” that are implicit or explicit in religious mythologies and doctrines under the general notion of theory. Religious myths if taken in a non-theoretical way are similar to stories and are literary ways of bringing us to an awareness and understanding from which we may have an experience of self-overcoming that allow us to live less selfish, more ethical lives, and frees us from the illusions about the self we are normally trapped in. The heart of religion is a founding experience of wakefulness and then a tradition that attempts to ritually re-enactment that most sacred experience. The mythological stories that give an account of the meaning of that experience and those rituals do not really reduce to theories. But they have been consistently implicitly or even overtly taken this way which is a fundamental mistake to try to make such language of the heart provide any literal accounts of ourselves. So in what follows I will

be referring to a general mistaken self-understanding that has been contributed to by religious, scientific, and philosophical accounts.⁵

Although theoretical understanding is immensely valuable, it has led us into very poor habits of thought. We can be scientific without being scientific. A theoretical model of what we are that has held us captive and has been reinforced by modern individualistic society and political theory sees the individual as a fundamentally real distinct locus of sovereignty and right. Each of us is a discrete atom of political and physical reality and together we make up society. The individual is what is most real. The individual is seen as a distinct consciousness or mind that knows itself by direct introspection and can reflect the outer material world in a unique inner awareness. Language is seen as a medium that allows each of us to communicate our feelings and thought to the minds of others.

This dualistic Cartesian-Lockean view that consciousness “represents” and corresponds to the outer world was abandoned more than two hundred years ago.⁶ The insurmountable problem is if we start with consciousness or mind as separate and distinct from its objects, a view called objectivism or naïve realism, then how do objects get “inside” the mind as representations of the outer world? If mind and material objects are fundamentally different then how are they related? How are objects meaningful at all? How is communication between different minds possible? How is it possible for our statements

⁵ For an account of the difference between religion, science, and philosophy see Section VI below

⁶Descartes is a good example, as is Locke, of a thinker who attempts to move theoretically from his religious world view into a supporting philosophical account that will make the new sciences of nature compatible with what is taken as a kind of literal view of reality that emerged from the Christian tradition. That tradition, in turn, was itself doctrinally constructed on the basis of Platonism for a thousand years then Aristotle for the next thousand years, at least in Catholicism, which until the Reformation and together with Eastern Orthodoxy WAS the Christian Church.

to correspond to facts and thus be true? How can children be brought into language and meaningful awareness?

A typical hasty answer to all this is that *perception* conveys the outer world of objects to the inner world of consciousness. This simply overlooks the fact that perception IS a feature of consciousness. There is no way to directly make “contact” with “the outer.” Descartes and Locke were aware of this problem but never solved it because it is insoluble in principle.

One solution to dualism is reductionism. Reality is all material or all mental. But at what cost do we purchase this greater abstract consistency? If everything is material, then most of what makes up human meaning and life vanishes as mere illusion. Love is just the movement of molecules in the brain. Justice is neural patterning through conditioning. Free will is a fiction. There can be no such thing as consciousness at all. There is only materiality. This is called eliminative or reductive materialism and is represented in for example, ancient Greek atomic theory of Democritus, Thomas Hobbes in the 17th century and Paul Churchland in the 20th century. Everything would be determined by brain states which would themselves be determined by every other state of the universe at every prior moment.

An immediate impossibility of such a view is that the theorist who claims this is the **best way to understand** things and who has **chosen** to believe this point of view as most **cogent and explanatory** based on the **best reasoning** he has done, has just made his own point of view impossible. All the words in bold would be meaningless on such a view. If everything is determined by material brain states, then his own view itself was determined, could not have been other wise, and CANNOT be chosen, cannot be reasoned for, cannot be taken as the best and most cogent view over any other view, cannot be taken seriously as an explanation of anything at all. Any awareness of and any talk about brains is illusory because minds and conscious awareness are simply illusions. Such

reductionism is self-undermining and incoherent.

The opposite reduction of everything to consciousness or mind called idealism (Leibniz, for example) is elegant, but flies in the face of common sense and still depends on belief in a kind of substratum called “mind” or “the mental.” Because of the insurmountable problems with dualism, materialism, and idealism, philosophers have abandoned such metaphysical theories. In fact, philosophers since Hume and Kant have pretty much rejected any form of previous metaphysics (theories of reality). Modern positivists and later thinkers such as Churchland mentioned above have implicit commitments to metaphysical views of what is real though they ironically oppose metaphysics and disavow any implicit reality commitments. They simply call the truth that materiality and brains are what are fundamental and that consciousness is a kind of epiphenomenon, nothing real in itself.

Kant attempted to replace traditional metaphysics with something tied strictly to the processes of consciousness itself without any claims to material or mental substance. The terms substance, reality, cause, etc. refer us back to categories of how consciousness of objects are made intelligible. Hume and Kant moved us away from reductive metaphysical theories and toward (but not all the way to) contemporary phenomenology, a careful examination of what shows up in experience and then careful thought about the conditions of possibility for such appearances or phenomena.⁷

⁷A rigorous form of phenomenology developed within Buddhism 2500 years ago as the core technique for freeing us from the illusions about ourselves that are the source of our suffering. This approach to phenomenology has continued to develop and in some practitioners is converging with western phenomenology. Given its roots in Greek and modern European philosophy, western phenomenology has a distinctive style to it that is more geared toward intellectual understanding even if through immediate concrete awareness and Buddhism continues to practice phenomenology as a means to enlightened wakefulness. But the two are rapidly converging in that Buddhists are increasingly interested in the understanding of

Nonetheless, the basic theoretical approach to understanding that emerged with Greek science and philosophy continued to dominate our thinking into the 19th century with Hegel providing a philosophical total theoretical vision of reality, though this was now done with the use of a form of phenomenology. At the same time during the 19th century, most of the modern sciences were being invented and captured our imagination as Newtonian science had in the 17th century. The 19th century gave us new theoretical ways of understanding physical nature in the natural sciences, but also ways of understanding ourselves in the new social sciences that came to model the natural sciences in isolating a range of phenomena, mathematizing them into “data” under a theoretical frame for testing hypotheses about cause and effect with regard to people and societies. There was a very strong move toward scientism or positivism in which everything is reduced to mathematized testable cause and effect relations and science is seen as the only or at least the best way of achieving rigorous objectivity and understanding things.

However, any theoretical understanding always presupposes a much richer meaningful context from which it can emerge that makes such abstract theoretical accounts possible to begin with. The very success of the sciences depends on their narrowness, that they selectively reduce the rich range of phenomena under the value of a kind of objectivity via mathematical testability. Humans cannot be reduced this way. They are the beings who create science and other ways of understanding. Science can be applied to humans but humans cannot be reduced to scientific explanation.

consciousness that emerges and westerners are increasingly interested in how such understanding can be applied to improving our lives, which has roots in the Socratic pursuit of self-understanding and living a better more wakeful life. There are other powerful sources of this in previous thinkers, for example, the powerful transformative exercises taught by Parmenides, see Peter Kingsley, *The Dark Places of Wisdom*, Golden Sufi, 1999 and *Reality*, Golden Sufi, 2003.

What Are We?

We are not fundamentally isolated individuals who know the world through direct perception and who know ourselves by simple introspection. In what follows you will see why this model is impossible and further why it is so destructive. What will be shown is that we are co-creative interpretive beings to whom things matter only in relation to others. We are fundamentally social and linguistic. We are a reflection of a shared tradition, set of values, and habits of meaning and language. Our individuality is unintelligible apart from this.

Three Levels of Interpretation

Human experience is fundamentally an interpretive process, a co-creative social process of the emergence of self and world, self and not-self, through meaning. It is a fundamentally meaning-making process whose basic feature is always temporally experienced as a particular and determinate sense of bodily presence in relation to objects of experience (being here now) within the context of memory and expectation.

There are three levels of interpretation. Two of them are not accessible to us without special careful reflection. One of these levels can only be accessed through careful kind of analysis called phenomenology and another level can be accessed by both phenomenology and psychotherapy but it is possible for unusually perceptive individuals to also access this level.

The first level is the deepest and is universal to all human experience. It is what makes the other levels possible. Phenomenology reveals the fundamental nature of experience as synthetic and temporal. Synthetic means that the basic nature of experience is productive of objectivity, experience is experience of unified meaningful objects. We can only become aware of this basic hermeneutical condition through phenomenological reflection but it is a mystery why there is conscious interpreting awareness at all.

There is a second level of interpretation that we are usually not aware of. It is where

we develop our sense of our world and all its meaningful elements. This level includes everything from the meaning we take on from the time we are born into our families and brought into language. It includes everything we take on from our cultures, including the meaning in the sciences, religion, political views, etc.. These are our habits of making sense of objects whether sensory objects or meaningful situations of human interaction up to our overall sense of the world and how it works. We take this meaning largely for granted. The meaning at this level is what we refer to as reality. Having such interpretive reflexes is universal to humans but the particular meaning reflexes themselves are NOT, though people commonly insist their view of things is the correct one and applies to everyone. This is called absolutism, an unnecessary and usually harmful approach to truth. It's supposed opposite, relativism, the view that every person or every culture has its own truth is equally untenable, unnecessary, and harmful. These views are not true opposites or contradictories. If they were, one of them WOULD have to be true. But they both can be false and in fact fly in the face of everything we now know about language and meaning. Since they are both typically harmful views and since we can hold a different much more reasonable and useful view that is far more consistent with what we know about the nature of human experience, we can just dispense with them (see the many sections in this book, especially Chapter 2, on the flaws and drawbacks of both these views). This second level is where humans develop *interpretive reflexes* that arise in familial and social conditions and give us our sense of meaningful reality. We live in our *unconscious interpretive reflexes* that begin to develop from the moment we are cared for by others and are brought into language. This basic caring for others and ourselves in the context of habits of meaning and interpretive reflexes, including common sense, religion, science, and other shared meaning is the context for individual identity that is always co-created.

They reveal our values and priorities that are hidden to us. They shape how objects are meaningful to us, the value and significance they have. We take these collective and individual unconscious interpretive reflexes to be reality itself. We just see the world of objects and events and do not see how all that slowly came to be through meaning and language from the time we are cared for by others, not what makes a world of meaning and interpretive reflexes possible to begin with. These unconscious interpretative reflexes are "behind" our conscious awareness and allow us to be conscious at all. Those *unconscious interpretive reflexes* or ways of making sense vary from one person, family, and culture to the next. But they all have a *universal fundamental character* for all human experience: They are temporal (experienced as before and after) and are always "objective." Experience is always experience of unified objects and their relationships. Objects are usually just taken to be "out there" independent of us. But A) they reflect the values and projects through which we experience the world and B) more deeply, they are always spatio-temporal, experienced as being in space and time. The first, how objects and the world appear according to our interpretive reflexes, varies with culture and family. The second is invariable for all human experience. We will look at both these features of human experience that are not available to normal awareness, but can be brought into conscious and conceptual awareness through phenomenological reflection.

The third level is well known to everyone. It is the interpretation that we do when we interpret a poem or a painting, or give our interpretation of an event or a speech or interpret one language to another. But what we normally call interpretation, conscious explicit interpretation that we are familiar with cannot reveal the basic interpretive feature of experience and is why "easy introspection upon ourselves" does not yield self-knowledge. What we take as immediate and "present" about ourselves and the world (our interpretive reflexes) actually leads us away from rather

than toward such self-understanding of the fundamental interpretive nature of experience.

What we will see below is that a careful description of human experience will reveal universal features that provide an inherent logic and standard by which to judge all human practices. These are imminent norms of intersubjective life regardless of when or where human life takes place. This seems to be impossible to discover something that the sciences cannot by their inherent limits and philosophy has aspired to theoretically for 2500 years. But we will see in the next section that the very nature of theory prevents such a discovery because theory removes us from experience into a realm of abstraction that cuts up and then reduces experience to the theoretical explanations we have invented which we then attempt to unify to no avail. One must remain with the unity of experience to understand experience. This is a kind of objectivity that is more profound than the abstract objectivity of theoretical philosophy and science and is ironically the condition of possibility for these.

Synthetic means that experience is made through meaning. It is not just given as if we are merely receptive passive beings and a world of objects imprints itself on our consciousness exactly as those objects are in themselves. This is called the myth of objectivism or is sometimes called naïve realism. Such a view dominated philosophy in the 18th century but was eliminated by David Hume and Emmanuel Kant who showed that such an objectivist view was logically impossible. This Cartesian-Lockean view has never been resurrected because it has insurmountable problems that would be far too much to attempt to explain here. Suffice it to say that no one in philosophy after Hume and Kant holds such a view. BUT the average person holds precisely such a view!!⁸

⁸ Russon's book is an excellent way to disabuse yourself of this myth. He shows how this myth is not just a mischaracterization of experience, but is very destructive and impedes human freedom.

Experience is always a determinate flow in specific meaningful situations, not something general and abstract. An object is not out there in itself, but is always **for** consciousness and consciousness is always **of** unified objects.⁹ Objects are the determinacy of our meaningfulness. This means that experience is always concrete and particular, always a particular situation here now with very discrete objects in relation to the self, always spatially oriented. As Kant correctly pointed out, space and time are not out there, but are ways that we experience, the basis of objectivity, objects are always spatio-temporal and space and time are not some external existing separate reality or containers for objects. Meaningful objectivity is fundamental to human experience. Why are objects always similar or the same for us? We are brought into language, intersubjective linguisticality (See **Eros of Wisdom**) which is fundamental, and gives rise to subjectivity-objectivity. Objectivity is participation in the fundamental temporal process of intersubjectivity: conformity to habits and demands of meaning, value, the "truth about reality" one is born into.

All cultural meaning arises out of the basic bodily capacity for experiencing determinacy, discrete objects of awareness. That is a given that we simply find universally in ALL human consciousness, regardless what cultural/linguistic overlay there is. Language and intersubjectivity are the means by which bodily awareness can emerge. Bodily awareness is ALWAYS already meaningful. But the reason two people from different cultures and languages can communicate is that their basic meaning is always bodily and thus through facial expressions, pointing, bodily proximity to each other and to objects, they can come into a meaningful relation because that relation is already established in advance by meaning and by the fact that meaning is always determinate for ALL human experience. We are looking for universal features of human experience, not what is different or divides us in how we make sense

⁹ See the works of Brentano, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, M Ponty, and many others on this.

of things, but we are united in our sense-making itself, not the sense we make, which can divide us.

Determinacy: The congealed memory of patterns of intersubjective recognition we were made familiar with (objects-otherness-people).
Objects: Significances, meanings, reflection of habits, reflection of self-identity. Not just there in themselves, but always already interpreted. Objects of awareness can be “external” as in objects of perception (chairs, etc) or “internal” such as thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, etc., that become the object of attention in awareness. To be an object of any kind is to be already meaningful, already interpreted. To be meaningful to someone is to be meaningful in terms of bodily possibilities. (25-26, 31) There are no “sensory” or “imagined” objects that are not already meaningful. They are experienced as “being there” and they become increasingly abstracted under concepts that come from prior habituation of meaning.

Humans are fundamentally interpretive beings. They are not fundamentally biological beings, for example, or fundamentally the beings seen through any of the sciences, religion, or social custom. All of those are ways of interpreting that if we see more deeply into the nature of interpretation and meaning, are not in conflict, have very different contexts and goals. Science is driven by a methodology of experimental design in which exactitude (applying numbers to phenomena) can allow us to test our claims about cause and effect and to generate unifying theoretical explanations of how some aspect of the world works.

Religion has nothing to do with testing such claims. Religion arises from a transformative experience in which the usual sense of self and selfishness is overcome. It is never about theoretical explanation but is always about a deeply humbling experience of the nothingness of the self in relation to being. From this experience arise rituals that reenact that founding sacred experience and myths that tell the story of that founding experience. In the telling of the story, there is nothing literal but rather something profoundly felt. The point of

myths is to tell us something about our felt sense of being here, not literal truths about anything. However, doctrines that can arise as a later development ARE about truth and so one must be very careful in how one relates to them. If taken too seriously, they can create terrible divisions among people.

Concrete experience always precedes theory. Theory is an artifact, a useful invention. This in no way indicates theory does not reveal something about reality for us through its methodologies. But we must come to understand the limits and power of theoretical abstraction and never reduce anything, especially ourselves to any theoretical understanding. We are not fundamentally biological beings. We are interpretive inventive creative beings who create powerful theoretical ways of explaining and predicting based on mathematical testability. That this is possible at all is a fundamental mystery about the awareness and intelligibility of things. And the place to start is not explanatory theories but looking at the *conditions of possibility* for theories or any intelligibility at all. That means the prior conditions without which experience would not arise. Such reasoning is called “transcendental” because it concerns what can only be inferred from but is not available in experience. The conditions of possibility of experience of objects is spatio-temporality.

The abstract theoretical science of biology developed by Aristotle and later modern evolutionary and genetic theories that arose in the 19th century are human ways of explaining a range of phenomena. Nonetheless, such theoretical understanding, though it is not fundamental, is highly valuable to us. When we turn to the social sciences it gets far more difficult to apply theoretical abstract ways of understanding to being who are fundamentally interpretive beings. To mathematize meaning is to change it or eliminate it. And it should be easily recognized that the phenomena being explained are prior to the development of these ways of explaining them. The word *phenomenon* simply refers to anything that we experience, whether it

appears to us as objective or subjective (what we usually call “outside” us or in our feelings and thoughts, “inside” us). We live in a civilization that is so conversant with theoretical abstract ways of explaining things that we forget this: Our abstractions are NOT IN experience, they are ways we have developed of thinking about experience. These theoretical ways of making sense are so habitual to us that we do not usually take it into account. It takes concerted effort and skill to even notice that we live in our abstractions. We start learning abstract ways of thinking as soon as we are brought into language at the earliest moments of our conscious awareness. But to have conscious meaningful awareness at all presupposes having been brought into meaning including theoretical meaning. For example, we learn at a very early stage that time has a “before” and “after” and this “before” and “after” is on a line to which we can apply numbers and can therefore be measured and counted. This line goes forward and backwards and we see ourselves at a determinate point on this line for a certain span of time. We were not here at an “earlier” part of the line and will not be here at a “later” part of the line (or if you have a belief in an “afterlife” the line will continue, but in a decidedly different fashion.) But if you examine your immediate experience, you will not find anything that corresponds to our notion of time (or heaven or soul, or even basic notions such as cause and effect). These are all abstract ways of thinking about and organizing our meaning in response to our wants and needs. We are certain that time is not space, yet we use exclusively *spatial* metaphors, such as a line or in the case of clocks circles or digitally abstract symbols we call numerals (that stand for numbers). None of this is time. If we try to examine time, we are thrown back on our experience that seems to have a kind of felt push and pull, anticipation and expectation or immediately present thoughts referred to as memory of what we call “the past” which is no longer except in our conscious awareness. Past and future are pure abstractions. There is only the abiding

present that we refer to with the phrase conscious awareness. There is only *experience* that is always already meaningful that we then attempt to grasp in our abstract ideas and theories. The attempt to use other abstractions such as the ideas of motion or change as concepts to explain time is to simply use notions that already presuppose time, thus it is useless to appeal to them. They are not primitive or basic enough. None of this becomes apparent to us until we do a careful examination of experience and the habitual ways we use abstractions to understand it.

Based on careful methods of phenomenology developed over the past century, Russon will be able to reveal extraordinary features of human experience that are not just revelatory but fundamentally **emancipatory**. That is, what is revealed is that human experience is fundamentally a movement toward freedom to pursue our possibilities as unique individuals motivated, ironically, through conflict and working through the neurosis that results in every human life! It is human need and desire as it comes into conflict with its meaningful bodily environment of objects, but especially other human wills, that give impetus to the development of co-created identities and personalities which are coping strategies that we become habituated to. But more important, these habits can imprison us if we are not in a Bildungs-process of self-overcoming. The wonder of human experience is that the trajectory through the suffering of conflict is also the trajectory toward our freedom. One’s horizon of meaning is not only limitation but also one’s opening onto the freedom to pursue one’s possibilities. Such possibilities are always beyond one’s present horizon of meaning. The tragedy of human experience is that we can never escape this set of habits entirely that have a basic fight or flight response process by which it operates. As we grow we become more sophisticated and skillful in negotiating and manipulating our environment to meet our needs and wants. We become “civilized.” But as we shall see, this has a very arresting and even devastating impact on the pursuit of our possibilities. We

almost never see it that way. Rather, we congratulate ourselves and are rewarded by others for how skillful we are in our personal, social, and professional lives. And there is no question there is value in this to the collective in many ways. But for one's freedom, it is devastating. As Freud says, the price of civilization is neurosis. We are trained to see ourselves in entirely false ways, ways that are completely inconsistent with actual experience, if we would pull back from the habits of abstraction and see it. Flying planes into the Trade Towers has everything to do with being imprisoned by such abstractions. We point to other people's beliefs and behavior as being mistaken and problematic, but we are just as imprisoned by our own abstractions even if we do not wreak obvious havoc with them. But when our beliefs are revealed for what they are, convenient habitual designators that serve our needs and wants that we then turn into truths on the basis of which we too often justify dehumanizing others, it becomes apparent that flying planes into trade towers is just an overt manifestation of a nearly universal lack of wakefulness in human beings that is cemented in place by fundamental misunderstandings about experience, belief, truth, and ethics.

How does one genuinely pursue one's own freedom and wakefulness and not become a cog merely serving the interests of the societal wheel? Can we serve our own freedom and social solidarity? The answer is definitely yes and in fact one ultimately serves the achievement of an enlightened society by taking on more powerful responsibility to oneself. That is the only path to genuine responsibility to others. Socrates, Jesus, Confucius, and Buddha seemed to go against the fabric of the societies, the habits of belief of their own times. There are fundamental features of human experience that each of them drew upon to advance the humaneness of the world. In each case, critical thinking played a central and necessary role in their wakefulness and the examined life that each of them lived. They tested the habits of belief of their societies and those habits were revealed to be contrary to the basic features of human experience and to the well-being of both individuals and the collectives. It was

precisely the examined life of these people in their enlightened service to the collective that provided the highest models for others (even though it was in the context of an unenlightened collective that each of these people was destroyed or nearly destroyed).

Ignorance and selfishness are the fundamental reasons for unresolved conflict and injustice. Selfishness arises from ignorance of the basic nature of experience and each person must be educated to be able to come to see this. Instead, we are inculcated with "morality" as the way of controlling behavior and attempting to preserve our habits of belief. This robs us of our freedom to pursue our possibilities.¹⁰ Societies that do not tolerate critical examination and testing of their habits of belief are attempting to impose permanence on the fundamental flux of experience and meaning. The fundamental features of experience, temporality and sense-making are ever present. But the sense we make, the habits of meaning and belief always change. Some fixity of meaning is necessary for a society to endure. But to attempt to arrest the flux of meaning is to go against the basic feature of human life: fallible, finite, vulnerability. We NEVER possess the truth and to take such a stance is the height of arrogance. It is the most damaging of all human tendencies that can only be overcome with critical examination of our beliefs and careful descriptive examination of experience.

Human individual identity is co-created with others. The strategies of survival and felt need and want arise in the context of conflict with one's environments and with others. We are motivated by this conflict toward A) domination of others, B) flight from others, including strategies of appeasement, or C) dissociation, which is a flight from the suffering self into self-deception or in worst cases, into split personalities. But this basic engine of conflict that drives us can instead move us toward

¹⁰ For an account of genuine ethics that arises from trusting and supporting the individual as opposed to morality that is based on lack of trust, punishment, and the attempt to control individuals, see Dean Pickard : "Nietzsche, Emancipation, & Truth" in **New Nietzsche Studies**, (SUNY), Winter, 1997, pp. 85-109,

freedom to pursue our possibilities which entails overcoming our habitual meanings and changes or even transformation in self-understanding. This “self-overcoming” is necessary to move toward human fulfillment or happiness. It is the Bildungs-process discussed above. Without being brought into language as babies, meaningful experience does not arise. The famous example of Helen Keller is a stark reminder of this. Helen became deaf and blind at just a few months old before her entry into a meaningful world and meaningful sense of self could emerge. Much later at the age of about 8, Anne Sullivan brought Helen into the language of hand touch. She was introduced for the first time to abstract signs and symbols. This language of touch in the palm has all the same elements as spoken language: nouns, adjectives, verbs, and grammar. From this arises the ability to abstract and relate one thing to another, to predicate meaningful characteristics to identifiable things. Only through abstraction, concept use, grammar, and the fundamental division between self and world or self and not-self, self and objects, self and other selves, does the possibility of human experience emerge as it does with normal babies as they are continuously exposed to language (spoken and gestural signs and symbols) as they make bodily contact with the world through sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. After about four years of very intensive exposure to language and meaning, Helen Keller’s sense of identity, (that she was someone) and awareness emerged. Only then did her sensations of smell, taste and touch (she has no hearing or sight) become a process of synthesis into meaningful objects of memory and immediacy of the ever-abiding present of experience that is the basis for memory/past and projection/future. After more years of intensive instruction and meaningful interaction she went to college with the help of her teacher Anne Sullivan. She flourished and began to write books about her own experience and later became a very well-known social critic who gave public lectures because she learned how to talk even though she could not see or

hear. It is very instructive and even shocking to read her account of how she came into meaningful awareness out of nothingness. All the people around her in her family before she was brought into language experienced her as responding to her environment in certain patterns, such as her preference for certain tastes, etc., took this as a minimal sign that she had some kind of meaningful awareness. But when we read her own account of the very vague visceral memories she had later when she was an extraordinarily well-educated adult, it indicates she had NO AWARENESS AT ALL prior to being brought into language. According to Helen herself in her autobiography:

Before my teacher came to me, I did not know that I am. I lived in a world that was no-world. I cannot hope to describe adequately that unconscious, yet conscious time of nothingness. I did not know that I knew nothing, or that I lived or acted or desired. I had neither will nor intellect. I was carried along to objects and acts by a certain blind natural impetus. ...My inner life, then, was a blank without past, present, or future without hope or anticipation, without wonder or joy or faith...I was not conscious of any change or process going on in me...When I learned the meaning of “I” and “me” and found that I was something, I began to think. Then consciousness first existed for me... It was the awakening of my soul that first rendered my senses their value, their cognizance of objects, names, qualities, and properties. Thought made me conscious of love, joy, and all the emotions. I was eager to know, then to understand, afterward to reflect on what I knew and understood, and the blind impetus, which had before driven me hither and thither at the dictates of my sensations, vanished forever. (Keller, H., *The World I Live In*, 1908.)

This is stunning. It concretely demonstrates the emergence of self-awareness through language and concept use that opens up meaningfulness. It is ONLY in this context of language use that abstract expectations, value judgments, and all aspects of personhood and interpersonal relations arise. Human beings are most fundamentally interpretive beings

who live in their meanings and this is nowhere more evident in the case of Helen Keller. This unique example of a person completely without language who then became not just someone with language, but an extraordinarily gifted person with unusual abilities for critical thought and insight, is so important that it is brought up again below as an example that demonstrates graphically what is at stake in philosophical hermeneutics. But we will leave that to later.

The point is that without language there is no meaningful experience, no thought, no awareness of self and world. When we are brought into language what begins to happen at a very early stage is the experience of "objects." This basic experience of objects and a sense of self is fundamentally **interpretive** and can only arise in language and abstract concept use (the notions of self and world are themselves abstractions, not found in experience where there is only the immediacy of sensory elements of shape, size, location, color, etc. Even those basic elements are synthesized into conscious awareness.

Human experience is an interpretive process, a co-creative social process of the emergence of self and world, self and not-self, through meaning. It is a fundamentally meaning-making process whose basic feature is always temporally experienced as a particular and determinate sense of bodily presence in relation to objects of experience (being here now) within the context of memory and expectation.

Synthetic means that experience is made through meaning and is not just given as if we are merely receptive passive beings and a world "out there" of objects in themselves that just imprint themselves on our consciousness exactly as they are in themselves. This is called the myth of objectivism or is sometimes called naïve realism. Such a view dominated philosophy in the 18th century but was eliminated by David Hume and Emmanuel Kant who showed that such an objectivist view was logically impossible. This Cartesian-Lockean view has never been resurrected because it has insurmountable problems that would be far too

much to attempt to explain here. Suffice it to say that no one in philosophy after Hume and Kant holds such a view. BUT the average person holds precisely such a view!¹¹

Experience is always a determinate flow in specific meaningful situations, not something general and abstract. An object is not out there in itself, but is always **for** consciousness and consciousness is always **of** unified objects. Objects are the determinacy of our meaningfulness. This means that experience is always concrete and particular, always a particular situation here now with very discrete objects in relation to the self, always spatially oriented. As Kant correctly pointed out, space and time are not out there, but are ways that we experience, the basis of objectivity, objects are always spatio-temporal and space and time are not some external existing separate reality or containers for objects. The very notion of reality refers to what is spatially and temporally present to us as objects. Meaningful objectivity is fundamental to human experience. Why are objects always similar or the same for us? We are brought into language, intersubjective linguisticity (See **Eros of Wisdom**) which is fundamental, and gives rise to subjectivity-objectivity. Objectivity is participation in the fundamental temporal process of intersubjectivity: conformity to habits and demands of meaning, value, the "truth about reality" one is born into. All cultural meaning arises out of the basic bodily capacity for experiencing determinacy, discrete objects of awareness. That is a given that we simply find universally in ALL human consciousness, regardless what cultural/linguistic overlay there is. But this basic bodily awareness does not emerge then language and culture are overlaid. Rather, language and intersubjectivity is the means by which bodily awareness can emerge. Bodily awareness is ALWAYS already meaningful. But the reason

¹¹ Russon's book, *Human Experience*, discussed in the next section, is an excellent way to disabuse yourself of this myth. He shows how this myth is not just a mischaracterization of experience, but is very destructive and impedes human freedom.

two people from different cultures and languages can communicate is that their basic meaning is always bodily and thus through facial expressions, pointing, bodily proximity to each other and to objects, they can come into a meaningful relation because that relation is already established in advance by meaning and by the fact that meaning is always determinate for ALL human experience. We are looking for universal features of human experience, not what is different or divides us in how we make sense of things, but we are united in our sense-making itself, not the sense we make, which can divide us.

A Guide to Human Experience and How it Can Make a Difference in Your Life

In his book, **Human Experience**, John Russon attempts to provide a much more adequate way of understanding human experience than our typical approaches based on assumptions and perspectives that turn out to be unsupportable and even “crippling.” In light of this more adequate phenomenological descriptive analysis Russon then attempts to show how we can more adequately address our primary concerns and struggles as human beings which include: Other people, self-esteem, self-understanding, and the freedom to pursue our possibilities. This process is fundamentally interpretive and is always from a standpoint of embodiment, my bodily opening to what I interpret, my meaningful bodily engagement in the “world.” The world is always a matrix of loosely interconnected beliefs and habits of meaning in my lived awareness. This arises in the family and moves to the larger human society. These aspects of the human situation, the personal, the familial, and the social can to varying degrees support or be in radical conflict with each other. The tensions, demands, powers, and needs of the bodily subject are lived as a *personality* that arises in response to the condition of interpretation, embodiment, memory, mood, and interaction with other people. The basic feature of this tension is neurosis. The book finally focuses on overcoming the crippling habits of self-

interpretation that naturally arise in this neurotic condition of tension in the personal, interpersonal, and social. Therapy, education, and philosophy are the proper arenas of this movement toward self-overcoming and human fulfillment. It is argued that the shift in perspective away from the standard and habitual view of ourselves and the world, a shift that is based on the analysis of human experience in the earlier chapters of the book, provides the materials and motivation for moving toward this self-transformation and emancipation.

1. What Russon’s book reveals is that built right into human experience, if we look closely enough, if we suspend our beliefs for a while to see this, is *reciprocity*, the impossibility of not seeing others as ourselves if we have truly taken on the sacred task of self-overcoming. The only reason this is not obvious is that we do not look at our experience, at our vulnerability and suffering, our basic meaning making or sense making as what is undeniably fundamental and universal to ALL humans, but rather appeal to our family traditions, our religious beliefs, our scientific explanations, our political biases, as fundamental truths.

2. Once an understanding is achieved about how our meaning arises, then the path opens to a much more fulfilled and healthy life. **THIS IS WHAT IS MOST POWERFUL ABOUT RUSSON’S BOOK:** There are *very definite steps* in this process of habituation and movement toward the freedom to pursue one’s possibilities. Critical thinking skills are indispensable to this process and operate especially at the third stage of emancipation. Emancipation means emancipation from our own narrow meanings and from the illusion that those meanings are reality.

3. Any such truth is a way of making sense and no sense we make is ever fundamental or universal. It only reflects a finite, fallible, vulnerable pursuit of meaning. The attempt to make sense is fundamental and universal to humans. But any particular sense

we make never is. Any view is a temporary point of view from which we pursue further insight.

4. The desire to possess truth arises from fear of loss of control. It is part of the fight or flight way we engage in being opposed. That fight or flight approach to the world is VERY primitive. Human emancipation moves beyond this. If one looks closely at human experience, you will find there something basic to ALL people that includes a NECESSARY ethical stance that is fundamentally humble in its recognition of ignorance as a condition of our finitude. Disciplined skeptical pursuit of truth ennobles. The assertion of any final truth is arrogant and is devastating to one's freedom and the freedom of others.

5. All meaning is finite and fallible, thus it must be subjected to testing when important things are at stake.

6. That **testing** is to see if one's beliefs are internally consistent AND to see if they are consistent with the inherent norms of experience, namely, its emancipatory nature and reciprocity. So because of our finitude, we can never presume our point of view have no need of revision and because the nature of experience is...

7. Thus one could ONLY be highly arrogant and could NEVER be justified in seeing oneself as superior due to one's particular meaning (truth). On the other hand, not all points of view are equally good. Some points of view are far more skillful, well-reasoned, and enlightened. No person has a superior status as a human being. But the inherent norms of human experience provide a way of seeing that some claims are more valuable and more objective than others.

8. The only universal claim we can make about humans is based in concrete description, not abstract explanation. When phenomenology is carried out rigorously, the claims made about the nature of human experience are GROUNDED IN EXPERIENCE as descriptions of what is universally present in

human experience. All one has to do is look carefully and skillfully enough. In contrast, the common prejudice that we experience independently real "objects" does NOT show up in experience. There is nothing wrong with theoretical abstraction as long as you see it as such and do not confuse it for something called "reality." If there is anything that answers to this term "reality," it must be in experience or secondarily the inferred conditions of possibility for experience. This view does challenge the idea that theoretical understanding pokes through to reality or truth. Rather, theoretical explanations provide orientation, explanation, and prediction of phenomena. Knowing the value *and limits* of abstract thinking in science, in religious doctrine (as opposed to religious experience) as well as common sense is critical. To fail to be able to do this and to think that any of this gets us to "truth" is arrogant and has led to the worst violations of what we know about humans from careful descriptive analysis. Science must remain skeptical, especially about itself, and religion must cultivate its core significance, humility in the face of the mystery that there is anything at all and that things matter to us.

Far more amazing than anything science has revealed, is science itself. Science is a phenomena that science does not and cannot approach, not the natural sciences due to the very nature of mathematization of the objects of inquiry and not social sciences because they attempt to emulate the natural sciences when their objects of investigation cannot be approached that way. That we can think like that, can bring order to our awareness in such a way that it makes things intelligible in such powerful ways is far more amazing than what we come up with in science. All the amazing things in science are only possible because of our ability to think scientifically.

B. HOW DO WE APPROACH AN UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE?

Draft

Concrete Phenomenology versus Abstract Theoretical Methodologies¹²

Modern mathematical sciences are only one type of objectivity by which we can test our claims about phenomena. But to do this, they move away from phenomena to abstraction. They set aside and forget what is fundamental: Any phenomenon is a phenomenon in the consciousness of a situated interpreting person. The objects and explanations of science are real within the context of conscious beings making sense of phenomena. But we are captured by an abstract picture of reality that various systematic methodologies have given us as if that picture is not abstract at all. It is an abstract representation that we do not see as a representation, but think of as reality itself. This is a fundamental mistake. Science is immensely valuable to us but it is not necessary to be scientific. That cuts us off from our ground, from our basic hermeneutical condition and task. Interpreting is a skill and we are responsible for our interpretations and have to justify them in order to expect others to accept them. But in no way are we to accept them as reality. We accept them as real interpretations and we judge them by strict standards, by the values of objectivity, consistency, clarity, range of explanatory power, etc.. These are vitally important to us because the better we do this, the better our interpretations serve our purposes which can be judged by inherent norms of human experience. The terms "reality" and "truth" are terms that apply to successful interpretations. But to think that any interpretation is once and for all, is a failure to grasp our basic condition of finitude, our basic hermeneutical condition. We are not uncovering something called reality in itself. To even think this way reflects how badly we have been captured by the picture of objectivism, dualism, and naïve realism which are demonstrably impossible perspectives because they are inherently self-contradictory. The

value of consistency is a basic human value that is necessary to us at every level. We live in our interpretations, but they have to be good ones skillfully arrive at. The ideas of absolutism and relativism are incoherent. It is our craving for the infinite in a condition of finitude, permanence in a condition of impermanence that leads us into such absurdities. We can, however, establish facts and "truth" within the context of the basic features of human experience. In the next section we shall examine this in some detail to see this fundamental nature is a temporal and synthetic (interpretive) drive toward emancipation and self-overcoming. For now we need to expand our idea of objectivity which we can do by better understanding the difference between concrete and abstract ways of interpreting phenomena. Science is abstract. Phenomenology is concrete. Both science and phenomenology provide rigorous objectivity. But as we shall see, phenomenology provides a much more powerful objectivity. But in science this is based on exactitude achieved through measurement. Science achieves objectivity that yields contingent truths. There are facts that just happen to be true and it would be no contradiction to imagine it otherwise. For example, it is factually true to say that the liver filters the impurities out of the blood and Columbus sailed to the new world in 1492 or recessive trait has a 25% chance of manifesting in offspring. You could imagine each of these otherwise and it would not produce contradiction just factual error. You could imagine in a strange world that some other organ filters the blood, that Columbus did not discover the new world and that genetics operates quite differently. ... It would be no contradiction to imagine these. They are factually false, not logically impossible. And as we know, facts are always subject to revision as we discover new information or when there is a shift in a scientific paradigm.

¹² See the Sections V and VI below for a much more complete discussion of theory and theoretical sciences.

In contrast, phenomenology achieves objectivity entirely differently and reveals certain necessary or essential features of human experience that don't just happen to be true. Rather, it would be impossible for them to be false. One could not possibly imagine them otherwise. For example, the claim that without meaning, there would be no science is an a priori or necessary truth. Or if something is a human being, then it is an interpretive being that makes sense of things. One cannot imagine human beings otherwise. To say this collectively reflects our basic collective condition as prior to individuality and avoids the controversy about when personhood begins. The entry into language use in infancy as essential to the coming forth of one's humanness is also non controversial. So the claim about meaning is collectively true and we can just avoid the controversy about how and when it happens. It is highly problematic to reduce humans to biological definitions. Those who wish to do this for religious reasons are unwittingly and ironically forced into an Aristotelian conception that one is not born human but becomes human. So regardless of such controversy it is impossible to imagine a human being who does not feel, think, experience, and interpret. Sense making is a necessary condition. It is not sufficient because we can imagine other thinking interpreting beings. Such knowledge is necessary but tells us something about human beings. If it is human, then it is a sense making interpreting being. This is as Kant would say synthetic a priori. A necessary truth about experience.

We are fundamentally finite interpreting beings to whom things matter and any mathematical approach to understanding human experience misses this entirely. We require a different kind of rigor and objectivity to properly understand ourselves.

Phenomenology provides an obvious alternative to abstract theoretical understanding by means of concrete description of experience. Experience is prior to abstract theories and it is with the unity of experience we must start. Phenomenology does not divide experience into inner and outer. It starts with careful

description of concrete immediate experience. This reveals that instead of subjects and objects as primary, the unity of experience itself is primary and allows the distinction of subject and object to arise. Consciousness is always consciousness of objects and objects are always objects for consciousness. Experience is first and foremost ALREADY meaningful, already objective. That means that experience is always experience of objects. Objects are meanings that are constituted always in the context of language use. Further, meaningfulness has very distinctive features to it that are more fundamental than any particular meaning. Meaning or sense-making always shows up the same way in all human experience even though our individual and cultural habits of meaning can be quite different. Thus experience is the formation of an identity of self and not-self that is basic to any experience of objects and objects will reflect the habits of meaning of any given social context. But the basic temporal and unified feature is universal to all human experience. This will be discussed in detail in the next section.

IS PHENOMENOLOGY OBJECTIVE?

Objectivity: Are the claims of phenomenology objective? In order for a claim to be objective it must be independently verifiable by others. In order for a claim to be verified, it must have an objective intersubjective **basis** for verification. If others cannot test what you say, then it remains unsupported and unworthy of belief. The means of establishing objectivity and the basis of verification is controversial. In natural sciences, objective means measureable. Verification and objectivity in science are pursued through mathematization of phenomena via a theoretical-explanatory methodology based on experimental design and testing of causal relations of phenomena.

A primary objection from scientific thinkers toward phenomenology is its lack of testable "objectivity" since it does not attempt to explain anything by appeal to the exactitude of mathematics. It is descriptive, not theoretically explanatory. Theoretical explanations are

abstract. They do not show up *in* experience but are *about* experience. Phenomenology restricts itself only to what is concretely describable *in* experience. Phenomenology has a distinct methodology for observation and as we shall see, it is the concreteness of phenomenology that provides objectivity for what are universally verifiable claims about human experience that science cannot make. This is because abstraction moves away from experience to provide creative explanatory thought about experience. In contrast, phenomenological methods of description stay focused on the immediate concreteness of experience and are thus *more* objective because they remain in immediate relation to *objects* of experience or phenomena. Objectivity is all about objects that can be intersubjectively verified. Any attempt to falsify the universal claims of phenomenology by finding a single human being (not in the merely biological sense) that does not participate in meaning will by definition be impossible. If it is a human being, then it will participate in meaning. This implies that anyone who loses this capacity is no longer human is actually consistent with the way we tend to understand for example, those who are in comas or so mentally incapacitated that they “cannot function as normal human beings” which simply reveals just how fundamental this relation is between being human and having meaning. What makes phenomenology objective is its constant engagement with objects of consciousness while minimizing abstraction

What is critically important to see here is that science MOVES AWAY from phenomena to *abstractions*, to what is thought and is not in concrete experience. Such thinking then returns to phenomena to transform them into “data” via measurement (see Section VI below on experimental design). In contrast, phenomenology moves only into the immediacy of *CONCRETE* conscious awareness to approach phenomena directly and *descriptively* THEN attempts to make significant generalizations about experience and the nature of phenomena that appear in experience

or conscious awareness. The two processes are roughly opposite.

Concrete descriptive phenomenology gives a very different and much more “objective” account of human individuality and society. Modern mathematical sciences are only one of several rigorous objectivities. But the objectivity of exactitude of applying mathematics to phenomena to produce testable data is inappropriate when attempting to understand conscious interpreting beings to whom things matter. Human beings are fundamentally interpreting beings and any attempt to abstractly reduce them merely to their observable behavioral features, and attempt to reduce them to mathematized entities is to approach them in a way that leaves out what they essentially are, interpreting beings. A description of a person’s understanding of their situation must be the starting point. Of course, this is not decisive, but it is the essential starting point. That understanding can then be subjected to a broader phenomenological perspective in which it can be “tested” to see if it is consistent with the inherent norms of human experience from the perspective of a more developed and rigorous understanding.

Phenomenology is objective because from concrete descriptive analyses, it generates generalities that apply to every human being, past, present, and future. Such universality is what is sought in every science, generalities that apply to all members of a class of objects to be examined and explained. In the sciences, this is a matter of probability, whereas in phenomenology, it is not probable that any human being will be an interpreting being to whom things matter, it is a defining necessity. Biology can also provide some seeming necessary generalities. But a thought experiment can show the limits of this. It may be empirically true that all human metabolize, for example. But it is not a self-contradiction to imagine a human being who does not, perhaps has some non metabolizing mechanism for restoring cells and providing fuel for mutation and other functions. But it is a contradiction to think of a human being who is a non interpreting being to whom things have no

significance. So what phenomenology reveals meets a level of universality rarely equaled in the natural sciences and never in the social sciences. It reveals a necessary condition for human experience. Metabolizing is merely a factual aspect, not a necessary condition. In science, we seek both necessary and sufficient conditions. But it appears that sufficient conditions operate only in abstraction and never apply to the openness of experience.

What is much more significant than the objective and universal features of human experience is the objective ethical norm that is derived from them. That is the ethical principle of reciprocity often called the Golden Rule. The sciences have no normative capacity. They cannot tell us what we ought to do. The sciences can only address what happens and why and how. In contrast, phenomenology reveals concrete universal features of human experience that can be used as norms by which we can judge human practices to be more or less consistent with the emancipatory and self-transcending nature of human experience. Anything that impedes these is something to be overcome. Anything that supports them is to be encouraged, cultivated, and protected.

Explanatory via theory. Logical consistency of a systematic method that mirrors the world and is consistent with itself. Moves from the abstract general to fit and explain the particular. Generate a large view in order to explain the particular

vs Phenomenology starts with experience and makes claims that are consistent with experience. Moves from the concrete particular to universal statements. Describes the particular and analyzes its features to see if these features show up in every case. Then it makes general claims that fit all particular cases.

Immediate objectivity of phenomena: By careful analysis arrive at generalizations that apply universally to all people

Phenomenology is the attempt to minimize as much as possible any abstractions and simply describe what is immediate in experience. It does not explain experience by appeal to abstract ideas, hypotheses, measurement, the production of data, and

theories. Its goal is to let the phenomena of conscious awareness come into view much more immediately and simply without the abstract overlay, not just from science, but all the habits of abstraction that we develop from infancy. Of course, we are already language using beings whose thinking is shot through with abstraction. So we can never just have awareness of "pure phenomena." We are always already operating in meaning. Nonetheless, skillful phenomenology can reveal features of experience that simply are not approachable any other way. And THAT is shocking. It is shocking to find out that very little of our habits of thought and belief has any basis in immediate experience. In Buddhism, which employs one of the oldest forms of phenomenology, most of what we think is real in experience are actually just words that are "convenient designators." These words, such as "self," stand for bundles of sensations and have no other reference in immediate experience. In the 18th century Hume showed that much of what we think we experience is not in experience at all. "Cause and effect," for example, is nowhere to be found in experience. This is just a way of making sense of what we experience. Most of what we commonly believe only exists in our habits of thought and meaning, not in experience. In the next two centuries western phenomenology has advanced greatly in its rigor and continued revelations about experience. We value science for its objectivity and skepticism, not accepting any claims without intersubjective testing by careful methods whereby causal claims can be falsified and verified. But the sciences require a theoretical structure for their interpretive mathematical methodologies. Phenomenology is also very rigorous, but it is not mathematical and does not appeal to exactitude for its rigor. This is because mathematics is NOT a feature of human experience but rather something that is revealed in human abstract thought.

Abstraction: Concepts or meanings are general and non-specific. They do not pick out the specific determinacy of immediate CONCRETE phenomena (experienced objects, feelings, etc.). Immediate phenomena: What

shows up and is immediate in experience. We can and do apply abstract concepts to our felt sense. **Concrete:** Immediate phenomena of experience, our felt sense (not the concepts and words we apply to them.) Love is a word and a general concept, but the felt sense one has when one loves is concrete. Poetry is appropriate to such feeling as one is trying to express the experience. Literal language would be useful if one is trying to define the concept.

My current meaningful situation is prior in reality to any abstraction. The basic lived experience of being located in specific meaningful situations cannot be concretely understood from the standpoint of actual experience by means of our abstract understanding of space/time, body/mind, and objectivity.

Abstraction and concept use is integral to human thought. But the standard abstract subject/object or mind/body dichotomy is a “logically incoherent and untenable view of reality... a conceptual absurdity” which does not map on to our experience at all and as an intellectual habit can only mislead us about human experience.

Roughly, “*abstract*” refers to what I think and “*concrete*” is what is immediately experienced. A chair is a bundle of phenomena (color, shape, size, location, etc.) that we group together with the phrase “this chair.” The word chair stands for the concept chair which refers

to a class of things definable by their function. The lived felt experiences of love or jealousy are concrete. The terms “love” and “jealousy” are abstract, are not in experience. They are only thought. Theoretical explanation is the use of abstraction to further interpret what we already take to be reality.

The distinction between concrete and abstract is particularly difficult for us to grasp because we are so habituated to taking abstractions as concrete realities. But if we look carefully at our experience, we will not find anything that answers to these concepts. Rather, they are ways of organizing the phenomena of experience. Once we realize this, then we can see that phenomenology is more fundamental and more objective with regard to experience than explanatory theories. Abstract theories and phenomenology are not really in opposition. They are different but complementary approaches to understanding. The problem why phenomenology is rejected from a theoretical explanatory standpoint is that such a view is really *scientism* and naïve realism which are not science. They are just poor and unsustainable philosophical views pretending to be scientific. There is nothing in science that requires such views. Since they are a liability and are unnecessary to our understanding, they should simply be jettisoned.

C. The Therapeutic Process of Self-Transcendence

DRAFT

Happiness is the goal of all human life, yet we do not know how to pursue it. **Popular witticism:** Insanity is to continue doing the same thing and expect a different result. We do feel a yearning for change in our lives. We wish, hope for, and even expect something different and better. But we allow our habits to carry us along and thus it is no surprise that we continue to get the same outcome of neurotic unresolved conflict in our lives the source of this conflicted meaning in ourselves and with others is the resistance to our will that we experience from infancy as we develop and

identity. Our meaning emerges in the push and pull of our desires and aversions, our dependency on others, and our need to overcome what resists us. The most primitive response to this challenge of life is fight or flight. We either flee from conflict, from what resists us, or try to dominate. Nearly as primitive are all the strategies for submitting to or overcoming the power of others. Sadly, many, perhaps most humans continue to labor under these most primitive responses to conflict instead of developing the skills of conflict resolution through genuine education,

the emancipating process of *Bildung* or self-overcoming (see the introduction to this text on education and the section below on *Bildung*). Most central to this is the development of the critical thinking skills necessary to better judgment, conflict resolution, and the therapeutic process of moving toward self-overcoming that is necessary for genuine human maturity.

The fight or flight response is primary, early, primitive. This and the intermediate strategies of coping that emerge in early childhood can arrest our movement toward freedom, toward our possibilities. The pursuit of wisdom takes cultivation through education beyond mere schooling and degrees in order to begin to see the basic features of human experience as fundamentally emancipatory. This means overcoming previous meaning, not trying to hold on to it and defend it in ever more sophisticated ways, which are still just disguised strategies of dominance, flight, or persuasion.

THE “HOW TO” OF THERAPEUDIC SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

Emancipation as it truly begins to mature is emancipation from our own meaning that we are in the process of overcoming. But due to our basic vulnerability and desperate need for identity, we tend to hang onto our meaning instead of let it propel us toward wisdom which means “seeing” into the nature of things, not holding on to habitual beliefs. Wisdom always involves questioning and overcoming or seeing through one’s beliefs.

It is arrogant to think that our meaning, our “truth,” is in any way final or applies universally. To wish for or assume this, betrays insecurity and fear to which the desire for control is the response. But as Nietzsche warns us, “truths are prisons” and says that it is not the courage of one’s convictions that is admirable, but the courage to question one’s convictions! What the great teachers have in common is that none of them sought control or truth, but emancipation for themselves and others. After they achieved their wakefulness, insecurity, fear, and desire for control no longer

dominated their lives. They were liberated from such primitive but basic motivations. How did they do it? In every case they drew from their traditions the means and the wisdom that they then built upon that allowed them to no longer be trapped in those traditions.

There are no abstract universal scientific, religious, or political truths. There is the movement toward wisdom that sees through our traditions yet promotes the stability necessary for human life. One sees this in the lives of Confucius (Kong Tzu), Socrates, Jesus, Mohammed, and many others who transformed our ways of life. What is universal is not a truth, but the attempt to establish and maintain a stable way of life in which the movement toward yet unknown possibilities that is the central feature of human experience might emerge. The insistence on truth reveals a desire for control motivated by fear that arrests this basic movement.

Our self-transcending experience fundamentally propels us beyond ourselves to recognition that *for ourselves* the other’s perspective is an essential value, and something for which we must care. Our essential reality as persons *is* to be drawn out of ourselves by others, and only thereby to arrive at ourselves. . Education as *Bildung* is the culmination of this experience of other selves for it is the stance in which we recognize that the care of ourselves is the care for others.

Based on seeing into the basic features of human experience there are specific steps, practices, and exercises one can undertake to break the habits of interpretive reflexes that govern our lives so we may move toward a more emancipated, wakeful, examined, and therefore ethical life way of being that is healthier, less neurotically conflicted, more compassionate and caring. That is the way of true education. It is the goal of modern psychotherapy and of philosophy, especially as phenomenology, not merely an intellectual and academic endeavor, but as the pursuit of

wisdom, the meaning of “philosophy” and its *raison d’être*.¹³

STEP 1: Turning toward our sense-giving or meaning-making power (away from habituated abstract objectivism).

We saw that experience itself is fundamentally synthetic and interpretive that allows conscious awareness to arise at all. This is not something we change, but rather we become aware of through careful phenomenology.

This is the first step in emancipating yourself from your interpretive reflexes, your “truths,” your habits of meaning that you call “reality.” The practice of turning toward your sense giving power opens the possibility of transformation or rebirth into new meaning and no longer believing the myth of objectivism, and that you’re past and your identity are fixed.

Treating the world as a set of objects is the standard positivistic prejudice. You can move from this toward oneself as a sense-giving power operative through your situation. Situations and things are not “objective” but rather meaningful.

Once you can genuinely let go of this via careful examination of experience, then letting go of all the related habits can follow (treating people as objects, believing that objects have intrinsic value, etc.).

You must also come to see that conflict is NOT the enemy. The “enemy” is what you do with it: fight or flight, self-deception, dissociation. You are now able to mobilize the inherent self-transcending feature of human experience whose central motivating force toward freedom is the *very neurotic conflict and distress that otherwise cripples our freedom*. Turning toward our sense giving power is ALWAYS open to us. It must involve the development of the skills and practice necessary to the process as we see below. But this initial turning toward and recognition of your fundamental interpretive nature and power is decisive and empowering.

STEP 2: Identification of interpretive reflexes.

Once you have seen through the myth of objectivism objects and situation can now be seen as symptoms of your already habituated meaning-value-neurosis. This skill of seeing through your habits of meaning in turn can allow you to understand the causes of your neurotic behavior and reveals the nature of your connection to the intersubjective world. Otherwise, you remain trapped in your habits of abstract meaning and belief as if it is reality. That meaning that might have had some value earlier in life can now be devastating to your relationships.

Now turn this phenomenological skill toward the habits of meaning or sense-giving you adopted from your family, per group, and society that may have served you well up to a point but eventually will impede your basic emancipatory movement. This now requires skill in carefully noticing your responses to all your situations, particularly when you get upset, afraid, angry or judgmental and critical. Recall that situations are fundamentally meaningful, are already interpreted. To be situated is to be situated meaningfully. How you undergo your meaningful situations are already set up in advance by your interpretive reflexes. They reflect your value-reality-truth. They are NOT “objective” and must be examined usually with the help of a partner, therapist, or educator.

Every time you catch yourself operating with your judgmental patterns and bigotries, your unreflective prejudices, you say to yourself what you have done and recognize that you have the freedom to choose a healthier alternative. If you have imposed your neurotic behavior on others, you simply apologize and re-establish your new integrity and dignity. You free yourself to live this new chosen path of an examined life of greater intellectual and ethical maturity and you foster it in others not by preaching, but by example. The best way to have an impact on others is to gain their trust and when they are ready to engage in movement toward greater intellectual and ethical maturity you are prepared to support

¹³The explicit steps spelled out here are implicit in John Russon’s **Human Experience** (2005).

this both by example and by encouragement, by mutual recognition and by always respecting the dignity of the other. You may or may not be up to the task of the resistance you will find from people and will sometimes have to move on to other relationship out of respect for your own dignity. You are engaged in the sacred task of your own Bildungs-process and you must choose the people and situations that will recognize and promote this.

You must approach yourself as another. Develop the skills of being both the person studied and the person who is studying. Develop the skill of describing the way in which you experience objects (See section 1 above). Notice and describe how your compulsions are experienced. Such description is the first step toward explication of your situated experiences in terms of the interpretive commitments they enact and embody and then you can begin the reeducation of those most familiar interpretive reflexes.

But you must first see them and how they compel. Until you can achieve this objectivity with your compulsions and insecurities, they will determine how you interpret and experience others. They will determine all your meaningful situations. The fight or flight dominate-control approach to situations varies greatly. But they all have in common. They involve self-deception and often blame and excuse making. A sign of more emancipated living is not blaming others or excusing oneself. The attempt to control others is a symptom of insecurity and fear of loss of control. Strategies for controlling others can show up in many different ways that are developed from childhood that we call "personality." A controlling person might control by withdrawing, control by instilling fear, control by learning to be liked or by learning to be entertaining, by manipulating people's desires and fears, etc.. All of these do not move us toward emancipation. They just allow us to survive emotionally. Far more powerful, would be to transcend the very limits the set up and govern our insecurities to begin with.

These strategies for coping with and avoiding trauma, disappointment, shame, etc.,

but also for getting what we want become life-long patterns that can be altered and even transcended but for most people they arrest the movement toward emancipation. Pursuit of comfort, safety and security become overriding concerns and our coping strategies are ways of flight or avoidance of the uncertainty and ambiguity of life. Conversely risk taking, even death defying risk taking can also be a form of avoidance. You cannot always tell from the outer behavior what the internal motivation is that drives it. But pursuing what we crave and avoiding what we have aversion to is universal regardless how that is pursued. To the extent a person does not come to see this, that person has forfeited the inherent emancipatory movement of human experience? The irony is that it is the personality strategies that allow us an identity by which we can open onto a meaningful world and pursue our emancipation, yet it is precisely that same set of interpretive habits and strategies, one's personality, that prevents this movement toward emancipation that is natural for humans.

It is a process of phenomenological self-interpretation and then self-transcendence. This will almost always involve others for support and guidance in this process. Conceptual reorientation from which one can recognize the inadequacy of the vision of normal selfhood is inevitable. The entire process can be judged by the *inherent norms of human experience*. Those norms tell us whether any habit of meaning, old or new is healthy or not. (see the previous section on this)

Becoming aware of what our sense-making is, the mid level of interpretation, does not protect one from all the pushes and pulls and vulnerabilities of being human. But they do allow you to not be so trapped in your interpretive reflexes. It allows you more readily to see conflict not as something to be avoided, unless it has no chance of resolution into a more aware perspective. Obviously, some conflict is dangerous, useless, counterproductive, too governed by blind arrogant interpretive reflexes. But conflict is

the basic engine for human emancipation and self-transcendence.

You cannot eliminate your interpretive reflexes. They are your entry into meaning. But you can come to see them as such and at that point they can be much more readily modified and even replaced. It takes practice and effort. Doing it very well is at the center of genuine maturation as a human being. Genuine maturation simply means increasingly overcoming selfishness. Overcoming selfishness is the primary feature of emancipation and self-transcendence.

There are the interpretive reflexes that arise in the conflicted meaning contexts of our families, peer groups, and society in general that shape our identities before we have a say in the matter. Before one can become aware that one's sense of what is right and real is actually the result of such reflexes, they already run your life. Emancipation is moving from this passive reflexive condition to an active condition of seeing that such interpretive reflexes run you life and can be overcome. Just realizing that we have the power for such emancipation is itself liberating. But it is only the start of the movement toward transformation of ourselves and our relationship to others. So a major and core aspect of emancipation is to see through these interpretive reflexes and at the point one begins to see one's possibilities beyond the limits of these habitual meanings. The family, peer group and society typically do not like having these meaning habits questioned and challenged and sometimes react violently. On the other hand, we also expect that when child grows up, he or she will naturally modify the meaning they have inherited and if the rearing and enculturation process has been successful, this person will find new meaning that is also compatible with the meaning habits that allowed them to emerge. But it is inevitable that there will be those times that there is great conflict and turmoil over a shift in meaning, a shift in world view

[NOTE: Pickard's exercises in phenomenological seeing and hermeneutical awareness (see section IV below) are specific concrete experiential practices for emancipating oneself from the habits

of abstraction and objectification and can greatly facilitate Russon's steps 1-4 toward emancipation]

STEP 3: Critical Thinking

Human beings do not like inconsistency and contradiction if they are confronted with it. We often have inconsistent beliefs but are not confronted with their inconsistency. Inconsistency and contradiction are anathema to making sense which we have seen is fundamental to human experience. When someone discovers something inconsistent in their thinking they try to correct it. Inconsistency occurs when two statements or beliefs cannot be true at the same time. Contradiction is a particular form of inconsistency where exactly one of two statements or beliefs must be true and one must be false. Thus you cannot believe both at the same time. When we encounter inconsistency and contradiction we have a kind of immediate discomfort that calls for resolution (in psychology "cognitive dissonance"). The discomfort of conflict of meaning is embodied or distilled in logic. The tool of logic can then be used to eliminate and avoid inconsistency. When two statements or beliefs that matter to us are in logical conflict like this, we seek resolution. We want to find out which one to believe (or through self-deception, eliminate the cognitive dissonance). It should be noted that people often do not want to engage in careful examination of their beliefs for fear that their beliefs will be undermined. Comfortable habits dominate much of human life until something awakens us from our thoughtlessness and dogmatic slumbers. That can exposure to unexpected information, a good teacher, a powerful piece of literature, such as Harriet Beecher Stow's *The Underground Railroad* that changed the outlook about slavery of many people, or anything that disturbs us or elicits our sense of wonder.

This step in the emancipatory process is especially apropos for this textbook which has been a "how to" guide for better thinking. In order to pursue overcoming our interpretive reflexes that are inconsistent or contradictory with the basic emancipatory feature of all

human experience, we must develop the **critical thinking skills** that can reveal the inconsistency and inadequacy of our current habits. It is only when we are faced with this inconsistency and inadequacy of our beliefs that we begin to move toward our emancipation that opens on to our possibilities.

Once you expose your interpretive reflexes in steps one and two, you begin to see alternatives and you can begin to judge those reflexes

You do not see these unconscious habitual and immediate ways of interpreting. These reflexes run the show before you can see it. There is inevitably a high level of self-deception associated with continuing in these patterns of meaning and behavior. You have a vested interest in them. They are your sense of reality-value-meaning-security. You feel threatened when these reflexes are questioned. Once you expose them you can then see that they are inconsistent with a better and healthier way of living and that you use up an enormous amount of unconscious energy with them that could be freed up for more genuine and responsible engagements in life. These reflexes feel like they work. You even get rewarded for them by a generally neurotic society built on fear and a morality of control (rather than a genuine ethics of trust and honesty). You can come to see that these interpretive reflexes that you call reality constantly damage you and others around you with unnecessary and unresolved conflict that only heighten stress and unhealthy and unethical ways of dealing with yourself and others. You must engage in serious *explication* and clarification of your values and where you got them. Critically test them by **the immanent norm/standard/logic of human experience**. This is the universal self-transcending feature of all human experience as fundamentally a temporal, embodied, intersubjective, co-creative, erotic/linguistic struggle for mutual recognition and care for oneself through care of the other. It is a recognition of our basic fallible, finite, vulnerability. It is a recognition of our basic co-creative ethical stance by which meanings and

practices can be judged by their coherence in terms of this imminent logic of experience.

Many of our meanings or “truths,” CANNOT be true at the same time. They create unresolvable conflict from which it is impossible to grow and mature. When one takes the arrogant stance that one possesses truth, then others who hold different views are simply wrong and easily come to be seen as enemies, if not evil. But we have seen that sense making is more fundamental than any sense we make. And we arrived at an awareness of the inherent emancipatory self-overcoming nature of experience that provides a standard or logic of care and reciprocity guides us away from such divisive arrogance.

A) By using this norm, you recognize the inadequacy of A) the family and B) the vision of “normal selfhood” of society C) religious dogmatism D) Scientism. You now recognize the need for a society or at least a community that supports and strives to fulfill the immanent logic of human experience.

B) You now have a standard by which you can evaluate your neurotic habits in terms of an imminent critique of universal features of human experience.

C) You can use critical thinking to test the coherence of one’s implied or overt reality by the inherent logic of the project of self-identity, the logic of human experience.

[See Pickard’s Exercises in Phenomenological Seeing and Hermeneutical Awareness (Part IV below): Those exercises allow one to experience the “facts” of one’s life anew, interpret them differently, which in turn allows one to experience them differently. This is a kind of reciprocal process (hermeneutical circle) where the overall meaning of one’s life is transformed by the specific events or facts taking on radically different meaning which in turn makes the specific events and facts continue to take on new meaning].

Learn to approach yourself as an “other” to be approached and understood on his or her own terms and unique process of coming forth. Do the same with all “others.”

STEP 4: Re-Education. Like raising a child again, a rebirth. Reconfiguring and Re-education of Interpretive Reflexes:

This step is a real challenge, but once you see just how full of shit you have been in your life and you decide you don't want to remain in that condition, then the conflict within you between your current new awareness of those previously unconscious habits, make you VERY uncomfortable. Your integrity cries out for transformation. "How could I have ever been like that?! "Why would I ever have wanted to remain that way?? Once you begin to develop the skills and perspectives necessary for you emancipation it can easily motivate you to continue to improve these skills necessary to your freedom and integrity as a person because you have taken on the responsibility of what previously were thoughtless interpretive reflexes that you imposed on others as if it was reality. Emancipation and responsibility feels good!

STEP 5: Re-placing old habits of meaning with new one: Now that you have exposed and become self-consciously aware of you interpretive reflexes and seen through the myth of objectivism and are now aware of healthier alternatives that are consistent with the emancipatory and ethical norms inherent in human experience you must begin to replace emotional and intellectual habits and interpretive reflexes with ones that are more consistent with the inherent norms of the emancipatory nature of experience. Reconfiguration or re-education of interpretive reflexes (overcoming myths of objectivity, etc.

John Russon's book *Human Experience*, is one of the best at exposing "objectivity" as a cultural myth, the idea that the world is just out there independent of our meaning. This is often called "naïve realism" for a good reason. It truly appears as naïve once one has done the careful examination of experience stripped of our habits of meaning. One has to be equally careful not to fall into relativism, also revealed as very naïve once one has emancipated oneself from the illusions we have about "truth." (See Chapter 2 on this.)

The exercises above will provide you with shocking experience that will now guide you to being a better and more aware person. You will now see how your habits/values/beliefs don't make sense and are inconsistent with and unsupported by the inherent norms of experience that you now have the skill to see. You will see that your beliefs are contradictory with each other and must be overcome. Most of all you will recognize your interpretive reflexes as thoughtless and arrogant (arrogant simply means not knowing your limits).

Even though you are now aware of the need for Rehabilitation, at first you will not be able to stop your interpretive reflexes. It took a life time for them to develop. But now you WILL be able to catch yourself and restore your integrity with others when those reflexes occur. Even after you see how horribly undesirable they are,,, you nonetheless can too easily return to what is familiar and comforting. There will be moments of backlash, such as "This is way too hard." "Why am I even doing all this stupid stuff? "My life was just fine until I got involved with this weird stuff," etc. etc.. You really have to be honest with yourself and not let yourself off the hook with such weakness. YOUR LIFE IS AT STAKE. Remember "The unexamined life is not worth living." "Know thyself." "The beginning of wisdom is the recognition of your own ignorance." (you always think you know, when actually you don't. To choose to merely do what you want, is not freedom at all and to go against your own freedom is to go against your life. It is a disservice to yourself and to others.

But eventually if you really FEEL the conflict, you will develop a great DISTASTE for being so arrogant about your finitude and fallibility that you will be highly motivated to do things that promote your transformation. What you want will come to support what you NEED. You will NOT want to be around people who do not provide an environment of support for your transformation, who will be threatened by it and perhaps attempt to shame you into returning to your old ways. But your resolve must match your insight about just how full of

shit you were with your interpretive reflexes. Once this kicks in, and only then, will this movement toward transformation really take off and succeed will be truly wonderful (full of wonder because “the world” is new). Once you rehabilitate, you will wonder how you were ever so blind and self-deceived, how you could live in such fear of loss of control that had become your primary mode of being. How you could be so brutal to others or so uncompassionate, so uncomprehending. This might be the hardest part, changing your habits of meaning/interpreting or at least catching yourself when you lapse into it. It takes tremendous commitment and a lot of integrity.

STEP 6: Reworlding: Habituation to new healthier interpretive reflexes: Re-habituation or new habituation in the PRACTICE of living. new being at home in this new concrete world. **Rebirth:** The self has to “grow up” again, be approached from within itself and remolded by its **inherent logic of self-overcoming**

You cannot be happy with yourself if you have gone through steps 1-3 and then NOT do this. This step can be very challenging but is sometimes is the easiest. Some people are so shocked when they see just how mistaken they have been and how much they have harmed themselves and others with it, they are suddenly transformed and are no longer even able to continue in the old habits. I can give you some guidance in how that would have to happen. But the slow process is the typical path and takes commitment to yourself, to your own integrity and getting rid of the normal high dose of self-deception you heap on yourself in order to not face up to what at bottom you know if you would be honest with yourself WITHOUT excuses. It is at this juncture that if you have any self-respect and integrity, the excuses simply stop. Explanations might be OK, but they so often are just veiled excuses, so one has to be careful.

This can be a long difficult process (see Bildung above), but we embrace this from an ignited sense of wonder and passion about our possibilities. But we can only have our passion ignited, if we have not run from the suffering

we are trying to overcome. Suffering is not be avoided but is the impetus for our transformation. To avoid suffering, is to avoid oneself, to avoid life, to avoid freedom to pursue one’s [possibilities.]

The very core of what freedom is, is to be sufficiently motivated by conflict, curiosity, suffering of the rupture of temporality to develop the skills necessary to overcome habits of meaning in order to really pursue our possibilities. Self-transcendence is our fundamental nature: the freedom to redefine ourselves and our world, the capacity to “rehabilitate” ourselves, inhabit a new world, to re-world.

Freedom has two phases: 1. Freedom from what inhibits or obstructs our movement toward our possibilities. 2. Freedom to creatively pursue those possibilities. The first kind of freedom is to become aware of what is holding you back and often it will be what you cherish the most and are least willing to part with or it will be what you fear most. The most common way of dealing with both of these is self-deception, deceiving oneself about... (see Herbert Fingarette, **Self Deception** and his later article: ...) What these steps so far really come down to is seeing who you are, a sense making vulnerable being to whom things matter who has a co-created identity based on interpretive reflexes that must be examined and overcome if one is to live consistently with the basic features of human experience, namely care and reciprocity.

Practice of new worlding:

Rehabilitation: until it becomes new habit, new interpretive reflex

A) **Reconfigure** ones’ environment, one’s “place” (“replace one’s self”). This is NOT working on yourself to improve things. Rather, it is a fundamental shift in meaningfulness. In order to make this challenging transition, you will need to avoid the triggers of neurotic behavior. This transition to a new world and new you requires a “space” for a new figuring, development of a new way of being in the world, transformation of the *objective setting* (meaning) that is normally and incorrectly just

seen as “reality.” This “re-placement” is fundamental. It is not just a change in surface behavior or an “improvement” within your old world, your old habits of meaning. That is not transformation. That would merely be adjustment of your habits to meet the demands of the conflict you are engaged in. No. This is a fundamental shift in your meaning in which these old conflicts simply do not arise. But to make the transition, your environment **MUST** be supportive of your transition.

B) Other people are crucial to your new meaning. They must promote your transition to new habits of meaning. This will often not be possible unless they too transform their habits of meaning and liberate themselves to pursue their possibilities. If their habits of

meaning impede your transformation, they must be avoided, at least until your transformation has become new habit. You cannot afford to be around those who are not able or willing to support your new world.

C) **Most Important:** You will need someone who acts as the “therapist”. This is someone who facilitates your transformation and is there as a resource and guide. This will be decisive for how effective this re-embodiment of one’s situation will be

“What fulfillment is or looks like is always unknown because it lies beyond the enabling horizons that open on to this possibility.” (John Russon)

RECAP of Self-Overcoming Toward Freedom:

1. **Turning** to your fundamental sense making capacity
2. **Careful Description** of what is actually there in experience without all the abstract over-lay. Then identify and make conscious your normally unconscious interpretive reflexes. This really takes some practice at phenomenological seeing (see the section below: “Phenomenological Seeing and Hermeneutical Awareness” (Chipiona, Spain Workshop))
3. **Skillful identification, explication and Critical Judgment** about what is *unhealthy* in your unconscious interpretive reflexes, now made conscious through the exercise in step 2 above.
4. **Reconfiguring and re-education** of those interpretive reflexes then Replacing them with healthy ones, for example, non judgmental, loving, forgiving, interpretive reflexes.
5. **Reworlding:** Habituation to new healthier interpretive reflexes. Practice them to the point they simply are your way of being-in-the-world. Any world is a matrix of interpretations. You have the freedom to transform them at any time.
6. **Freedom** is to become aware of the fundamentally interpretive and conflicted nature of human experience, to see that conflict is the engine that drives human freedom and is not to be feared or avoided, but skillfully used to overcome limits. Develop the skills of critical thought and in particular the undoing, humility, and self-overcoming of philosophical questioning that allows you to see through what you thought you knew, experience a sense of deep wonder and awe, so you can overcome poor habits of feeling and thought and engender transformation and re-worlding as an ongoing way of being-in-the-world.

D. Genuine Dialogue and Empathy

The fight or flight response is primary and primitive. It may continue to have value in some instances, but most of the time it not only impedes but completely destroys the opportunity for growth and the pursuit of wisdom. The pursuit of wisdom takes cultivation through education beyond mere schooling and degrees in order to begin to see the basic features of human experience as fundamentally emancipatory. What we typically call education is haphazard at best in promoting this and in fact is very damaging to the process because it gives one the illusion that one has become “educated.” If we take the literal meaning of the term education seriously, to educate or bring forth, this refers to bringing forth the defining and most crucial features of being human. These are the capacity for skillful judgment, most importantly to overcome one’s own prejudices and interpretive reflexes that have long been ingrained before we have a chance to do anything about it. It also centrally involves the capacity for empathy toward others. Genuine empathy is completely different from sympathy which is often taken for a synonym of empathy. You can have sympathy for an animal. But you can only have empathy for another human, a being who does not merely have memory, pain and pleasure, mammalian attachment and recognition as animals do, but a being who lives in their meanings. Animals are not capable of beliefs, ideologies, sophisticated abstract reflection, science, religion, resolving conflict through dialogue, killing each other over religious or geopolitical disputes, etc.. Humans are beings who inhabit a meaningful interpreted world of abstract meaning that they take for “reality” or “the truth.”

To have empathy does not mean to sympathize for the suffering of another which we can do for animals or people. Empathy means to enter into the meaning of another, enter into the felt immediacy of their undergoing of the challenge of a meaningful life, a life that is always the pursuit of identity, recognition and coping with conflict.

Feeling emotion over the suffering of another is NOT empathy. That is sympathy. Empathy is to enter into the meaning of another and to suffer alongside them, with them, in their meaning. To understand and feel the conflict the other experiences puts us in a position then to engage in dialogue that has the potential to resolve the conflict, most centrally the conflict within that person, and then conflict with others. In order to do this, one must be able to set aside and step outside one’s own self-centered world. It can only happen if we have enlarged our own meaning to be able to genuinely enter into the meaning and felt lived experience of others. Empathy is centrally about highly developed interpretive skills that make understanding possible, not just sympathy. It necessarily includes genuine understanding that cannot be achieved without skillful interpretation. This does not mean one agrees with all interpretations. Rather it allows one to have genuine dialogue with others such that it sets the stage for genuine compassion, understanding, and conflict resolution. It allows us to see how others are trapped in their meanings, just as we are. It always reflects back to us our own egocentric predicament of struggling with the limits of our meaning. Wisdom is not the pursuit of enlarged meaning, wider knowledge of things. It includes but goes beyond this. It is coming to terms with and skillfully seeing what it is to be a being caught in and struggling with meaning and limits and how we attempt to impose our meaning on others out of our arrogant self-righteousness whether by persuasion or force. To take others’ processes of moving toward their freedom, which means the process of moving toward their possibilities as a human being, is central to our own freedom. Freedom entails developing the skills and perspectives necessary to the never ending process of self-overcoming that ironically requires and identity and a sense of self that we must maintain in order to have a meaningful standpoint from which to pursue our freedom. Wisdom is seeing into the nature of this irony which is itself one of the highest

achievements of human freedom. There is nothing more threatening to those who “have the truth” or who are pursuing control in response to their fear and insecurity than the freedom of others who disagree with them. Their task is not to deal with their insecurities and fear by attempting to control others, but rather to promote the intelligent freedom of others. There is no doubt that the selfish irresponsibility of others may require of us to defend ourselves. But that should be the last resort, not the first impulse. When we act on first impulse and do not really have empathy for others, then we will just heighten the conflict rather than resolve it because we might be able to see some justification in the behavior of others. When we see this, then we can work toward alleviating the causes of much human conflict. As we said, when others think you genuinely understand and care about them, the door opens wide for conflict resolution... provided we do not insist on our own conditions for this and allow for the greatest mutual freedom that is reasonably sustainable. That takes constant vigilance not just to the usurpations of others, but toward our own arrogance and self-righteous. Might does not make right. Only intelligent discourse can move us toward genuine mutuality and reciprocity, the keys to any genuine ethics. Genuine ethics is promoting mutually compatible pursuit of our possibilities, something very much like the ideas of the American Founding Fathers had in mind. But this takes skill and the will to implement it. At its best, involves genuine empathy, not for what others believe, which may be flawed and even dangerous, but for their struggle as human beings. When people think you genuinely understand and care for them, they are far more likely to be open to reciprocating this openness toward you and modifying their own stance. Once we enter into genuine dialogue, the likelihood of self-overcoming increases. But it is never assures. Life is always a risk. It is always a matter of uncertainty, ambiguity, and vulnerability that each of us must navigate the best we can with the help of others. Conflict resolution becomes far more possible through genuine dialogue. Of

course, the other person must also be open to overcoming their limits by developing the skills for this. That is not something that happens in a short time. It may never happen sufficiently for resolving conflict and sometimes power must be exercised. But it is hoped that this exercise of power is from an enlightened standpoint that can only be carried out if empathy and excellence in making judgments are guiding the use of power. This now doubt sound utopia to many. The point, however, is to genuinely aim for this as a goal. If we don't then we certainly will not move in that direction of a more humane, mature, and wise human condition.

In this process we must avoid condescension and uphold human dignity. If we fail to do this, then we disrespect ourselves. If you are condescending, then you yourself have not yet sufficiently overcome your ingrained selfish standpoint that is basic to being a self. As they say in Zen Buddhism, you must first have a self to overcome the self. The problem is not selfishness. That is inherent to being a self. The problem is failure to develop the skills in judgment and perspective to genuinely mature into human freedom that overcomes selfishness. Freedom is not merely doing what you want. In fact, that is the opposite of freedom. As Rousseau warns us merely pursuing one's desires is to be nothing more than a slave to impulse and thus to thwart the movement toward human freedom. Freedom is the ability to reasonably choose which impulses are best to pursue or not. We all know this from watching a two year old. But somehow we think a thirty year old with an advanced degree does not fall victim to this failure of freedom because they have played the game of delayed satisfaction successfully. Certainly they have to some degree, but merely being able to do this is much more a matter of prudence in getting the consequences one wants than emulating the highest examples of human wisdom available to us in such models as Socrates, Jesus, Buddha, Confucius, etc.. Schooling is NOT education. None of those people had degrees, yet they were far more intelligent than the vast majority of people with

Ph.D.s. The highest end of education is wisdom and one of the central features of wisdom is that it always conflicts with our habits of meaning, our unexamined interpretive reflexes: "The unexamined life is not worth living." We need to find out why this really means and why the selfish self will usually only go kicking a screaming out of its habits. There often needs to be a transformative moment, an epiphany or series of epiphanies about one's previous blindness. Sophocles and Shakespeare are not considered great artists merely because of their skill with language. Rather, it is their ability to peer into and expose the human soul, to expose us to ourselves and thus give us a chance to move toward self-overcoming, to move toward wisdom, which simply means to see, to see through what we thought we knew. Conflict among humans even if based on geopolitical issues is more deeply rooted in our "truths." Truth is the greatest enemy of wisdom and vice versa. Wisdom is seeing through our truths and thus why we tend to so easily persecute and kill people of wisdom. The first target of demagogues, or tyrannically regimes, are intellectuals, people with the critical skills and the knowledge to see through the sham claims and ideologies of those who have or seek power. Socrates and Jesus died. Attempts were made on the lives of Buddha, Confucius, Spinoza, and many others throughout history who have had the courage, skills and integrity to challenge unexamined or insufficiently examined prejudices.

The pursuit of wisdom which we will discuss below in philosophy and religions easily gets impeded or appropriated by a failure to understand the deepest levels of human experience from primitive sensation through the three levels of interpretation.

The overcoming of previous perspectives in philosophy can lead to deep humility, the starting point for wisdom. All religions are based on a sacred experience of its founder of self-overcoming. That experience is always one that results in deep humility. This can

happen only when the selfishness that is inherent in our early trajectory as human beings and in most cases dominates throughout life due to a failure to achieve genuine maturity is overcome. This means transformative self-overcoming of the interpretive blocks that make humility and genuine compassion for others possible. It is overcoming previous meaning, not trying to hold on to it and defend it in ever more sophisticated ways, which are still just disguised strategies of dominance or flight from the surrender of the ego that is necessary to go to the deepest spiritual and philosophical levels of self-overcoming.

Most of us want to have better and more authentic relationships. But most approaches to this are superficial and do not go to the root of what a careful descriptive (phenomenological) account of human experience reveals, namely, that we are in a process toward ever increasing emancipation. Emancipation from what? The tyranny of others? Yes as far as we have not yet seen into the nature of experience. But the real question of emancipation is not "from what" but "for what?" And to be ready for this most powerful use of freedom to pursue one's possibilities one must confront not only the oppression of other people, but centrally one's own oppressive habitual interpretive reflexes we mistakenly call reality and truth. The most powerful way to approach this emancipation is a combination of philosophical reflection and phenomenological practice, such as Vipassana meditation which goes deeper than meaning to the concrete primitive sensations that are at the root of all meaning and experience, thus deeper than any abstract thought. That we suffer with what arises as meaning and valuation arises, as a sense of self arises, is universal to humans. Such vulnerability is our shared condition, not the beliefs we hold that we mistake as truth and reality which only serve to divide us. These must be overcome to have genuine empathy and dialogue.

II. Bildung

Bildung is an ambiguous term which gets translated from German into English typically as “education.”¹⁴ A “gebildet” person is an educated person. But we need to grasp the much richer sense of the term. This can be done by distinguishing intellectual, cultural or “school Bildung,” from philosophical and individual Bildung. Intellectual Bildung is the process in which an educated or “gebildet” person develops the skills and employs methods with which to generate and organize knowledge and information to be applied in various useful ways. A high example of this is the genuine scholar whose life is largely devoted to learning. On the one hand, this form of Bildung has great utility for society in its need for order, efficiency, and a ready reserve of knowledge. On the other, this form of Bildung is manifested in narrow instrumentalism. Instrumentalism is aimed at usefulness defined by a highly limited field of investigation. The identity of each field depends on its object and its methods of investigation. This can be within the social or natural sciences or other fields of research such as history, philology, linguistics, religious studies, or legal studies, for example. In each field, a very limited range of phenomena are reduced to “data” by means of the various methods of testing, typically by applying abstract numbering to phenomena (measurement). An approach to understanding that interprets the world of phenomena from within a narrow methodological testing procedure like this by its very nature cannot approach the core of what it means for be human and certainly not the immediate felt meaningfulness of an individual’s sense of being here . It eliminates most of what humans experience in order to achieve a high level of explanatory and predictive success with regard to the exceedingly small range of “data” that is produced by means of its method of testing in order to contribute to theoretical or scholarly understanding in the diverse and reductionistic fields of research. Reductionist approaches to

understanding “reduce” the field of understanding to a narrow range of phenomena under a theoretical frame that attempts to reduce all such phenomena to a single unified account of all such phenomena. For example, the chemical understanding of reality tells us that everything we know of began as a result of the emergence of various atomic structures, such as hydrogen or helium after the Big Bang. As things cooled off, all the living and non living things of the world began to emerge. This theory reduces everything to a single explanatory principle. It leaves out most of what humans experience that other fields of research attempt to understand. But even all the fields of study together do not produce wisdom and do not tell us anything about what we ought to do, what our possibilities are, what fairness and justice are, what it feels like to be in love, and many other centrally meaningful features of human experience.

The opposite of such reductionist accounts is philosophical Bildung that aims at wisdom and personal self-understanding from a lived experiential standpoint. It is a mistake to think that the specialized fields of study are more rigorous because they are based on the exactitude of measurement and theoretical explanatory understanding. Philosophical Bildung is even more highly rigorous because it has to take into account the reductionist theoretical accounts but then understand the nature and limits of such understanding as well as the whole range of human understanding outside theoretical accounts. It has to generate a highly rigorous critically thought out and creative coherent way of understanding that encompasses or is consistent with ALL phenomena and must do this from the fundamental non reductionist standpoint of lived experience aimed finally not at just understanding, but at how to live, how to be a better person, how to grasp the fundamentally ethical standpoint inherent in human experience. This takes an extraordinary level of skill and responsibility. It requires much more than a theoretical understanding. It requires seeing our basic vulnerable, fallible,

¹⁴ Wilhelm von Humboldt enriched this term and made it fashionable at the end of the eighteenth century.

INTERPRETIVE standpoint that is presupposed in everything we think say or do. We never escape our basic condition by retreating to theoretical standpoints that presuppose this very condition of possibility for any understanding, scientific, religious, practical, or political, etc.

Philosophical Bildung, in contrast to intellectual Bildung, involves much learning but with an entirely different attitude and motive: authentic self-formation, rich self-understanding, and finally wisdom. One immediately thinks of such people as Socrates, Jesus, Buddha, Confucius (Kung-fu Tzu), Goethe, and many others who achieved extraordinary levels of wisdom, not merely explanatory theoretical scholarly understanding. They did this by drawing on the cultural riches available to them, but took this much farther than usual. They drew the implications of their cultural legacies to achieve insights that in turn became models for others to aspire to in living a human life. The critical creative insights of these people provided the basis for others to achieve meaningful coherence in their lives, but more importantly, to live examined lives, thoughtful ongoing insight and pursuit of wisdom, rather than dogmatic illusions that they possessed truth. One of the fundamental outcomes of a genuine Bildungs-process is the humble awareness of the fallible, vulnerable condition of uncertainty inherent to our finitude (being limited or finite beings). The possibility of this recognition and wisdom only arises for each individual in the context of their lived experience, their own coherent sense of self and world.

In Nietzsche's view, the meaningful coherence of my life and my own identity is not something that is shaped intentionally, but is revealed to me in the process of my own Bildungs-process, self-formation, coming forth as a human being. It is fraught with uncertainty, ambiguity, and "detours." It is always underway, never complete. Who we are is less what we know, what we do, and what happens to us than what is revealed about us in this process of self-formation. Nietzsche was very critical of contemporary education and learning.

It has little coherence and is usually a continual piling up of knowledge, information, and the skills necessary to manipulate this store for practical use. Even knowledge for its own sake as in theoretical science is extremely narrow and in no way produces wisdom. What he found to be true of education in his own time is certainly true of ours. True Bildung is nowhere to be found, only specialization, pursuit of knowledge, wealth, status, power. Nietzsche says that the task in true Bildung is to "become who you are" and finally embrace all that has led to who you are; all the things you would have gladly avoided and edited from your life. Nietzsche calls this "amor fati." Each of us is a "spiritual fatum" something already potentially there and our life's task is to discover and embrace this. I am not just a blank slate that experience writes upon, but rather an emerging identity that moves toward itself via the experiences of my life. The particular events of my life are not who I am. Rather, who I am shows itself in how I appropriate the particular events of my life as *my* experience, experience from *my* sense of things. My sense of things does not reduce to any or all of the events of my life. And if those events had been different and had some significantly different impact on my journey to myself, that identity itself when more fully recognized would not be wholly different. That "spiritual fatum" has no determinate way of working itself out. Rather, there is indeterminacy or contingency in this process. But that "spiritual fatum" is what organizes the events of my life into a coherent whole. Bildung is the process of the unfolding or the emergence of this "spiritual fatum" or inner identity that is more "true" of us than any of the outer events of our lives.

We must distinguish the mere *events* of our lives from the *meaning* of our lives, *school* Bildung (a process of adaptation) from true *individual* Bildung. If teachers assume that they can know what is right for students in terms of the individual Bildungs-process for each student, the danger is very great because genuine Bildung is not something that can be pursued via theoretical models of learning and their methods. In fact, such models and

methods typically preclude even recognizing true *Bildung* and ultimately rob us of the highest form of human dignity (what Gadamer and Nietzsche are so focused on). Neither the "adaptation" approach to schooling, nor the "accommodation" approach (in which standards and grades are deemphasized or abolished) can engender true humanity and an ethical attitude which might do justice to the individual pupil. This ethical awareness must arise in a society that values the '*Lebenskoennerschaft*' (Gerd Achenbach's term: ability to know how to live) that is necessary for the recognition of true *Bildung* and is not something that can be a task of schools alone. *Lebenskoennerschaft* is not something that can be specifically aimed at. What Gadamer's notion of *Bildung* adds to this is the larger context of meaning in which we gradually appropriate what we inherit from our culture and language and make it our own. Nietzsche emphasizes the self-undermining nature of this process of continual self-discovery.

At the center of Gadamer's concern to understand understanding (the goal of philosophical hermeneutics) and to engender an awareness of the universality of the hermeneutic condition is also the idea of *Bildung*.¹⁵ Drawing on Hegel, Gadamer says "Bildung...requires sacrificing particularity for

the sake of the universal.... distancing from the immediacy of desire, of personal need and private interest, and the exacting demand of a universal."¹⁶ Such movement away from particularity is movement away from oneself "keeping oneself open to what is other—to other, more universal points of view. *Bildung* always requires training in abstraction out of one's own immediate stance, i.e., alienation." However, according to Gadamer, "what constitutes the essence of *Bildung* is clearly not alienation as such, but *the return to oneself* (emphasis added)—which presupposes alienation, to be sure."¹⁷ This movement away from and return to one's particularity is the movement toward authentic individuality and autonomy. Gadamer says, "In *Bildung*, that by which and through which one is formed becomes completely one's own."¹⁸ It is only in making it one's own that autonomy is approached. One does not have a sense of oneself and one's possibilities without this movement away from the narrow horizons of the particularity of immediate awareness. But it does not become one's own until it is lived in one's own particularity, rather than just abstractly known, for example, learning about the "Golden Rule" versus making it one's own because one's horizons have been radically altered in a genuine understanding and experience of what this principle tries to express. It is in such a consciousness that what Hegel calls "recognition" of the other (a vulnerable human being to whom things matter) and "reconciliation" (the overcoming of alienation from the other and from oneself) can take place.

Bildung is nothing fixed or measurable. "The cultivated consciousness has in fact more the character of a sense...that surpasses all of the natural sciences. It is a universal sense."¹⁹ The "cultivated consciousness" of *Bildung* is an ability to apply this universal "common sense" or reasonableness to any concrete situation. Aristotle's *phronesis* is invoked here. The

¹⁵ The Greek precursor to the German *Bildung* is *Paideia*, which means culture, education, and character development (related to our modern *pediatrics* and other words denoting children). It is the bringing forth of a flourishing human being, which in ancient Greece emphasized one's individuality always in relation to the collective. As Werner Jaeger says, this was a consciously pursued ideal. The Greeks "were the first to recognize that education means deliberately molding human character in accordance with an ideal... It starts from the ideal, not the individual. Above man as a member of a horde, and man as a supposedly independent personality, stands man as an ideal; and that ideal was the pattern towards which Greek educators as well as Greek poets, artists, and philosophers always looked ..."The Greek mind owes its superior strength to the fact that it was deeply rooted in the life of the community."¹⁵ The Greeks provide a model for us culturally, just as Socrates provides a model for us individually, of what can be achieved in human life. But this model is not to be copied, certainly could not be. We are of a vastly different milieu. But the excellence achieved is a model and incentive for our own pursuit of our possibilities collectively and individually. And it is the pursuit of this possibility in individual *Bildung* that each of us is that is central in philosophical counseling as we shall see in Part 3 below.

¹⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised ed. Continuum, 2002, (p. 13)

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 14

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 14

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 17

ability to respond “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way, is what is appropriate and best, and this is characteristic of excellence.”²⁰ It is the ability to grasp the concrete circumstances in their infinite variety from a distance. According to Aristotle: “It is the mark of an educated mind to expect that degree of precision in each department which the nature of the subject allows: ...while a specialist can make judgments as to his own particular subject it requires a person of all-round education to form competent judgments about things in general...”²¹ For Aristotle, *phronesis* is an intellectual virtue but only in its integral connection to virtue. Reason alone cannot produce virtue. Critical ability without the ethical virtues gives rise to mere cleverness governed only by the particularity of desire. It takes *paideia* or *Bildung*, molding the individual according to an ideal such that reason can play its most powerful role in human ethical communal life, which in turn sets the necessary condition for a human being to achieve his or her own creative autonomy (and for Aristotle the final telos of pure contemplation for its own sake).

Bildung is both a necessary *condition* for the autonomy and ability necessary to engage in the radical inquiry of philosophical hermeneutics and is equally an inescapable *outcome* of such radical inquiry since philosophical hermeneutics takes us to the highest universality, a reflective awareness of the universal condition of finitude and linguisticity. These two are inseparable and reciprocal. This reciprocity is itself a reflection of the hermeneutical circle that hermeneutics discloses in its inquiry into understanding and meaning. Philosophical hermeneutics begins with a *descriptive* phenomenology of the experience of understanding that engenders an awareness of the horizons that make understanding possible. It moves to a *normative* dimension.

The normative dimension of philosophical hermeneutics centers on the recognition of other people as sharing our same basic condition as vulnerable, fallible, interpreting beings to whom things matter. Ethical awareness begins with recognition of our commonality, recognizing the other as oneself. This is the reciprocity of Kant, the recognition of the other in Hegel (*Anerkennung*), and a way of achieving a genuine universality sought after in the expression of the many versions of the Golden Rule, the most widely expressed ethical principle in human societies. There is an ethical demand in the recognition of the other as linguistic because to be a linguistic being is to already be a being to whom things matter, a vulnerable being operating within horizons of a meaningful world. Conflict of interpretations is inevitable but the humility engendered by philosophical hermeneutics, which implores us to always take into consideration our own limits that enable and inhibit our understanding, makes it difficult to dismiss this most basic status of all vulnerable, valuing, linguistic beings. This basic vulnerability is not merely physical or emotional. Rather, the very meaning context of a meaningful world in which the meaningful experience of an emotion or a physical sensation arises is itself subject to rupture. It is subject to the rupture of wonder, horror, anguish, and awe. These primordial experiences, which are the basis for all the more surface emotions, are not merely experiences of physical pleasure or pain or emotional joy, sorrow, fear, etc. At this deepest level they are the opening or the loss of my world. All other experiences are possible only as meaningful experiences within the horizons of my world. The powerful guiding normative hermeneutical perspective of individual *Bildung* and the “good common sense” of a broad human perspective have been lost as methodologies of science and instrumentalism have become the dominant model for approaching life. But science, though highly valuable, cannot go to the heart of what it is to be human nor can religious mythologies that have been turned into ideologies. They both

²⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2, 1106b21-3.

²¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, 1094b-1095a.

must serve a much broader and cultivated awareness of our condition for which hermeneutical rigor is not only appropriate, but necessary. Methodologies of the natural science have their power in their narrowness, in their exactitude of mathematization. Such exactitude is highly valuable so long as we recognize its limits. Misapplication of exactitude to the study of anything human or social is a failure to recognize these limits, a failure in good sense, a failure in *Bildung*. Mathematical exactitude and theoretical explanation in the natural sciences cannot be a model for the essentially interpretive studies of human beings and culture, nor for guiding society as a whole.²²

For Gadamer, the true meaning of education, *Bildung*, is

a never-ending process of openness and a perpetual fusion of horizons, arising through dialogue, in which the ideal is never to stop learning... The truly educated person — the true “hermeneuticist” — then, is “radically undogmatic.”²³

This requires the ability to suspend judgment and a powerful attitude of openness to having ones truths and habits of mind overturned through careful and sustained inquiry, which is essentially the definition of *philosophia*, the **eros of wisdom**. It must also be emphasized, however, that this “hermeneutical openness” is not the common conception of being “open minded” a kind of self-congratulation for escaping the worst forms of narrow mindedness. Hermeneutical openness only arises in the very challenging journey toward *Bildung*. That journey is not a quick fix, not a matter of the degrees and diplomas of

²² Science is highly valuable to us. But one can be scientific without being *scientistic*. Scientism, the view that the methods of science are the best or only path to understanding in every field of inquiry, is a kind of hubris that is the mark of a lack of *Bildung*, as is religious dogmatism. Just as one can be scientific without being *scientistic*, one can be religious and participate in the mystery that we honor in our mythologies without becoming religiously ideological and dogmatic. The achievement of *Bildung* is a developed human being, a human being who has undergone extensive intellectual and moral self-discipline and lives in the openness and distancing of radical hermeneutical inquiry that undermines all religious, scientific, and political dogmas.

²³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 355.

contemporary cybernetic mass education conspicuous for its mediocrity and specialization. What Nietzsche said of his own time is even more relevant today. Education was marked by:

an indecent haste...as if something would be lost if the young man of twenty-three were not yet “finished,” or if he did not yet know the answer to the “main question”: *which* calling? A higher kind of human being, if one may say so...takes time, he does not even think of “finishing”: At thirty, one is, in the sense of high culture, a beginner, a child.²⁴

This gives support to the contemporary idea of “life long learning,” provided it is the pursuit of genuine *Bildung* and not just developing hobbies or an escape from boredom. It is never too late for *Bildung*. And it is always too early to have finished. True education, for Nietzsche, requires excellence in learning:

One must learn to see, one must learn to *think*, one must learn to *speak* and *write*: the goal in all three is a noble culture. Learning to see--accustoming the eye to calmness, to patience, to letting things come up to it; postponing judgment, learning to go around and grasp each individual case from all sides. That is the first preliminary schooling for spirituality: not to react at once to a stimulus, but to gain control of all the inhibiting, excluding instincts... Learning to *think*: in our schools one no longer has any idea of this...even in the universities, even among the real scholars of philosophy.²⁵

It is only through education in the strong sense of *Bildung*, the education of the spirit that engenders something like Nietzsche’s powerfully ethical sovereign individual²⁶ that Nietzsche’s “Great Health” is made more likely. In **On the Genealogy of Morals**, Nietzsche writes of the possibility of a “Great Health”, a kind of “*zweiter Unschuld*”²⁷ (GM), II, 20a), a second innocence made possible by both the

²⁴ *Twilight of the Idols*, “What the Germans Lack”, 5.

²⁵ *Twilight of the Idols*, “What the Germans Lack”, 7.

²⁶ See Dean Pickard, “Nietzsche, Emancipation, Truth and Ethics,” in *New Nietzsche Studies*, Vol 2, Fall/Winter, 1997.

²⁷ *On the Genealogy of Morals*, II, 20a.

death of God (traditional Truth) and a different implementation of the human propensity to *aktiv Vergessenheit* “active forgetting”²⁸ (GM II,1) which serves life and health. This forgetting, this “second innocence” is not a literal forgetting of one’s past but a rebirth in which the significance of our past is radically transformed. It is a transformation in attitude toward life, the possibility of living without the motive of revenge, the possibility of seeing through the self-deceptive fictions that sustain us in the face of the challenge and struggle of life. It is the possibility of overcoming the desperate desire for permanence, chronophobia (fear of time), overcoming the desire for salvation from suffering, insecurity, uncertainty and from life itself, which is always one’s own life. The overcoming of such motives is troped in the transforming idea of eternal recurrence and its post nihilistic correlates, the *übermensch* and

the attitude of *amor fati*. These are signifiers of a possible type of consciousness, a way of living in which we have a radically different relationship to our past and our beliefs, which are no longer turned into truths. “Convictions are prisons,” says Nietzsche.

Bildung, then in its strongest sense is a philosophical attitude and engagement. It is both the ability and desire (eros) to constantly set aside one’s prejudices, to see them as such, and exercise vigilance in the constant over turning of our beliefs: *philosophy*. Such love of wisdom never arrives at truths, only tentative insights in the service of a way of being in the world, **Lebenskönnerschaft**, an ability and an attitude that goes beyond any perspective or belief, an attitude of both humility and confidence and a love of life, which is to fully embrace one’s finitude, *amor fati* (to “love one’s fate” and “become who you are,” as Nietzsche says).

²⁸ OGM, II,1

III. Philosophical Hermeneutics

Our commonality as human beings is that we are beings to whom things matter who live in our meanings and our felt sense of being here. This felt sense of being-in-the-world is always our starting point. Recent philosophy has become increasingly sensitive to this phenomenological starting point and has recognized that our being-in-the-world is fundamentally linguistic and interpretive. Though early philosophers were aware of the central importance of language in what we think and say about anything,²⁹ in the past two centuries the question of language, meaning, and interpretation has come increasingly to the center of philosophy.³⁰ Questions of truth, knowledge, reality, and ethics are now posed in the context of the question of meaning, language, and interpretation. When Wittgenstein says “The limits of my language are the limits of my world,” or Quine tells us that “We can only talk about what we say there is,” they are recognizing what Gadamer has developed further in his notion of linguisticity (*Sprachlichkeit*), that all meaningfulness arises in the context of language use. Meaningful experience is never utterly captured in language and we often think about and experience things without words. But meaningful experience never occurs outside the context of linguisticity, only occurs for language users.

In **Politics**, Aristotle defines humans not as the rational animal but as the animal with logos, the word, i.e. language, by which we can abstract and distance things and be aware of time and what is beneficial.³¹ Language is not merely one more phenomenon that occurs in the world and is studied in our science of linguistics. Gadamer says, “What language is,

is the most hidden of anything that humans can contemplate.”³² Our experience of speaking is our way of grasping the phenomenon of language itself, and hence deceives us into thinking that in knowing its phenomenological aspects we can understand it. Language is not an object of thought that one can hold at a distance and observe. Language cannot be reduced to phonemes, graphemes, or any given content and certainly cannot be explained by any theoretical deep structure. Language is the very condition of the possibility of any understanding and meaningfulness at all in philosophy, science, religion, or common sense understandings of the world.³³

Without language there is a kind of consciousness that is exhibited in animal behavior, but not meaningfulness or “worlding,” as Heidegger calls it.³⁴ It is worth quoting again a passage from Helen Keller who was both blind and deaf from infancy. Her account bears this out. As an educated adult reflecting on the time before she was brought into language at about age seven or eight through a method of touch by her teacher, Anne Sullivan, she says:

Before my teacher came to me, I did not know that I am. I lived in a world that was no-world. I cannot hope to describe adequately that unconscious, yet conscious

²⁹For example, Plato’s **Cratylus** and Aristotle in **On Interpretation**

³⁰It is especially with Nietzsche that the question of interpretation comes more fully into view. Nietzsche was a philologist and so was highly trained in matters of language and interpretation.

³¹ See Gadamer’s remarks regarding this in “Boundaries of Language” **Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics**. ed., Lawrence K. Schmidt, Lexington Books, 2000, p. 10.

³² Quoted by Istvan Feher in “On the Hermeneutic Understanding of Language: Word, Conversation, and Subject Matter,” in **Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics**. ed., Lawrence K. Schmidt, Lexington Books, 2000, pp. 60-61).

³³ See Günter Figal, “The Doing of the Thing Itself,” in Robert Dostal, ed. **The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer**, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002, p 105-106) See also Istvan Feher, “On the Hermeneutic Understanding of Language: Word, Conversation, and Subject Matter,” in **Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics**. ed., Lawrence K. Schmidt, Lexington Books, 2000, pp. 60-61)

³⁴Humans alone have the freedom to distance themselves from the constraints of nature. The fundamental form of such distancing, according to Gadamer, is questioning. A question implies a direction of meaning. (See Lawrence Schmidt, “Language in a Hermeneutic Ontology,” and Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Boundaries of Language”(1985) and “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language” (1992), in **Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics**. ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt, Lexington Books, 2000).

time of nothingness. I did not know that I knew nothing, or that I lived or acted or desired. I had neither will nor intellect. I was carried along to objects and acts by a certain blind natural impetus. ...My inner life, then, was a blank without past, present, or future without hope or anticipation, without wonder or joy or faith...I was not conscious of any change or process going on in me...When I learned the meaning of "I" and "me" and found that I was something, I began to think. Then consciousness first existed for me... It was the awakening of my soul that first rendered my senses their value, their cognizance of objects, names, qualities, and properties. Thought made me conscious of love, joy, and all the emotions. I was eager to know, then to understand, afterward to reflect on what I knew and understood, and the blind impetus, which had before driven me hither and thither at the dictates of my sensations, vanished forever. (Keller, H., *The World I Live In*, 1908.)

It is the development of self-awareness through language and concept use that opens up meaningfulness. It is the context in which abstract expectations, value judgments, and all aspects of personhood and interpersonal relations arise. Human beings are most fundamentally interpretive beings who live in their meanings.

Philosophical Hermeneutics is the cutting edge of the postmodern linguistic turn, what might be called the "hermeneutical turn," and is most radical in its inquiry. What distinguishes recent philosophical understanding of the world since Nietzsche is the increasing awareness of its reflexivity, that is, it is an interpretive process that reflexively recognizes itself to be interpretive. Philosophical hermeneutics is at the forefront of this recognition and is a rigorous attempt to understand understanding. "All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language..."³⁵ All meaning and understanding always moves in what Gadamer, following Heidegger, called the

hermeneutical circle.³⁶ The particular facts and events of our world are interpretable because of a kind of unconscious or partly conscious sense of its whole meaning. That whole meaning constantly changes due to the malleability of the meaning of its particulars, which in turn changes our sense of the whole. The experience of understanding is not mere knowledge, but an event in which one's horizons of meaningfulness are transformed. Understanding is not something we do. It is something that happens to us.³⁷ We can put ourselves in a position to allow or promote understanding. But understanding is an event, a happening, not an action. True experience of understanding surprises us, confounds our expectations and opens new horizons to us. It is more like an awakening, an experience of beauty, than an intellectual process, though cognitive and intellectual processes are involved.³⁸

Understanding must approach itself from its own nearness or not at all, that is from within the hermeneutical circle and from the standpoint of an historically situated speaker. It was the aim of the Enlightenment to overcome prejudice that blinds us to clear thinking and achieve truth through algorithmic methodologies of certainty. Gadamer sees that prejudice not only has this negative feature that was to be overcome, but is the inescapable condition and openness for any meaningfulness at all. Prejudices are the horizons of our understanding of anything and constitute our openness into the world of meaning "The historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are the biases

³⁵Gadamer, **Truth and Method**, (TM) 2nd revised ed., Continuum, 2002, pp. 389.

³⁶ This is not a vicious circle, but is productive of meaning, a precondition for any understanding whatsoever. The term hermeneutical circle refers to the circle of meaning of the whole meaning system and its reciprocal relation to any particular element in that system.

³⁷ "The capacity for understanding is a reception, in the sense of pathos, rather than an activity...Hermeneutics looks to understand what the understanding is, over and above the ease of a purely technical control of it." Jean Grondin **The Philosophy of Gadamer**, McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 2002, p. 18.

³⁸ See Gadamer's **The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays**, Cambridge Univ. press, 1986.

of our openness to the world.” Gadamer goes on to say, “The prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.”³⁹ So Gadamer replaces the Enlightenment prejudice against prejudice with a fundamental insight about the limits of meaningfulness. Prejudice is not something that can be overcome or avoided, but rather is the inescapable condition of any meaning and understanding at all.⁴⁰ The point is to recognize this and remain both humble yet vigilant in our process of understanding so that it transforms the way we live, transforms who we are.

Just as Aristotle never gives rules for *phronesis*, there are no rules for understanding. Understanding does not arise due to some methodology. Rather, one has some standpoint, some horizon that arises out of life experience and linguisticity that makes it possible to understand the world at all. Any method only operates within linguisticity and cannot stand outside it to investigate it. The having of a horizon or standpoint precedes any rule-like procedures. Such rule-likeness is only read off any standpoint after the fact. That there is an intelligible world of regularity in experience is the starting point for any interpretive methodology including the exactitude of the sciences. This is a central insight in **Truth and Method** that distinguishes philosophical hermeneutics from previous methodological hermeneutics which failed to see this and that was concerned primarily with

adequate methods of interpreting meaning.⁴¹ In contrast, philosophical hermeneutics is concerned with meaningfulness itself and has expressed this in the idea of linguisticity (all meaning arises in the context of the limits of language use and interpretation). This does not mean that all thought or feeling occurs as language. Rather, all thought and feeling, all meaningfulness arise in the broader general context of a way of being in the world whose necessary precondition is participation in language. The lived hermeneutic event of understanding is determined by linguisticity which does not reduce to any particular human language but is the basis for all of them. The common root of all language and the universality of the hermeneutic condition is found in the experiential “impulse towards the word” or “*verbum interius*” in the ontological structure of human being in the world. That ontological structure is linguisticity in which all meaning is made possible. This term “*verbum interius*” (inner word), is Augustine’s way of referring to that felt sense of yearning that needs to be expressed but surpasses any linguistic expression we can give it. The idea was used and developed further by Heidegger in his analysis of *Dasein*. Gadamer recognized it as the universal source of our basic hermeneutical condition as interpreting beings. The phrase “inner word” does not refer to any “private or psychological inner world existing prior to its verbal expression. Rather, it is that which strives to be externalized in spoken language. “Externalized language is the site of a struggle which must be heard as such. There is no “pre-verbal” world [subjective or objective], only world oriented to language, the world which is always to be put in words, though

³⁹ Gadamer, **TM**, pp. 276-77.

⁴⁰Gadamer’s Philosophical hermeneutics is grounded in a direct phenomenological observation of communication and understanding in human life. We are always explicitly or implicitly in dialogue with our tradition, with another, and with ourselves. The dialogic event of understanding is a “fusion of horizons.” Horizons are limits that both enable and inhibit our understanding of anything. The fusion of horizons is the interpretive interaction with the tradition we inherit, with other people, and with ourselves as we come to understand anything. Gadamer develops his thinking from Hegel’s recognition of the basic condition of historicity. He uses Husserl’s notion of horizon, but develops this beyond its phenomenological perceptual meaning to include cultural and linguistic awareness, and makes use of Heidegger’s radical historicity (facticity). Facticity refers to our situatedness and finitude and our concerned engagement in the world (things matter to us) in which we project beyond the meaning of what is present to us (live in our possibilities).

⁴¹**Methodological hermeneutics**, developed by Dilthey and others from the tradition of biblical hermeneutics of the 16th and 17th centuries, was an attempt to provide a rigorous objective method of investigation appropriate to the human and social sciences. This approach assumes an objectively correct interpretation of a text or any meaning. This is a form of **scientism or objectivism**, the view that reality and truth can be achieved guided by the assumption that the methods of science can provide independently objective truth, rather than seeing science as a powerful interpretive process guided by the value of objectivity.

never entirely successfully. This is the uniquely hermeneutic dimension of language."⁴²

There is no fixed starting point of meaning. To recognize this, one must *not* do what we habitually do in epistemological and methodological approaches to understanding, which is to isolate propositions and attempt to establish their truth value through inferential processes in order to achieve objectivity. This objectivity is predicated on the false notion that there is a standpoint outside our situatedness from which we can come to know things as they are independently of our situatedness. The history of philosophy has been largely concerned with the truth value of propositions, with the ontological status of such propositions, and the concepts contained in them.⁴³ Propositions were seen as the core of language and the bearers of truth, which, with diligence, can be fully expressed in the proposition. Rather than the metaphysical and logical priority assigned to propositions, Gadamer tells us that "language is realized not in statements but as conversation."⁴⁴ Gadamer focuses on what the text or person has to say, rather than on achieving a final and correct interpretation. A successful interpretation lets the truth of the text or person emerge. That truth is not merely propositional but rather indicates an understanding of something, some matter of concern, and a horizon of understanding within which it emerged. In contrast with the belief that propositions correspond to something called reality which can be penetrated with the use of logic in reasoning, including the methods of science, hermeneutics looks to the larger context of rhetoric in living language as the very condition and source of all logic and reasoning. "At the beginning of generic logic stands the

advance work of language itself."⁴⁵ "The linguisticity of our experience of the world is prior to everything that is known as an entity and is spoken of."⁴⁶ Understanding is a product of life, not a logical product of propositions. Logical propositions and the arguments in which they are used only have their life in the context of my whole understanding. They do not stand outside it.⁴⁷

Philosophical hermeneutics entails the realization of the impossibility of absolute knowledge in the condition of finitude and historicity. Relativism itself is an attempt to stand outside history and make an absolutist claim that all truth is relative. Philosophical hermeneutics does not finally defeat absolutism and relativism through such reflexive argumentation or by presenting an alternative theory of truth. It dissolves them in the undeniable awareness and immediacy of finitude and historicity.⁴⁸ Truth is neither relative nor absolute. What we call truth is the linguistic result of skillful interpretation. There is no privileged access to truth. The very term is ambiguous. Literal discourse aims at literal, conceptual, factual truth. Poetical and symbolic discourse aim at a felt sense of what is most significant and important. To fail to distinguish these different uses of language is to invite a conflict between them as in the controversy over creationism and other pseudo debates. Even in the "pure" sciences of mathematics and logic the idea of certainty and closure is obsolete.⁴⁹ The universal claim of

⁴⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *TM*, p. 431.

⁴⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*. (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1985-95, Bd. 10, 273) quoted in *Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*. ed., Lawrence K. Schmidt, Lexington Books, 2000, p 6.

⁴⁷ See Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 105, for a similar view.

⁴⁸The philosophical achievement of hermeneutics is that "it negates relativism and historicism by [reflexively] folding it back on itself showing its own historicity--that is its [relativism's] secret dependence on metaphysics: the dogmatic thesis of historicism that everything is relative can be made meaningful only against the horizon of a nonrelative, absolute, supratemporal, metaphysical truth. Only by supposing absolute truth possible and using it as a criterion could an opinion be judged merely relative...Historicism denies its own historicity. (J. Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 11)

⁴⁹ There can be no closure, no formal algorithmic system for accessing something called Truth. Even the

⁴² (Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Yale Univ. Press, 1994, p. xv)

⁴³Gadamer says, "It is the classical logic of judgment, the logic founded on the concept of judgment in which Statements are taken out of their context and given truth value." Hans-Georg Gadamer "Boundaries of Language" in *Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*. ed., L. K. Schmidt, Lexington Books, 2000, p. 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 15-16. According to Jean Grondin, the proposition "is something secondary and derivative." *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. p. xiv.

philosophical hermeneutics is not a propositional claim to the certainty of an ahistorical universal truth, such as Habermas's transcendently necessary conditions of communication.⁵⁰ Rather, it reveals a *universal human condition or predicament*, namely, that all understanding occurs within an historically situated shared linguistic horizon, i.e., linguisticity. Hermeneutics cannot and does not attempt to stand outside this condition to make pronouncements. Rather, its great contribution is to reveal this basic condition more fully and clearly than any earlier thinking. It makes no metaphysical or epistemological claims. Rather, it reveals the unavoidable reflexivity of any such attempt to escape finitude and our inescapable hermeneutical condition, i.e., interpretation and the enabling horizons are always implicated in any "truth" any explanation, any claims about "reality." The way to judge claims is not based on whether they are "true" in any final sense or whether they correspond to reality, but whether they are

philosophy of logic and mathematics in the works of Goedel, Church, and others has ironically demonstrated formally that no formal system can achieve both closure or completeness and logical consistency (see, for example, John Kadvan, "Reflections On The Legacy of Kurt Goedel: Mathematics, Skepticism, Postmodernism," in **The Philosophical Forum**, Vol. XX, No. 3, Spring 1989). For an historical overview of this development by an eminent mathematician, see Morris Kline, **Mathematics: The Loss of Certainty**, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980). The famous logical problem of decidability demonstrates the basic reflexive nature of language and meaning. The very recognition of this feature of human thought depends reflexively on the structure, limits and rules by which our thinking about all this is guided. Reflexivity has no end as we attempt to move outward to any final limit or perspective that will logically entail what has made any perspective possible. What is exciting to logicians is that Church's Thesis on undecidability is taken to be an **apriori** result for all human thought, i.e., it is a truth of human thought not arrived at by empirical evidence. There is a massive literature on undecidability, for example, the "diagonal problem" and other forms of the "halting problem" that reveals this.

⁵⁰Habermas dismisses Derrida and other "postmodernists" for committing a "performative contradiction" wherein the preconditions of the act of speaking contradicts what is being claimed by them. However, Habermas's own attempt to develop an ethics grounded in transcendental conditions of speech itself leads to a performative contradiction. Further, his so-called "necessary conditions" are an artifact of the basic condition of reflexivity in the interpretive process. See Dean Pickard : "Nietzsche, Emancipation, & Truth" in **New Nietzsche Studies**, (SUNY), Winter, 1997, pp. 85-109, and "The Problem of Reflexivity in Habermasian Universalism," **Auslegung**, V. 19, #1, Winter, 1993, pp 1-20.

hermeneutically skillful and aware of their interpretative or hermeneutical condition. Even in epistemology, the correspondence theory of truth and reality has been abandoned as hopelessly untenable. Philosophical hermeneutics takes us out of the inadequate and inappropriate ways of thinking that lead to such an impasse to begin with.

Fallibilism is the idea that truth is the best and most coherent, consistent, and rigorous interpretation that we have at a given time. This approach always attempts to remain aware of our broader interpretive horizons of finitude and uses but does not reduce to logical consistency. This is a genuine alternative to absolutism and relativism. There are other alternatives, such as the various forms of American pragmatism, Nietzsche's view of truth, and Donald Davidson's.

Logic is parasitic on language and is a distillation and a refinement of the ability to recognize regularity in making sense of things. Rather, appeal to regularity, consistency, and anomaly indicates the inescapable linguisticity that is the background or context for any claims, any logical procedures, any awareness at all.

The virtue of philosophical hermeneutics is that it is not another theory or argument about what is right, true or real and is not competing with any such theories. It is not a theory at all. One does not debate it. It is very much like Gotama Buddha's insights about the immediate features of awareness in general, aside from our awareness of this or that particular thing. All one has to do is stop and see. The Buddha did not allow himself to be drawn into metaphysical debates which, as Kant demonstrated and Hume phenomenologically revealed, is an empty exercise. Hermeneutics is not a debate, but points to something in our immediate awareness, something that is undeniable about consciousness, if one can disengage from the ordinary long enough to see what is omni present in our experience and awareness.

An example of something that is always there but we never see it is the periphery of our visual field. If your attention is not drawn to it you don't see it. This is not a theory or a

debate over truth, not something abstract that can only be thought about. It is confirmed in the immediacy of experience through a phenomenological exercise of noticing what is present, yet unseen. Similarly, philosophical hermeneutics brings our attention to what is always immediate and present and is a necessary condition of any awareness and meaningfulness at all: linguisticity and finitude. It begins with a phenomenological awareness of the basic features of experience and moves to an awareness of the conditions of meaningfulness.

Among the benefits of philosophical hermeneutics is realizing that we live in our meanings and that our horizons of understanding are always the limits within which we are able to interpret what happens. This is not a new idea. Epictetus said that the "The thing that upsets people is not what happens, but what they think it means." We live in our meanings. The very horizons that enable

us to be aware at all are also dangerous if we mistake them for truth. There is an actual recalcitrant world. There are the facts of our lives. But these "facts" only have their meaning within linguisticity, they are always a) themselves the product of interpretation and in addition to this b) they take on a significance for us beyond their mere status as facts. There is nothing fixed about how they matter to us. The issue is rather correspondingly a) one of skill in interpreting and a greater hermeneutical awareness of what it is to be an interpreting vulnerable being and from this b) learning not to get so caught in how we have made the facts matter to us, how we have added meaning to them. If we recognize other people as being in this same basic condition of insecurity, uncertainty, and finitude we can understand what they do in a way that is more compassionate and less damaging to ourselves and others.

IV. Exercises in Phenomenological Seeing and Hermeneutical Awareness

The following set of exercises is included here to show that phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics is not merely an abstract domain of discourse within philosophy, but can be implemented in exercises which, if practiced well, can lead the individual using these exercises to elicit transformative experiences that can bring profound shifts in perspective on an experiential level, not merely intellectual. It is only at this experiential level that genuine transformation in one's being-in-the-world can take place. Intellectual seeing may be necessary to such transformation, but is never sufficient. It always requires

experiencing it "in ones bones." If you use these exercises, they must be carried out with great care and completeness to get the outcomes that are possible. In each case, an exercise can take the better part of an hour up to several hours to do them properly. Merely reading the exercises and spending a few minutes will definitely not suffice any more than meditating for a few minutes will lead to an appreciation of what meditation is and can engender. These exercises complement Russon's six steps to emancipation in Section IC above.



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Ran Lahav (Israel-USA) and José Barrientos Rastrojo (ETOR, Spain)

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Phenomenological Seeing and Hermeneutical Awareness

Powerful experiential exercises can be used to concretely demonstrate that each of us is completely unaware of things that are immediately present to us. This is so because our habits of mind do not permit such seeing. To suddenly experience something like this is to be able to experience in a very concrete way the fact that we are always operating within horizons that are conditioned by our habits of perception and by our emotional, cultural, linguistic milieu. I will mention one exercise for perception and one for emotion that can cause a "breakthrough" experience.

The exercise in perception is to notice for the first time just the periphery of one's visual field, its actual shape and that it is always there, quite easy to see, if we draw our attention to it in four easy steps.

1. Keep your focus on a spot in front of you (the exercise will not work without this).
2. Without moving your eyes, notice everything in your left visual field, then the right, then above, then below.
3. Next, see all four directions *at the same time*. This will be a first for most people (though it is familiar to martial artists, among others).
4. Finally, notice the shape of this total perceptual field *itself*, rather than anything *in* this field.

Then, as you come back to normal, see how easy it now is to notice this visual field that is always present, that you never noticed before. You can't just *look* at it, but you can *see* it nonetheless.

This is analogically similar to the difference between certain kinds of knowledge, which have objects, as opposed to wisdom, which does not. Wisdom is not seeing this or that. It is not a perspective. Rather, it is an attitude that arises from such shifts in perspective, a kind of seeing things in an over all relation that allows us to not be so trapped in the particular.

A similar exercise can be done with emotional orientation in our experience that reveals an omnipresence of our vulnerability, whatever fluctuations in surface emotional states there may be that constantly attract our attention and color our views of things. Behind any particular desire or feeling there is an underlying yearning, vulnerability, temporality, a distention of the soul, as Augustine calls it, being pulled, moved, or motivated. (It is what Plato has Diotima reveal to us in the *Symposium* as the true nature of Eros and the fundamental feature of human experience.) The world always feels some way or other to us. It is colored with joy, sadness, ennui, desire or any other felt sense of things. But this is only variation of the basic omnipresent character of conscious awareness, namely the world always presents itself to us in feeling or mood, as Heidegger says. This omnipresent felt sense is the concrete manifestation of our vulnerability, our capacity to be affected at all, our openness to meaningfulness. It always has a cultural, linguistic, and personal felt horizon. The actual exercise is to select very powerful experiences from memory and relive them, experiences of intense joy, sadness, fear, anger, etc.. We then turn our attention to feel and see what is common to all of them. This is not easy at first, since these appear to be such radically different feelings and experiences. But just as we were able to stop looking at objects in our perceptual experiment in order to see something that is omnipresent but cannot be observed directly, we can begin to detect something that is omnipresent in our felt sense of being in the world. We can then move to a further recognition, the omnipresence of not just vulnerability

or being pulled, but of meaning and interpretation without getting caught up in this or that meaning, thus setting aside theoretical issues of truth. We can later also discuss the centrally important confusions about truth and why relativism/subjectivism, on the one hand, and objectivism/absolutism, on the other, are simply untenable ways to even try to approach the issue of meaningfulness. Clearly, some interpretations are vastly superior to others. But this has little to do with questions of epistemology and much to do with philosophical hermeneutics.

A third exercise is an extension of the last one. It is to remember and vividly relive those moments in our lives that are most disruptive of the ordinary, most disorienting but that give us an entirely new orientation and capacity for new meaningfulness. Examples that can be tapped into are powerful moments of deep wonder as a child, or the experience of falling deeply in love, the experience of becoming a parent, or the experience of some life altering realization, etc.. This rupture of the ordinary is an opportunity for self-overcoming, renewal, rebirth, connection with something sacred in us, something powerful that arises out of our deep vulnerability. Experiences of horror, anguish, and grief are also experiences of this deep rupture to our meaningfulness. When we experience these it is difficult, if not impossible, to have a point of reference and stability from which to notice the basic character of such experiences, that is, our deep vulnerability, that things mean anything at all and that things matter deeply. Such experiences could not occur without this deep vulnerability. To relive these experiences puts us closer in touch with the ever present possibility for reworlding and transformation. Even experiences of horror, the sense of impending loss of our world or the experience of anguish when all is lost and "nothing matters" if we survive these moments, upon reflection we can see that as terrible as such experiences are they reveal our deep vulnerability in that our meaningful world can be overturned. But at some point we emerge from such primordial experiences, if we are torn open by them enough and reworld, with a sense of wonder and awe at how we are reborn. Such death is the only death we ever experience, the death of a meaningful world. I must survive to have such an experience. What we usually call death, the experience of the absence of another, is itself an experience of one who is still vulnerable, and hence alive. Death is not something we ourselves can experience. If we experience it, then it is not what we normally mean by death. The only death we experience is the death of our meaning.

Exercise 4

1. Sit relaxed and follow your breathing eyes closed. Let yourself become still and focused.
2. Begin to notice what occurs in your awareness and then add the labels
 - a) **Sensation:** (color, cool, warm, heavy, light, sleepy, itchy, tension, pain, tingling, pulling, buzzing, humming, stretching, nervous, etc.)
 - b) **Emotional feeling** (bored, sad, joyous, excited, anxious, angry, pleased, curious, nervous, etc.)
 - c) **thought** (thought/memory and feeling sensation/emotion; thought judgment and feeling sensation/emotion; Thought image and feeling; Thought imagination; Thought narrative, thought dialogue, etc) We will spend several minutes on this
3. Kant tells us that space is our "outer" sense and time is our "inner" sense. This is the way our sensory awareness is experienced, as "out there" and "in here." Let's explore this now just as it is experienced without any habits of thought about how the world is, rather, just the distinction in experience between this inner and outer sense that precedes our assumptions and habits of thinking about the world this way or that. Notice how your sensory awareness has a "location" to it, a "there" that in our habits of meaning we call spatial location. All sensation has this spatial quality or characteristic of location, but so do all images or imaginings have this spatial quality, as well. Let us become aware just for a

moment of this sense of "out there," that things are there in my awareness of sensation, even my own body with the various different qualities of sensation and feeling are here or there, in my stomach, in my throat, on my skin here or there. I feel proximity to things around me. This itch is here, not there. That sound is there not here. We normally just take this for granted as being located in space as if space is "out there." Let us remember that space is a concept, not an experience. We never *experience* anything called "space" any more than we experience anything called "time." Rather, we experience spatially and temporally. Staying for a moment with this feeling of spatial location, see if you can set this habit (of bringing your experiences under the concept of space as "out there") aside momentarily and just become aware of the *sense* of "there" *itself*, the *sense* of now, *itself*. Now notice the focusing on each of the features of awareness *itself* more than what it is you are focusing on. This is the beginning of the ability to experience experience itself, rather than this or that feeling or object that normally captures and fills our awareness.

4. Now distinguish any feature of your awareness from your awareness itself. Let anything arise to awareness without examining it or labeling. Rather begin to notice the distinguishable features of your awareness (sensations, emotions, thoughts as we did before) but now notice what is common to them. Hint: they are all present to you, are "there" "now." Now begin to let go of noticing the distinctiveness of what comes to awareness and be aware once again of your awareness itself. What phenomenological feature(s) does it have?

See if you can become aware of all your sensations at once without focusing on any one of them. At first your mind will dart from one to another trying to be aware of each one. But one technique to bring them simultaneously into awareness is to focus out in front of you into the blackness without really focusing on it, just keep your orientation there until you begin to have an awareness of all the sensations going on without focusing on any one of them and not darting from one to another. Even if you only have a split second awareness of this, you have an awareness of "thereness" without any particular "there." Next, if you can just come to this same awareness for a split second over and over but now let go of the overall awareness of thereness (space) and notice the "newness" of this "thereness". The experience is of awareness itself rather than an awareness of anything. It has no location in space. It is what Kant called "inner sense" as opposed to outer. In outer sense, I seem to have a location in relation to whatever I am sensing. Thoughts seem to be inner and sensation seems to be outer and emotion seems to be both inner and outer, mostly inner. Emotions rarely occur without thoughts. See if you can now distinguish all these in your experience, your phenomenological noticing.

Augustine tells us that this inner sense is most intimately experienced as a "yearning," a kind of openness or receptiveness to something not yet. It is our sense of impending future, a "now" a purpose or hope guided by positive or negative expectation to which our response is feeling. The final part of this exercise is to come to an awareness of this "yearning" or vulnerability, this being pulled that is ALWAYS there, ALWAYS present in all the different qualities of experience we call feeling or emotion and that feeling or emotion always has a here and now to it. If you do these exercises well, you will be able to develop this bare awareness more easily and not be driven by your emotions to behave in habitual patterns, to see the process of awareness with all its variations as the here and now of vulnerability or yearning or being pulled. You can observe this being pulled rather than let it impel you to acts that you would not wish to pursue if you were able to be more reflective about it. Being able to see into the core of any experience, the being pulled of the here and now, give you some control and choice. It allows for better judgment about what matters.

The term in Sanskrit for bringing inner and outer sense to rest, bringing memory to rest, bringing emotion to rest is called *samadhi*. *Samadhi* is cultivated awareness of complete equanimity and stillness. In this condition space and time are suspended yet there is awareness of this profound stillness. It is an awareness in which the distinction of self and not self is suspended but can return in an instant. This is non philosophical contemplation. It gives us a

vacation from the self and its habits, cravings, aversions, and insecurities. In Zen it is called bare awareness where there is no perspective. Practice of this bare awareness allows us to suspend our usual perspectives and interpretations thus making them somewhat estranged when we come back to them. We are momentarily freed from them as habits and can examine them and shift to other perspectives much more easily. From this arises *prajna* or insight which is not seeing from this or that perspective but a condition of freedom in which an attitude may arise that is non particular and non judgmental, just noticing, without judging.

Transformative Insight (see below at end) also uses a different but companion practice of reading or thinking-saying a powerful insight and rather than reasoning one's way or arguing pro or con, take the insight seriously as life transforming.

What would it be to understand and shift one's horizons and orientation such that an insight becomes not intellectually "true" but becomes an undeniable lived felt awareness, an attitude? Even if we only have it for a split second, it has found its way to our spiritual core and becomes a possible way of being in the world for us. This is not an intellectual shift but a gestalt shift in understanding where all the elements of our knowledge and awareness take on a different horizon of meaningfulness, a different whole and therefore a different felt sense of being here.)

Exercise 5: Attitude: Attitude is a much higher level feature of being in the world than mere perception or emotion or belief. How and why is attitude different from these and what difference does this make?

a) Think of a time when you had the most shocking realization that you were mistaken about something, that you got the facts wrong and judged someone unfairly. What is the experience of that shift like? Now consider that there may be such undiscovered errors in your life. You are fallible. The response to a powerful recognition of this is humility. But if you have integrity, you will develop skill in making judgments. You will have the confidence to live powerfully by your judgments because they are more skillfully arrived at. At the same time you are humbly aware of your finitude and fallibility so you are ready at any moment to subject your judgments to careful scrutiny and modify or abandon them. You take a general approach of suspending judgment when possible, in many cases where it is not required or the matter is of great importance.

b) Think of a time when you were completely convinced of your rightness about something and were very judgmental toward someone, but you did have the facts right. But you subsequently had some good fortune or change in your life or a really good vacation or you fell in love and you were able to see and experience those same facts with a very different **attitude**. This led to a rather different perspective, a different valuing and interpretation of the same facts, even though the facts did not change in a descriptive sense, though the meaning of those "same" facts may be radically different now. That change is one of attitude. The mere facts of our lives are not what is central but what those facts are made to mean. So to distinguish what happens from what we make it mean is a major advance in human freedom...

c) Because you recognize others as being in the same basic condition of vulnerability and fallibility, you can have compassion, you can put yourself in the other's place and are careful in making judgments that have an impact on others.

d) Increase in Freedom: Become aware that you have the power to make these changes in attitude regardless of circumstance.

CONCLUSION:

The value of these exercises in **Phenomenological Seeing and Hermeneutical Awareness:** We become 1) less caught in our meanings, therefore 2) less selfish, less judgmental. The first experience reduces our insecurity and fear in life and the second leads to an awareness of others as ourselves: reciprocity (often called the Golden Rule).

The Presense of Thereeness and Meaning

The great mystery that we try to penetrate with language in our religions, philosophies, and sciences is that there is anything at all, that there is something rather than nothing that shows itself in intelligible ways, i.e., we can say something about it. But even more mysterious than the fact that there is something there for us and that we are always making something of it, is that there is a "there." This is the basic feature of meaningfulness, the basic feature of being for us: that it is immediate and concrete in a "there" and we further interpret (explain and abstract) from this given into all our "stories." The world is meaningfulness that always shows itself in a concrete immediate way, is always a meaningful presence or "there" for us. But we bury it under our interpretations and miss the "being there," the presence of anything, which is more fundamental than what we have made of it in our religious, metaphysical, scientific, common sense, and personal narratives.

It is this shared condition of "being there", of meaningfulness, and our vulnerability that is universal and unites us. There are no foundations for our claims about truth, knowledge, and reality, but there is this universal condition of being there, of things mattering to us, being meaningful. Things only show up as interpreted within the horizons that our language, culture, and personal finite experience make possible. But we can see this "showing up" itself without getting caught in the meanings, the "truths" that enable this showing up, this presence. The horizons of our awareness are our inhibiting and our enabling limits. They give us our openness to everything, but are also the limits of our understanding and are the source of much of our conflict, our casting the world in terms of good and bad, but more ominously, good and evil. We create enemies out of "difference" that threatens our habits, patterns, truths, and goals. We confuse importance, that things matter deeply to us, with "truth" about what we take to be important. Out of our insecurities and need, truth becomes most important without any awareness that this is what has happened. Ironically, this cuts us off from our spiritual and ethical core. We fail to see that there is something more basic than truth, namely that things matter, that it is the "mattering" itself, rather than the "what" that is most primordial and provides the most basic ethical communality. What matters is always a meaning, an interpretation within finite temporary horizons of understanding and that is why truth matters because these truths are interpretations with which to meet the challenge of our finitude, uncertainty, and vulnerability. Whatever commitments or leaps of faith we make, it is the deep need to have such connectedness that is basic, not this or that interpretation. Meaning-giving is most primordial, not this or that meaning that we call "truth." It would be instructive here to remember what one of the greatest Christians, Augustine, said about interpretation: To paraphrase the last chapter of his book *My Confessions*, since a sacred text is a text aimed at spiritual transformation in the lived experience of the reader, no interpretation can claim to be "true." Rather, if the interpretation brings the reader to live in the presence of the sacred, then the interpretation was "true." As long as one approaches the sacred with the attitude of deep humility and unknowing and does not have the arrogance to claim to know the truth, then one has the appropriate attitude with which to approach the sacred. This is entirely unsatisfactory from an historical, scientific, or logical/textual approach. But Augustine warns that logical and historical thinking should guide us when looking at the world, but not when we approach God/The Mystery. Likewise, to historicize or logicize a sacred text is to undermine its purpose and power. The sacred, which for Augustine is not something that can be addressed with historical or logical thinking, can only be approached with the deepest of humility, with the attitude that one knows nothing with regard to the deepest mysteries.

The exercises here can be used for self-discovery and self-overcoming, the process of always returning to the place of humility in the face of one's finitude, fallibility, and vulnerability.

Transformative insight: Transformation of Horizons of Meaning

The following are a few succinct insights from philosophy and religion to contemplate. There are many more that will be used from world philosophy and religion. Wisdom or profound insight often seems ridiculous when stated outright. Think on these until they begin to make sense, until they speak to you powerfully enough to transform the attitude with which you approach life.

1. "Love your enemy" (Jesus, Buddha)
2. "No harm can come to a good person." (Socrates/Plato)
3. "It's not what happens that upsets us, but what we make it mean." (Epictetus)
4. "The unexamined life is not worth living." (Socrates/Plato)
5. "Think not of the ignorance and faults of others, but of your own." (Kung Fu Tzu)
6. "The beginning of wisdom is the recognition of your own ignorance." (Socrates/Plato)
7. "Treat others as you yourself would be treated." (Kung Fu Tzu, Jesus, many others)
8. "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him." (Zen proverb)
9. "O my Lord, if I worship Thee from fear of hell, burn me in hell, if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me thence, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me Thine Eternal Beauty. (Rabia, Muslim Sufi)
10. "I pray God to make me free of God." "If I had a God I could understand, I would no longer consider him God." (Meister Eckhart)
11. The view that "All truth is relative" is a non relative universal absolute statement, hence self-contradictory.
11. "Become who you are." (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*)
12. "All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language that allows the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language." (Gadamer, *Truth & Method*)
13. "Security is mostly a superstition, it does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing. To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits is strength undefeatable." (Helen Keller)
14. "Time tends toward non being." (Augustine, *Confessions*)
15. "The root of all evil is thoughtlessness" (Hanah Arendt)
16. "Always look life in the face, then... know it for what it is, and finally... love it for what it is." (Virginia Woolf)
17. "What was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all 'truth' but something else-let us say, health, future, growth, power, life." (Nietzsche)
18. "We can only talk about what we say there is." (Quine)
19. Before my teacher came to me, I did not know that I am. I lived in a world that was no-world. I cannot hope to describe adequately that unconscious, yet conscious time of nothingness. I did not know that I knew nothing, or that I lived or acted or desired. I had neither will nor intellect. I was carried along to objects and acts by a certain blind natural impetus. ..My inner life, then, was a blank without past, present, or future without hope or anticipation, without wonder or joy or faith... I was not conscious of any change or process going on in me... When I learned the meaning of "I" and "me" and found that I was something, I began to think. Then consciousness first existed for me... It was the awakening of my soul that first rendered my senses their value, their cognizance of objects, names, qualities, and properties. Thought made me conscious of love, joy, and all the emotions. I was eager to know, then to understand, afterward to reflect on what I knew and understood, and the blind impetus, which had before driven me hither and thither at the dictates of

- my sensations, vanished forever. (Helen Keller, *The World I Live In*, 1908.)
20. To be fully rational requires surrendering unconditionally to the throe of wonder instead of clinging to the given; it means allowing oneself to be cast into the abyss of the unknown instead of trying to find a way to secure oneself from that vertiginous possibility. (Jerome Miller)
 21. "For the mere impulse of appetite is slavery, while obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty." (Rousseau)
 22. "The historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are the biases of our openness to the world...The prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being. (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*)
 23. "Hermeneutics has the task of informing; of making each Dasein, in its being, accessible to...itself; of going back to the self-alienation with which Dasein is oppressed. In hermeneutics the possibility is of Dasein's becoming and being for itself understandingly. (Martin Heidegger)
 24. "The philosophical way of life is no longer a theory divided into parts, but a unitary act, which consists in living logic, physics, and ethics. In this case, we no longer study logical theory -that is, the theory of speaking and thinking well — we simply think and speak well. We no longer engage in theory about the physical world, but we contemplate the cosmos. We no longer theorize about moral action, but we act in a correct and just way. (Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*)
 25. Understanding is an event, something that happens to us, not something we do. "The capacity for understanding is a reception, in the sense of pathos, rather than an activity,...Hermeneutics looks to understand what the understanding is, over and above the ease of a purely technical control of it." (Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*)
 26. Some things are up to us and others are not. Up to us are opinion, impulse, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever is our own action. Not up to us are body, property, reputation, office, and in a word, whatever is not our own action. (Epictetus, *Handbook* 1, p. 287)
 27. We live in our meanings
 28. We are not fundamentally biological beings, but beings capable of creating powerful explanatory biological theories and models.
 29. Suffering is not pain. Suffering is what you do with your pain.
 30. To genuinely forgive oneself is not to go easier on oneself. It is to become less self-deceived about the challenge of the condition of finitude in which one must make sense of things, take action, and pursue one's identity. Thus, it requires self-overcoming, becoming harder on oneself. But this can only happen when the creative life energy that has been siphoned off defending, protecting, and excusing oneself from this inescapable life task has been made available for this most central of all tasks. Then becoming hard on oneself is joyfully pursued, embraced, not continually and self-deceptively escaped from. From this arises greater integrity, without which one cannot live a flourishing life. It gives rise to both humility and confidence in the face of one's finitude.

V. Theories and Linguisticality

Phenomenology is the careful noticing and description of the actual phenomena of consciousness apart from, but not independent from our interpretations (by “bracketing” our concepts or meanings: Husserl). There have been many other forms of phenomenology, such as Buddhism, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, M. Ponty, to name a few. There are some important advantages of phenomenology: The ability to distinguish what happens or what is present from what we make it mean, thus giving us the opportunity to not be as trapped in our meanings. Another advantage is to be able to be aware of the world as it appears in consciousness so we do not miss its beauty and the wonder this can elicit. Another is the ability to distinguish the basic features of consciousness, as in Buddhist meditation, to free ourselves from the habits of mind that lead to unnecessary suffering. Recent developments in western phenomenology are primarily aimed at careful description of phenomena for philosophical purposes, for beginning the process of philosophical reflection on a much more stable, consistent, and reliable basis. The objectivity provided by phenomenology is different from what we usually pursue via theoretically based methodologies of measurement.

Philosophical Hermeneutics: Builds upon phenomenology but involves the additional careful noticing that all consciousness is interpretive, already meaningful, and that it has “horizons” (Husserl/Gadamer) or “prejudices” (Gadamer) that make meaning possible. These horizons and all perspectives or points of view are made possible by **linguisticity** (Gadamer). **Linguisticity** is the basic condition of being already situated in a language and its already interpreted meaningful context that makes possible and shapes how we experience things. (Consciousness is often not verbal, not in words, so not *linguistic*, but all consciousness arises in the context of being a language user, and is thus *linguistical*.) No sense of self and world arises without language. (Remember the example of Helen Keller cited in *The Eros of Wisdom*.) **Bildung** is the process of becoming increasingly aware of an already interpreted world, making it our own (at least integrating it into our “world view”) and

continually going beyond horizons of meaning to new understanding. *Bildung* is a constant process of self-formation and self-overcoming. Thinking and attempting to understand are activities, something we do. *Understanding* itself, however, is something that happens to us, not something we do. It is the *event* of a horizon shift in which world and self are now present in a new way. The *hermeneutical circle* is the interplay of the elements or particulars of our meaning and understanding in contrast to the horizons of meaningfulness in which they operate that can be called our world view, totality of meaning relations, web of meaning, etc.. Each particular has meaning only in the context of the whole and the whole is greater than the sum of its particulars, i.e., understanding is not a collection of particulars, not a collection of knowledge. Some new element or arrangement of elements can bring about the event of new understanding or new horizon from which we experience and view any particular thing, event, or phenomena of experience. Understanding can arise in many ways, not merely by trying to “figure something out.” Knowledge is not understanding. But knowledge can only occur in the context of horizons of understanding. One can have knowledge that takes on new meaning by means of a new understanding or horizon shift. *Wisdom* is not knowledge or any collection of knowledge and not merely some understanding or shift in horizons of awareness and meaning. Rather it is the attitude that can arise from ones holistic sense (grasp on things as a whole) that then informs any particular engagement, interpretation, judgment, or action. Though there can be no wisdom without knowledge and understanding, there *can* be knowledge without wisdom which is the norm. Understanding is also not wisdom, but is a long series of steps toward and a prelude to it. One could say that one form of wisdom is what occurs when understanding understands itself. **Philosophical hermeneutics** is the attempt to understand understanding that can contribute to wisdom (literally, seeing or insight), which is seeing or seeing into our basic condition of vulnerability and finitude such that it enlightens our relationship to ourselves and the way we interact with the world.

Theory: Thinking that attempts to explain, unify, and then possibly predict phenomena of consciousness by reduction to one or more principles. *Scientific theory*, for example, attempts to empirically explain and predict phenomena within a narrow domain of enquiry by testing hypothetical causal relationships under some overall guiding and well-established theoretical interpretive frame to produce “knowledge.” Such knowledge can be overturned or reinterpreted within a successful theoretical frame or by a shift to a new more successful theoretical frame that explains and predicts a wider range of phenomena more consistently and completely. In contrast, *Ethical theory*, for example, attempts to *describe* what people in fact believe is right or wrong, just or unjust and in some cases attempts to *explain* why they believe this. Or ethical theory may attempt to *prescribe* what people *ought* to do based on a theoretical understanding of what is right or wrong, just or unjust instead of just describing of explaining what they believe. These *prescriptive* theories are NOT empirical, but are judged on their consistency and adequacy in accounting for morality and in guiding action. All theorizing is limited by what it is that is to be explained and what the goal of the theorizing is.

Theory-Laden (Blackwell Dictionary): A concept, term, or statement that is theory-laden makes sense only in the light of a particular theory or set of principles. Even experience is always shaped by theoretical traditions and expectations. Every observational term and sentence is alleged to carry a theoretical load. This position challenges the view of logical positivism that a protocol statement is a theoretically neutral report of experience, and denies reducibility of theory-laden terms to a

purely observational level of knowledge. The term implies a rejection of the influential dichotomy of theoretical terms and observational terms. “There is a sense, then, in which seeing is a ‘theory laden’ undertaking. Observation of x is shaped by a priori knowledge of x.” (Hansen, 1959)

The question we raise here is whether all thinking and experience is “theory-laden.” Heidegger rejected Husserl’s notion of presuppositionless starting points in phenomenology which might initially seem to support this idea. But implicit in Heidegger and made very explicit by Gadamer, theory is NOT fundamental to all thought and experience. Rather, philosophical hermeneutics is the non-theoretical disclosure or revealing of the conditions of the possibility of meaningfulness in linguisticality, including theoretical meaning and interpretation. So, linguisticality is not a more basic theory of interpretation and meaning, but rather the realization of the inescapable reflexive paradox of meaning-interpretation already depending on meaning-interpretation as a precondition of any meaningfulness including theoretical understanding. Theoretical understanding is a species of understanding and understanding presupposes *linguisticality*. Meaning is always already present and is the condition for any theory, perspective, or meaningful experience. Theories may condition experience, but linguisticality conditions theoretical understanding. Yes, one might argue that concepts are theory-laden. But that they are theory-laden and presuppose theories is itself possible only in the reflexive condition of *linguisticality*. *Theories* depend upon *linguisticality*, not the other way round.

VI. Religion, Science, and Philosophy

There is much confusion about what science, religion, and philosophy are and this confusion has some of the worst consequences for us. This section is meant to elaborate on what was only briefly discussed in Chapter 2.

RELIGION: literally, to “bind back” (to the sacred, to what is most basic, most important, to the source of meaning)

A. The Sacred: Felt sense of awe, profound respect for power of nature and being of the world, an experience of the sublime

B. The elements or dimensions of religion that grow out of this sense of the sacred:

**Experiential*- deeply felt sense that things matter and that this has a source that can be connected with

**Ritual*- Re-enactments of the most sacred or holy original or central events

**Mythical*-the narrative recounting of what is fundamentally important, story of how everything began and/or the source, how and why things are the way they are, what the final destination is, what our place is in this story is, what we should do about it, what it all means.

**Social*-how religious beliefs provide a meaningful system of relations between people. (Myth is not to be confused with history, which is a different way of interpreting and expressing time and events). Mythical narratives are closer to literature in attempting to reveal profound psychological truths about ourselves and the world, rather than a literal account of it)

**Ethical*-what is permitted or forbidden in order to stay connected to the sacred. The concern for others and for the collective is basic to humans and is always contained in religious traditions but does not reduce to this.

**Doctrinal*-the systematic rational justification and/or explanation of all the other elements.

C. 1. Naturalistic Religions such as the Buddhism of Siddhartha Gautama which focuses on immediate phenomena or philosophical Taoism (Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu) which tends to focus on immediate phenomena with a philosophical non

anthropomorphic underpinning. (anthropomorphic: man-like god or gods)

2. Super naturalistic religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism: heavily based on anthropomorphic metaphysical beliefs about non observable realities/entities with varying degrees of literalness. (metaphysical: not directly or indirectly observable)

D. **Theology:** Literally, discourse and rational analysis about God or the gods, or more generally about religion or spirituality. This discourse is variously used to understand, defend, facilitate, propagate or compare one or more religious traditions. Our discussion in this class of traditional arguments for the existence of God is a part of theology as well as philosophy of religion. Insofar as the discourse is guided by the attempt to understand and make sense of religious concepts and phenomena, it is philosophical. Insofar as it is an attempt to support a religious tradition it is not.

E. *Philology & Religious Hermeneutics*: scholarly literary interpretations of ancient religious texts that have exposed their origins and likely historical, cultural, psychological, literary significance.

F. Two kinds of religion: "*religare*" spiritual religion (deeply felt response to human finitude and vulnerability and attempt to live the deep psychology of the mythology) vs. *theoretical, metaphysical, doctrinal* religion that provides a system of explanations and rationalizations based on taking the mythology as a foundational logical, historical truth. This type of religion tends toward ideology (a normative agenda put forward by controlling a society's core ideas).

II. **SCIENCE**- literally, systematic knowledge, from Latin: *scire: to know*.

A. **Greek Science:** Was primarily theoretical and intellectual in its method, for example, atomism was invented by Leucippus and Democritus to give a theoretical way to understand the problem of how things can

have an identity and yet undergo change. (Science & philosophy were not distinct until Parmenides and Plato raised purely logical, metaphysical and epistemological questions about the nature of being, knowledge, and truth.)

B. Modern Science: Systematic methods for testing empirical generalizations (claims based on sense experience) by generating and testing hypotheses (explanatory proposals) about cause and effect among observed phenomena. The primary model for the methods of the experimental sciences is mathematization of space and time. This is done by means of measurement of sense experience under some guiding well-tested interpretive theoretical framework that allows for the development and testing of explanatory hypotheses and the production of data. This is typically done by means of operational definitions by which measured sense experiences can be used to explain and predict the type of phenomena under investigation. The first really systematic modern sciences were Copernican astronomy and Newtonian physics (Galileo did not yet have a systematic framework of interpretation but greatly hastened the intellectual conditions that eventually led to the development of Newtonian science).

There is no unified method or body of knowledge called “science” but rather various sciences that share a family resemblance in the use of various similar but distinct methods of testing explanatory hypotheses. Each science is specific and tailored to the domain of inquiry and type of object it investigates. Thus, physics (which studies the basic physical nature of phenomena) and biology (which studies the basic nature of living things) are quite distinct. This is evident from the very vocabulary used in each of these sciences. The larger broad division of sciences is between the so-called *natural sciences* which include both physics and biology as well as astronomy, chemistry, geology, etc., and the *social or human sciences* such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, political science, etc., that study the

nature of human beings (human behavior, emotion, cognition, etc.), and human social and political organization. The natural and social sciences as a group are typically distinguished from the *HUMANITIES* which include the many different arts and philosophy. History is usually considered one of the humanities, but is also often labeled as one of the social sciences.

C. Theories, Hypotheses, Laws, and Models:

An accepted *theory* in the sciences is a well tested interpretive framework that explains a range of phenomena and is necessary for the ordinary testing procedures of science to operate. Theories are the result of a highly successful attempt to simplify and unify a range of phenomena. A theory, once developed through a great deal of collective effort and shown to be mathematically sound, is very stable and does not change quickly or easily. A *hypothesis*, in contrast, is a tentative testable explanation (within a theoretical frame) developed for explaining some particular phenomenon or range of phenomena already recognizable as relevant under the general interpretative frame of the theory. A genuine hypothesis must be falsifiable. It cannot count as true without testing and we must know what would count in its favor and against it. Successful testing produces confirmation and with enough confirmation the hypothesis becomes part of a larger theoretical framework which must also be falsifiable to be genuine scientific theories. Scientists do not set out to “prove” hypotheses, but to test and confirm them. Proof is a strictly deductive mathematical term. Science is based instead on inductive logic in which we reach conclusions about unobserved things on the basis of what has been observed. For example, our best theory of cosmology, based on massive amount of observation, inductively supports the prediction that the sun will burn out in about 4 billion years, though we have never witnessed this. The findings from inductive reasoning are always a matter of high probability, not certainty. However, there is no reason to

reject a very well-confirmed theory until we have data that disconfirms it.

Often multiple hypotheses are posed to explain phenomena and the goal of research is to eliminate the ones that are not well-confirmed. Many hypotheses are generated in the sciences, but most do not survive the rigorous testing procedures often called the “scientific method” even though it should be plural: the methods of the sciences. In contrast, theories usually remain for decades or centuries even as they are modified and refined. In science, theories are never hunches or guesses but massively well-confirmed frameworks for interpreting and explaining phenomena. A theory or hypothesis that cannot be disconfirmed (cannot be falsified) is not a genuine scientific theory or hypothesis. However, it is also considered sufficient for theory to be testable in principle at some undetermined point in the future. The term theory in science is now sometimes stretched to refer to speculation that is currently unverifiable, such as string theory.

D. Testing Hypotheses: Experimental Design:

In the sciences phenomena that are correlated or appear together in experience that are suspected to be causally related can be tested by means of experimental design. The design begins with a phenomena or type of phenomena to be explained by means of a working hypothesis. Experiments are designed to test the hypothesis. Depending on the science and what is being tested, the suspected causal factor, (called the *experimental, independent or manipulated variable*), must be precisely defined. It must be given an *operational definition*, otherwise it will be uncertain what was tested, how to interpret the results and it will not be possible to replicate the test to confirm or disconfirm its findings. The test should measure (typically give a numerical value to) the effect or outcome (the *dependent variable*) as a result of the presence of the suspected causal factor/independent variable. All other factors (intervening variables) that could possibly cause some change in the outcome must be

screened out otherwise we would not know what caused the result. A degree of confirmation is achieved when there is a statistically significant outcome that is not explained by factors other than the tested variable. A hypothesis can also be tested by inferring what must be true if the hypothesis is true and then seeing if what was predicted by the hypothesis is in fact the case. That adds confirmation to the hypothesis. *Controlled experiments* involve manipulation of the thing to be explained to investigate causal outcomes. *Natural experiments* are those in which the thing to be explained and its effects/causes are found already in nature instead of manipulated.

Laws simply refer to regularities in phenomena that do not vary, such as the law of gravity, Newton’s laws of motion, the laws of thermodynamics, Boyle’s law of gases, the law of conservation of mass and energy, and Hook’s law of elasticity. Laws are simply an invariable range of phenomena, such as how things fall to earth under certain conditions (gravity) though this can be explained differently by different theories. For example, Newton’s Theory based on a static conception of space and uniform absolute time explains the law of gravity differently than later theories in physics. Because Einstein’s theories explained and predicted a wider range of phenomena better than Newton’s, Einstein’s were adopted because they had more explanatory and predictive power and range and were better confirmed under a wider range of conditions.

One scientist *cannot* create a theory; she can only create a *hypothesis*. In general, both a scientific theory and a scientific law are accepted to be true by the scientific community as a whole. Both are used to make predictions of events. Both are used to advance technology that in turn allows for further development of science.

Models in Science (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) Models are of central importance in many scientific contexts. The centrality of models such as the billiard ball model of a gas, the Bohr model of the atom, the MIT bag

model of the nucleon, the Gaussian-chain model of a polymer, the Lorenz model of the atmosphere, the Lotka-Volterra model of predator-prey interaction, the double helix model of DNA, agent-based and evolutionary models in the social sciences, or general equilibrium models of markets in their respective domains are cases in point. Scientists spend a great deal of time building, testing, comparing and revising models, and much journal space is dedicated to introducing, applying and interpreting these valuable tools. In short, models are one of the principal instruments of modern science.

Models can perform two fundamentally different representational functions. On the one hand, a model can be a representation of a selected part of the world (the 'target system'). Depending on the nature of the target, such models are either models of phenomena or models of data. On the other hand, a model can represent a theory in the sense that it interprets the laws and axioms of that theory. These two notions are not mutually exclusive as scientific models can be representations in both senses at the same time.

Models and Theory: The separation between models and theory is a very hazy one and in the jargon of many scientists it is often difficult, if not impossible, to draw a line. So the question is: is there a distinction between models and theories and if so how do they relate to one another? There are two major views on this among philosophers: The syntactic and the semantic view of theories. The *syntactic view* of theories, construes a theory as a set of sentences in an axiomatized system of first order logic...Proponents of the syntactic view believe models to be irrelevant to science. Models, they hold, are superfluous additions that are at best of pedagogical, aesthetical or psychological value.

The *semantic view* of theories reverses this standpoint and declares that we should dispense with a formal calculus altogether and view a theory as a family of models. Although different versions of the semantic view assume a different notion of model, they all

agree that models are the central unit of scientific theorizing.

However, against the semantic view, it has been argued that models are relatively independent from theory, rather than being constitutive of them...A look at how models are constructed in actual science shows that they are neither derived entirely from data nor from theory. Theories do not provide us with algorithms for the construction a model. Model building is an art and not a mechanical procedure. The second aspect of the independence of models is that they perform functions which they could not perform if they were a part of, or strongly dependent on, theories. A theory may be incompletely specified in the sense that it imposes certain general constraints but remains silent about the details of concrete situations, which are provided by a model.

In contrast, others have argued that fundamental theories such as classical mechanics and quantum mechanics do not represent anything at all as they do not describe any real world situation. Laws in such theories are schemata that need to be concretized and filled with the details of a specific situation, which is a task that is accomplished by a model.

A further argument has been made that when theories are too complicated to handle, a simplified model may be employed that allows for a solution.

E. Interpretation: Finally, with regard to all discourse, including that of science and religion, it is hermeneutical, that is, a linguistic process of interpretation based on past interpretation. (See the sections on hermeneutics in *The Eros of Wisdom* and *Theory and Linguisticity*)

III. Philosophy versus Science

Philosophy involves rigorous and sustained thought about very basic issues such as reality, knowledge and truth, self, society, justice, ethics, and much more. Like the sciences philosophy involves testing our ideas. But unlike modern natural science, philosophy is not limited to narrow empirical

methods. Much of philosophy has been theoretical in attempting to provide explanations of the world and our ideas, but philosophy does not/cannot assimilate the unknown to the known as science does. Philosophy does not produce knowledge, but rather, when successful, leads to better understanding, insight, wisdom, which the sciences, by the nature of their limits that make them such powerful explanatory methods, cannot do. Science can only operate by gradually assimilating the unknown to the known via its narrow limits of empirical investigation and testing. Its power is in its narrowness. To dilute science into an attempt to understand how things hang together in the largest or deepest sense, pursue non empirical ideas such as justice, rights, meaning, etc., would be to destroy the effectiveness of science. Philosophy, beyond its previous attempts to provide such overarching large theoretical views, is consistently a kind of undoing or undermining of beliefs/truth, an emptying out that allows a new beginning, rebirth, begins in wonder and generates wonder on the way to new understanding of ourselves and the world that is not finally restricted to any method. Philosophy in its narrowest sense is great skill in critical thinking, particularly conceptual analysis that aims at conceptual clarity. But philosophy is not merely about clarifying conceptual boundaries, as for example, in clarifying such central concepts as justice, time, causality, self, etc... In its broadest sense, philosophy is the hermeneutical or interpretive attempt to understand understanding itself. It is an attempt not to understand this or that, but to understand the conditions of the possibility of understanding, that is, what it is to understand at all. This is not at all a psychological explanation of what happens when we understand something. Rather, such psychological explanation is itself an example of understanding. What we understand and how we do it are not the same thing as understanding itself or its conditions of possibility. To understand understanding hermeneutically is to step outside theory

altogether. It is an awareness of the conditions of our finitude and the conditions of meaningfulness and interpretation that dictate or make possible any understanding we have of anything. In this sense philosophy truly is the pursuit or love of wisdom as its name indicates. It is not knowledge, but a seeing into the very interpretive conditions of knowledge or meaningfulness generally that allows us to grasp anything at all. That was Plato's goal: to grasp the conditions of the possibility of intelligibility or meaningfulness of the world at all. But he tended often to use metaphysical and epistemological theories to pursue this as did most of philosophy after him until as recently as the late 19th and early 20th centuries when this "business as usual" in philosophy was severely challenged and largely abandoned, at least in the presumptions of what a philosophical theory might be able to do, and most strongly in; moving beyond methods and theories to a phenomenological and hermeneutical approach to understanding.

A. Some uses, descriptions and/or meanings of Philosophy:

1. Literally, love or pursuit of wisdom by intellectual and moral self-discipline. That is, rationalistic, and normative non mythopoeic, non supernatural investigations of the nature of things that may overlap with but are not restricted to objects of scientific investigation.
2. Inquiry into the nature of things based on logical reasoning not restricted to empirical methods.
3. The analysis and critique of fundamental beliefs.
4. The attempt to synthesize consistently all learning and understanding.
5. One's basic viewpoint.
6. The system of values by which one lives.
7. The *practice* rather than merely the intellectual recognition of wisdom. A way of life.
8. The normative investigation into the value and meaning of claims of truth, reality, justice, methodology, and value judgments themselves.

9. An unusually persistent attempt to think critically and clearly about fundamental issues
10. "...the disease for which it was supposed to be the cure" (Wittgenstein) (i.e., is supposed to clear things up for us but often does the reverse)

B. Traditional Areas of Philosophy

Metaphysics: Theories of reality

Epistemology: Theories of knowledge and truth

Axiology: Theories of Value (including ethics and aesthetics)

Ethics: inquiry into the nature of moral judgments, their meaning, and validity, and into the nature of an ethical or virtuous life),

Aesthetics: inquiry into the nature of the experience and judgment of beauty and/or artistic merit, the meaning and validity of such judgments.

Logic: Study of the Rules of consistent thought

Special Topics: e.g., philosophy of art, sport, science, law, etc..

C. Two kinds of philosophy in the Socratic Lineage

1. Theoretical (some limited similarity to the sciences in generating and testing theories, but not by appeal to hypothetical-mathematically derived data).
2. Spiritual practice (some limited similarity to religion in pursuing a way of living a human life)

D. Characteristics

1. Logos - Logic, A or not A, true/false, pursuit of definitions, categories, limits, foundations, absolutes
2. Analysis (breaking down elements in order to understand) and Synthesis (putting all understanding and learning together in a consistent whole).

E. Types of Philosophy

1. *Argumentative* (logic of propositions, premise/conclusion construction and analysis of concepts to reduce or eliminate rhetorical, psychological, emotional elements and isolate truth value of particular propositions) versus *Narrative philosophy* (examination of rich

rhetorical, experiential, psychological elements together with logical/conceptual elements of language in our narratives to achieve profound insight and understanding)

2. *Language Analysis* (often inadequately identified as "Anglo-American" philosophy) Breaks into roughly two camps: Ordinary language analysis and formal language analysis in which the usual content of language is reduced or eliminated in the pursuit of logical/empirical truth. Both approaches attempt to maximize clarity in our statements and their conceptual components.
3. *Phenomenology* is a highly rigorous method where the usual abstract conceptual and theoretical elements that dominate our language and understanding are bracketed so we can deal with what actually appears in our experience of phenomena.
4. *Philosophical Hermeneutics* The attempt to understand understanding and the basic condition of finitude and linguisticity from which understanding arises. (See section in *The Eros of Wisdom*)

Oxford Dictionary Definition of Philosophy

(Greek, love of knowledge or wisdom) The study of the most general and abstract features of the world and categories with which we think: mind, matter, reason, proof, truth, etc. In philosophy, the concepts with which we approach the world themselves become the topic of inquiry. A philosophy of a discipline such as history, physics, or law seeks not so much to solve historical, physical, or legal questions, as to study the concepts that structure such thinking, and to lay bare their foundations and presuppositions. In this sense philosophy is what happens *when a practice becomes self-conscious*. The borderline between such 'second order' reflection, and ways of practicing the first order discipline itself, is not always clear: philosophical problems may be tamed by the advance of a discipline, and the conduct of a discipline may be swayed by philosophical reflection (see also owl of Minerva). At different times there has been more or less optimism about the possibility of a pure or 'first'

philosophy, taking an *apriori* standpoint from which other intellectual practices can be impartially assessed and subjected to logical evaluation and correction (see methodology). The late 20th-century spirit of the subject is hostile to any such possibility, and prefers to see philosophical reflection as continuous with the best practice of any field of intellectual inquiry.

IV. Literal versus Figurative or Symbolic Discourse: *Literal Discourse:* Science and Philosophy: Emphasis on Conceptual clarity, clarity and subtlety of distinctions in *thought* expressed in language

Symbolic/mythopoeia: Religion/Philosophy - Emphasis on richness and subtlety of what is *felt and understood* expressed in language

V. Scientism and Religious Dogmatism

It is crucial to not confuse science with scientism (positivism) and religion with dogmatic religion. Science is an extraordinarily valuable, highly skeptical rigorous set of methodologies for testing our claims about the world, particularly empirical claims. *Scientism*, on the other hand, is a kind of poorly thought out *philosophy* or set of insufficiently examined assumptions ABOUT the sciences. One does not need to, and is far better off not invoking scientism. Scientism is the assumption and belief that science is the only or best way to approach understanding or provides the best model for this. This is clearly an unwarranted view. The most basic assumptions of science are not themselves scientifically verifiable, such as, the assumption that by mathematizing space and time you can produce something called knowledge. This is a valuable and an enabling assumption, but it cannot be tested within science. It is one of several basic logical “surds” or starting point that allow science to even function at all, as does the commitment to the *value* of objectivity, which is another basic and unexamined assumption. This assumes that only in treating something as an object and then distancing oneself in abstraction from it, can it be known and

understood. There is no question that there is value in this standpoint for us. It is an enabling value that holds that intersubjective testing is a better ground for belief than individual subjective experience. One’s personal desires and beliefs are bracketed out of the scientific method. Without this, science would not be possible and all its immense value to us would be lost.

So, **scientistic** thinking is not **scientific** thinking. Scientistic thinking is akin to dogmatism in religion. Much of religious dogmatism (unquestioned or insufficiently questioned belief) is based on a widespread confusion about the role of sacred texts and about the sacred itself. A text can be deeply revered as sacred without dogmatically asserting its status as foundational unquestioned truth. The confusion of the terms “sacred” and “true” creates a great deal of unnecessary conflict and suffering. To take a sacred text as foundational and literally true is disastrous in two ways: 1) It actually undermines its sacredness, since it opens the text to literal, logical examination where its mythopoeic power to reveal something basic about our deep felt sense of being here is undermined by showing the logical inconsistency of such texts with themselves, and 2) if taken literally, one is then forced to deny any other sacred text as truly sacred, since only your sacred text is taken to be true.

Problems in the social sciences: The modern social sciences, psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc. began to emerge in the late 1800’s. The mathematical exactitude of the older natural sciences of physics and astronomy and the new sciences of modern biology and chemistry were models of successful sciences. For more than a century now, the researchers in the social sciences have attempted in one manner or other to achieve such success through exactitude. Others in these fields have moved away from this model. One thing is clear: no social science has yet become a unified science. There are psychologies, anthropologies, sociologies, etc.. That is

because they have no unifying methodology like the natural sciences. The social sciences are beginning to take the advice of 18th and 19th century thinkers who originally saw that the object of such sciences are interpretive beings, namely human beings, and they cannot be objectified, measured, and studied in the way physical elements, chemical compounds, and cells are. Dilthy had seen that an interpretive methodology was appropriate, namely hermeneutics. It will be a very slow process of overcoming this initial inappropriate direction that the social sciences took in the 1800's, but it has begun and should come to some powerful fruition in perhaps decades, perhaps a century. This is

not to say that the data produced by the social sciences has not often been very insightful and useful. But it has not produced an understanding that goes to the heart of what it is to be interpretive beings that live in our meanings. There can be no overall unifying and simplifying theoretical view such as in the natural sciences. Once hermeneutics and the fundamental issue of interpretation is taken as the unavoidable starting and ending point of any understanding of human beings, as opposed to explanations of limited objectified measurable features of humans, the social sciences may blossom to their much fuller potential. All understanding is hermeneutical

VII. The Sacred, the True, and Idolatry

Introduction: For centuries from Plato to Augustine to Descartes, Kant and Hegel “the True” has been identified with “the Good” and “the Good” has been taken as something sacrosanct, something sacred. For Augustine our yearning for truth and the Good is really our yearning for God. But I will argue that the sacred and the true are mutually exclusive pursuits. The attempt to capture the sacred in doctrine destroys access to the sacred. Ironically, doctrine is a form of idolatry. It is worship of truth instead of reverence toward the sacred.

People may want to kill for their truths but the sacred cannot be defended this way. The sacred is immune to everything we are or that matters to us, but is only available to us via our deep vulnerability. The sacred becomes available to us to the extent that we let go of any attachment, especially to truth, and overcome the arrogance of finitude that we are inherently susceptible to. The sacred cannot be approached through our truths, only by setting them aside.

The Idolatry of Doctrine versus Genuine Ethics

Your true self is free from beauty and ugliness, free from God and evil. When you manifest yourself as emptiness, at that moment, you are free from everything. (Joshu Sasaki-Roshi)

I pray God to make me free of God.” “If I had a God I could understand, I would no longer consider him God. (Meister Eckhart)

In the west and in much of eastern thought, the problem of suffering and/or evil (since they are not synonyms), is seen as perhaps THE question at the heart of the mystery of vulnerability and meaningful experience. Why is there anything at all, but much more pressing, why do we suffer? We feel compelled to explain this and also to ascribe blame, if not to others, to ourselves. We must have done something to offend the gods.

The Greek adage: “From suffering, wisdom” seems to promise some semblance of redeeming significance to this enigma, if in fact wisdom would arise. But in the religious art of Greek tragedy we are typically left only to ponder the enormity of senseless suffering. It appears that we must face the absurdity of it all armed only with the courage of Sisyphus to give what meaning we can to our lives. Man does not live by bread alone. Mere survival, though a necessary condition for meaningful human life, is not sufficient. Weak scientific

explanations of the utility of pain or religious abstractions about salvation do nothing to help understand our basic deep emotional-psychological vulnerability. How do we address the profound horror we experience in the face of the worst suffering, especially suffering caused by others out of ignorance, cruelty, or indifference? No amount of naturalistic explanation or “in the grand scheme” type of answer seems to come close to addressing this profound mystery and horror. The Book of Job confronts this issue directly but never has an answer. In the end, Job’s commitment paid off and he was restored. But he only affirms what he knew to begin with: God is powerful and not to be questioned or understood, only obeyed. At the end of his encounter with God, when Job says: “Now that I have beheld thee, woe unto man,” he now knows this power is whimsical and cannot be trusted. Justice is a matter of power. In the New Testament, we are introduced to an all loving, all forgiving God, rather than an all powerful God to be feared

(though the New Testament is also a book of the worst retribution). But still, nothing in the New Testament accounts for the suffering in the world and primarily gives only “the solution,” not an explanation. Man’s Fall in the “Old Testament” is mythologically-psychologically powerful but, if taken as an explanation, it is notoriously inadequate. Dostoevsky’s “Brother Karamazov” famously confronts the problem, but also has no answer, only the possibility of being in the world lovingly as depicted in the character of Father Zossima. To overcome selfishness and to love is the highest and most fulfilling form of life for a human being. Such is a sacred life, a life of spiritual maturity and genuine ethics, a lived felt sense of reciprocity and compassion for others. I agree with this, but it has nothing inherently to do with theism and is antithetical to moralities of good and evil that are typically associated with theism. The sacred is that which makes possible a transformation of the heart into an attitude of Love which is the ultimate and most powerful response to deep vulnerability, insecurity and suffering. This too is no explanation of suffering. But I will try to show why seeking such explanations is itself deeply problematic, has nothing to do with the sacred, and impedes such transformation.

Suffering is a loss of equilibrium, loss of the sense of ease and flow of meaningful experience. This rupture of equilibrium gives rise to craving especially craving for a permanent condition of equilibrium in the face of temporality and impermanence. The basic temporal nature of finitude and vulnerability is the condition of possibility of suffering, horror, and anguish to begin with. Vulnerability is the condition of suffering and suffering is the condition for the possibility of the idea of evil. The shock of evil is the shock of coming face to face with temporality and vulnerability. It is a rupture of abstract expectation, a rupture of habit, and elicits a sense of helplessness in the face of the dispossession that the “I” experiences. Wisdom in both East and West has been seen, at least in part, as the development and exercise of our ability to cease our “self-focused” response to suffering,

(and its causes: craving, and aversion) and in some way (whether amor Dei intellectualis, aslama, bodhisattva compassion, amor fati, etc.), embrace the whole despite the finitude from which we always see/experience things and suffer over them. Again, this is no explanation.

Religion is a response to our felt sense of vulnerability and our suffering. But religious experience is a species of human experience and it is with human experience that we must begin, a phenomenology of human experience, then a phenomenology of religious experience in that larger context of human experience. What is central to human experience is making sense or meaning making. Above all else, in response to our vulnerability, we need things to make sense. We need to be oriented, be at home in the world, and have a sense of purpose and belonging, if not control. We are beings who can be brought into meaning, into sense making. The notions of meaning and vulnerability seem to be coequally fundamental. Without vulnerability there is no meaning and without meaning there is no awareness of vulnerability. Meaning is the condition of vulnerability and vice versa. Sense making is the source of the self, the “I” (see the autobiography of Helen Keller). Making sense and developing an identity is a co-creative relationship with others in and through language and language is at the root of all meaningful human experience and endeavor, including religious doctrine. Religious doctrine is a response to the fundamental and intense desire to make sense, to explain, especially to explain power and suffering and to cope with our vulnerability. Each cultural tradition develops ways of making sense of our basic finite temporal vulnerable condition and the mystery of being here. But there is always a very uncomfortable even violent tension between religious experience and religious doctrine. That tension finally comes down to either holding onto the self that so often includes the baggage of moralities of good and evil or finally jettisoning this in order to move toward the sacred which has nothing to do with truth, retribution, and being right.

Was the defining moment for Christianity the institution of the Nicene Creed or the life of Jesus? If it was the later, then why not just call it striving to be awake (in fact, the name of Buddhism) from which love and *genuine ethics* can more readily emerge? That possibility is open to all humanity, not merely Christians who (are required to) believe they have found “the way.” To the extent one takes the entirely abstract Nicene Creed as the defining moment, to that extent the possibility of emulating the wakefulness of Jesus is diminished. Idolatry is an ever present danger. Every major religion has to reinvent itself, reinvigorate itself with some sort of mysticism from time to time, cleanse itself of the idolatrous accretions that arise from the arrogance of finitude, from the craving of human finitude to secure itself in some truth, some object of belief, in some explanation and justification as if these are not born of our finite and fallible condition. This arrogance of finitude, this failure to sufficiently acknowledge our limits and ignorance is seen in all wisdom traditions as the root and source of suffering. And so the desire to preserve the founding experience of a religion in doctrine invariably tends toward idolatry, a movement away from the sacred. It makes an idol of truth. Doctrinal religion is an idolatrous betrayal of the sacred and metaphysics is an ironic betrayal of the wonder and creativity that gives rise to it. The morality of good and evil is associated with metaphysics. In contrast, *genuine ethics* is associated with an emancipatory movement toward the sacred. Jesus was an example of genuine ethics. He was the ultimate heretic. This is not just a coincidence. Genuine non judgmental love and compassion can only move away from doctrine and is always heretical. Love is the ultimate most powerful response to the vulnerability of finitude, not doctrine.

A colleague, who is a Christian, said to me that though he admires some things about Buddhism, it appears to him that it does not quite know what to do with evil. He is right that Buddhism does not deal with evil, which it takes as an abstraction and is entirely focused

instead on the concrete fact of suffering. Buddhism does not attempt to give any metaphysical account or justification for its “truths,” only a descriptive phenomenology of features of consciousness as integral to a practice that can allow us to respond differently to suffering so it is reduced and compassion is increased. Buddhism is a heretical reaction to the highly ritualized and metaphysical religion of the 6th century BCE in India as Jesus appears to be a similar heretical response to the entrenched legalism of Judaism of the 1st century BCE. In Buddhism, the sacred is the capacity in each one of us for wakefulness and transformation. Buddhism is focused not on what to believe, but on what thought and action impedes or promotes wakefulness and transformation.

Jesus and Buddha overcame the arrogance of finitude and this freed them to simply love and have deep compassion for what often seems like a hopeless condition of meaningless suffering, iniquity, and death. That such transformation is possible in the face of the mystery and enigma of consciousness and suffering has been manifestly realized in virtually every culture, not by an abstract God, but in exemplary concrete human lives. THAT is the evangel, the good news that access to such transformation does not lie in something outside ourselves, though this possibility is part of the gift of our cultural heritage and it is understood that it requires both the support of a community but finally a personal journey, the courage to give up the last vestiges of clinging. And I believe if we take the Gospel of Thomas as our point of departure instead of what Paul and the canonical gospels did to the life and teachings of Jesus that eventually led to the idolatry of the Nicene Creed, then Jesus is among the highest examples of why this good news is not just talk, not just more illusion in the service of the ego, but concrete evidence of this most wonderful possibility in the face of the “slaughter bench of history,” the arrogance of finitude, and the enigma at the heart of human vulnerability and meaningful awareness.

Such transformation is only possible AFTER jettisoning all religious and

metaphysical illusions without turning to the equally arrogant illusions of scientism or rationalism (making science and reason idols instead of seeing them as the limited though indispensable tools and means that they are). This, of course, is NOT anti religion any more than it is anti-science. It is a critique of what prevents the movement toward transformation and genuine ethics, namely the arrogance of finitude. And that requires precisely skepticism about received opinions and habits of thought and especially a critical stance toward dogma and ideology whether religious, political, or scientific because these drastically inhibit our spiritual possibilities.

The Buddha laid out a course of pragmatic skepticism necessary for the movement toward wakefulness and transformation.

Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it. (popular translation of a section of the Kalama Sutra, a sermon by the Buddha in the 6th century BCE)

Critical thought is a necessary condition, though certainly not a sufficient one, for self-overcoming and moving away from the cultural and personal attachments and beliefs that ensnare us. The true role of philosophy is NOT theories and system building, but UNDOING what we thought we knew to allow us a much more honest and fresh start in the pursuit of wisdom (Pickard, "The Eros of Wisdom" 2005). One will never overcome having beliefs and a historically situated perspective. What transformation means is radically changing our relationship to our vulnerability, to our cravings that are reflected in our beliefs so that we no

longer allow these to govern our lives and prevent the highest possibility for a human life, a life of love and genuine ethics.

Jesus and Buddha became agents of transformation for others and the core of the traditions that grew out of their founding experiences can always be brought back to life because this possibility resides at the core of every finite being to whom things matter. Mattering presupposes a self and its vulnerability and meaning, the pre-conditions of suffering. In addressing suffering, Jesus and Buddha did not just talk about the possibility of living here and now in such a liberated state in which they could experience their vulnerability to its depths, not as fear and insecurity, but as love. They were living examples of what extent this possibility of self-overcoming can be realized for finite suffering meaning-making beings. "Judge not," "turn the other cheek," "forgive others their trespasses," are not goals. They are not commandments to be followed in order to receive reward, but are "gifts" to ourselves and each other that we do not attempt to give. One does not struggle for or aim at these. They are by-products, the fruits of such liberated consciousness, such self-overcoming. No rules and commandments are necessary to this, certainly not rules of good and evil. Even the ethics of reciprocity is not wakefulness, and rather a by-product of it. Genuine ethics is not merely the sensible principle of reciprocity stated, for example, in the Golden Rule. All reasoned ethics is only critical thought that attempts to approach the doorstep of genuine ethics. Critical thought is necessary but not a sufficient condition for genuine ethics. This requires a transformation of the heart to cross over and beyond such principles and rules, beyond good and evil and beyond any attempt to justify and explain. One does not believe in this or that morality and "try" to live up to it.⁵¹ The need for rules and

⁵¹ For an account of genuine ethics that arises from trusting and supporting the individual as opposed to morality that is based on lack of trust, punishment, and the attempt to control individuals, see Dean Pickard : "Nietzsche, Emancipation, & Truth" in **New Nietzsche Studies**, (SUNY), Winter, 1997, pp. 85-109,

commandments is in fact a symptom of the absence of such liberated consciousness. Such rules and commandments only tend to wind up perpetuating habits that arise from the arrogance of finitude.⁵²

Moralities of good and evil are inherently destructive and antithetical to the sacred and to the liberated consciousness that can approach the sacred beyond the arrogance of finitude. There is no true liberation or freedom if one is caught in the problem of evil. And there is no relief in any mythological-metaphysical accounts of the origin of evil. These accounts do nothing to promote emancipation from the craving for salvation. Such abstract accounts of salvation only partly assuage insecurity but play into the desire that gives rise to such idolatrous thinking that overall increases human suffering. It is astonishing to listen to erudite followers of various religions talk about heaven and what it will be like. This is literal non-sense that does nothing but obscure and defer the real hermeneutical task of self-understanding and self-overcoming that can lead to genuine ethics and away from the punitive, vengeful morality of good and evil. Such thinking is completely focused on preservation of the self and the meaning and expectation one is stuck in. It is forfeiting the here and now of temporal impermanence, the place of our possible liberation, to the utter self-centered abstraction and illusion born of a craving for permanence. It has nothing to do with the sacred. Clinging to such metaphysical illusions substitutes them for the sacred. The very definition of idolatry is to substitute the self (and its truths/attachments) for the sacred. This is the arrogance of finitude, not the utter humility that arises in a genuine self-annihilating experience of the sacred that extinguishes all illusion of such truths.

The beautiful language of sacred texts that arises from liberated and reverent consciousness truly can be transformative, but

not if we do not know how to read these texts, do not bring a certain readiness to be transformed even if it is a surprise to us. As Augustine rightly believed, the Christian Bible was not a book of literal truths, in which case it is full of self-destructive contradictions, but was far more valuable and important than anything propositional logic and literal discourse can reveal. It is a book of spiritual transformation regardless how one interprets it. There is no “true” interpretation (though there could certainly be better or worse interpretations). It is the spiritual outcome that determines whether one has read it well and touched its “truth.” Recall the famous remark: “One cannot have an ass looking into the scriptures and see an angel staring back.” One must be ready to read a sacred text. One must have begun to understand the hermeneutical task of seeing through the illusions of our habits of meaning and our truths so we are not reading sacred texts to support these habits and truths instead of doing the hard and risky work that self-overcoming entails. If one reads the Bible in order to be saved, one is already practicing idolatry in the service of preserving the self and assuaging its insecurities. But the path to the sacred is to do the opposite, to go the way to one’s insecurities, one’s vulnerability. A sacred text will not do the work for you. It ONLY becomes a vehicle for the sacred when you have moved seriously toward emptying out the arrogance of finitude. Otherwise, any reading of such texts will only be idolatrous attempts to support one’s habits of commitment to the self and its insecurities, cravings and aversions. Rabiya, the famous Muslim Sufi, exposes one of the worst wrong-headed approaches to the sacred:

O my Lord, if I worship Thee from fear of hell, burn me in hell, if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me thence, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me Thine Eternal Beauty.

Buddhism could easily embrace this expression despite its non-theism because it is about utter emancipation from the craving and aversion of the self that opens onto donative

⁵² For an account of genuine ethics that arises from trusting and supporting the individual as opposed to morality that is based on lack of trust, punishment, and the attempt to control individuals, see Dean Pickard : “Nietzsche, Emancipation, & Truth” in **New Nietzsche Studies**, (SUNY), Winter, 1997, pp. 85-109,

love, compassion, and genuine ethics. But overcoming all worldly attachments in a transformation to a God centered meaning is only trading one large attachment for many small ones. The Buddhist exhortation: "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him" is completely enigmatic to Christians attached to God. Meister Eckhart's "I pray God to make me free of God" seems to move in the direction of this Buddhist insight. However, any attachment (including God, Jesus, or the Buddha) impedes freedom, diverts it, impedes the sacred process of self-overcoming. Freedom is essential to moving toward the sacred mystery of vulnerability and the possible transformation of this vulnerability into love instead of attachment, insecurity, craving, and aversion that are the root of iniquity. It has been demonstrated many times over that attachment to, devotion to, or worship of God is not essential to wakefulness. Enlightenment, whether one approaches it through theism or non theism, includes the emancipation from the desire for salvation. Devotion to God may provide a transition to a much less self-centered way of living. But God-centered religions always run the risk of attachment to worship, dogmatic truth, and following commandments that can just as easily lead to tyranny. What is at issue is not attachment to abstract belief about what is propositionally true about God or anything else, but transformation of the heart, a way of being. Even Augustine, who understood this, nonetheless, in his yearning for Truth/God/Salvation, was caught in a form of craving. His suffering over his iniquity was itself a compulsion and an aversion that still sometimes dominated his life, even if he did great good (along with the evil he certainly visited on others such as the Donatists). In Buddhism, such yearning and craving is something to be observed as an artifact of human vulnerability. No matter how unnamable one pretends God to be, our needs and prejudices are inescapably bound up with such projections no matter how nebulous. Must one have an object for one's self-transcending love? Can that object of reverence simply be the mystery and enigma that we are, that we suffer,

that our vulnerability is the condition of possibility for emancipation and self-transcendence? Of all the gospels floating around in the first century after the death of Jesus, the Gospel of Thomas seems to be least dogmatic, (says nothing of the immaculate conception, the crucifixion, resurrection, or the trinity), but is focused on an emancipated way of living here and now, not salvation in a hereafter based on a particular set of beliefs.

Jesus and Buddha were not talking about salvation and preservation of the self and were not aiming to assuage its insecurities by giving illusions of permanence to cling to. There is a dignity and maturity in embracing one's impermanence that also allows one to truly be here now with some semblance of the age old quest for sophisticated innocence. Jesus and Buddha were living examples of overcoming the desire for salvation and overcoming the self-centered craving and aversion that lead us into iniquity and away from the sacred, away from the genuine Bildungs-process of self-overcoming and emancipation that can lead to genuine ethics, the ethics of a transformed heart and donative love.

Evil is an artifact of suffering. If we could not suffer, there would be no perspective from which to experience and label something evil. Without vulnerability there would be no suffering at all. So why is there consciousness at all such that suffering can arise? Buddhism finds this question misplaced, sees it as a diversion that creates more suffering. Buddhism simply begins with the phenomenon of vulnerability and especially the epiphenomenon of craving (most basically for permanence in a condition of impermanence). Buddhism eschews any attempt to explain the mystery of suffering in terms of evil or any account of a fall through original sin. Even the use of the widespread notion of karma to explain suffering is only used in Buddhism to refer to the cause and effect of conscious states and is not a metaphysical explanation as it is in Hinduism. The point is not to find an explanation for evil, nor is it to ignore evil, but to see evil as a product of vulnerability and

ignorance of the nature of consciousness, especially its inherent emancipatory possibility. The craving for explanations only magnifies suffering since no metaphysical explanation can reach into the heart of the enigma of being here, of meaning, of vulnerability, and suffering. Any abstract account moves toward the arrogance of finitude and an idolatrous separation from the concrete sacred core of vulnerability. Buddhism is a practical rather than a metaphysical or epistemological response to the immediate phenomenological condition of suffering which is seen as rooted in craving, habit and expectation. As the story goes in Buddhist lore: A monk repeatedly posed the question of the origin of evil and suffering to the Buddha to which the Buddha finally said (I paraphrase): "If you were shot with a poison arrow, would you not immediately remove it if you could or would you wait until you could identify who or what was responsible for it and provide an explanation for it?" We have no way to penetrate the mystery of suffering (who or what is responsible), but we do have the means for overcoming it (the 8-fold path). Emancipation from the illusion of self is the path to overcoming suffering, blame, desire for revenge. Buddhism has virtually no concern with blame or retribution, nor did Jesus. In stark contrast, these are deep characteristics of the Abrahamic religions and Persian Zoroastrianism that had an immense influence on them. This stain and dis-ease of "ressentiment," as Nietzsche calls it, is ironically anathema to the life of Jesus. It is obvious that these religions do not reduce to Nietzsche's hyperbolic "ressentiment" but they certainly foster it and would be unrecognizable without it, without the power of God to punish or save.

The notion of evil is intimately related to desire for revenge. It is the primary "human, all too human" response to horror when it is abstracted into the morality of good versus evil (whether us versus them or me versus myself). The powerful human penchant for self-deception is a response to the untenable cognitive dissonance that arises from the internalization of the morality of good and evil. This internalization is related to the deepest

human spiritual malaise or dis-ease: desire for revenge. Desire for revenge both motivates and is justified by moralities of good and evil. The lives of the Buddha and Jesus are high examples of having overcome this disease. Morality and genuine ethics are mutually exclusive. The first is a symptom of an arrested emancipation process; the second is the higher fulfillment of it. What would such an emancipated consciousness be like? What are its characteristics? This is unimaginable from within moralities of good and evil. Even for those who see its possibility, like Alcibiades at the end of the Symposium, we are left unable to clearly articulate it, but only recognize it and point to it in its living embodiment, the seeming miracle of Socrates. Can we construct a curriculum, as Plato attempts to do in the *Republic*, that might prepare for and lead to this kind of virtuous life?

If the highest good is freedom to pursue my possibilities, evil is a word that denotes the destruction, the ruination of my possibilities and my integrity at the hands of another or through my own iniquity. There is always the struggle between self-overcoming and emancipation, on the one hand, and clinging to the self and its cravings and aversions, on the other. Emancipation, self-overcoming, and transformation are an inherent tendency in human experience. Evil, whether perpetrated by others or by my own iniquity is essentially a loss of this movement toward emancipation and pursuit of my highest possibilities. The basic feature of consciousness, craving and aversion, are habits that can dominate us, rob us of the highest possibilities that are only open through the cultivation and exercise of our freedom. The Christian use of the Greek word "sin," "to miss the mark" is exactly the right word for this loss of freedom due to iniquity that arises from the failure to genuinely engage in the herculean task of self-overcoming. The mark of mature human consciousness is equanimity and compassion that arise from the absence of craving and aversion and all the judging, failed expectation, hatred and retaliation that comes from this. Even if such craving and aversion are present, they can be merely observed as

features of consciousness, rather than allowed to motivate one's thoughts and actions. At the center of such mature self-overcoming is a transformed consciousness that resides in the liberated space of love and compassion. It is impossible to "take advantage" of, disappoint, or harm someone who has evolved to this level of maturity. There is no handle on such people as Socrates, Jesus, or Buddha by which to control them, thus they present real threats to those who crave power and control over others instead of themselves. But to appropriate the apt word "sin" and associate it essentially with evil is a fundamental mistake. As long as one is concerned with evil, one has not really come to terms with suffering and the arrogance of finitude. Finitude cannot be overcome as we envision in our metaphysical myths of salvation. Liberation is not salvation; it is a life enhancing transformed relationship to finitude. The term "sin," if we take it literally can be a sign for us of the hermeneutical task and challenge incumbent on humans collectively and individually to embrace their finitude and to see self-overcoming rather than self-attachment as our on-going task. It requires us to come to realize we live in our meanings that are always already underway and that require us to overcome those habits of meaning in order to waken to new possibilities of being in the world. These habits and loci of meaning and identity that we call personality and character arise in the conflict of selves struggling to meet need and desire. They are coping strategies that emerge as we are brought into meaningful awareness through bodily contact, feeling, and language. These habitual strategies are to be modified, outgrown, transformed, not reified and preserved in some completely abstract atemporal hereafter. Reifying the self in a metaphysics of presence only magnifies the suffering and carnage of the world. Buddhist Logic is critical philosophical thinking that aims to undo every abstract illusory belief we hold with regard to the self and the world. But this is only as a preparation for something far more important. One finds similar critical thought in, for example, Hume and Nietzsche and much of contemporary postmodern critiques of

modernity. But in Buddhism it is specifically designed to free us from our habits of belief and the arrogance of finitude often by eliciting a kind of intellectual or cognitive crisis that can open a path to the practice of mindfulness, a phenomenology that keeps its focus on what is phenomenologically real or present rather than abstractions that are motivated by our insecurities. The path to enlightenment is away from such abstractions to the immediacy of the here and now. It is in ideas of the past where we harbor resentment, desire for revenge, and chronophobia (fear of time and change) and it is in ideas of the future that we have hope for satisfying our desires and attachments as well as salvation of the abstraction we call the self. We are fixated on these instead of the possibility of freedom in the moment, a freedom that allows us to love unconditionally. Past and future are no longer prisons but represent the trajectory of our possibilities for emancipation and fulfillment rather than merely pursuing satisfaction of desire rooted in attachment, craving, and aversion. The here and now is of course always in the context of the co-created meaning of tradition, memory, and projection. However, there is a radical difference in how one interprets one's past and projects one's future. That is why the past is never fixed, is always open to more enlightened reinterpretation, and the future and past can appear quite different from a radically changed present.

That there is temporal awareness at all, identity through time at all, the capacity of finitude to think things other than they are, to project a "should" onto the flow of existence, to think the pure abstractions of infinity, perfection, and the absolute are all symptoms of vulnerability and the capacity for meaning. The recognition of our basic hermeneutical condition and task of self-understanding entails giving up the illusion of possessing truth and elicits a sense of humility that, if deep enough, is beyond good and evil, not as an anti morality but as an emancipation from morality that can open to genuine ethics. Morality is a response to the wound of existence that tries to posit and impose a solution, justice, salvation on the

enigma of suffering and its condition, namely, temporality and vulnerability. The wisdom of insecurity and embrace of impermanence engenders the capacity to overcome such chronophobia which is what motivates possessiveness and the myth of the given in the face of continual impermanence and loss.

We are vulnerable beings to whom things matter, finite beings who, in experiences of wonder, horror, anguish and awe, can be brought into an immediate awareness of our nothingness and the nothingness of any truths that arise in our craving to overcome finitude and vulnerability. It is in such awareness that we can experience the cravings and aversions of others as symptoms of this deep vulnerability that all humans share in common. Our cravings and aversions and the truths we use to support them are what divide us and are what lead us to iniquity (a kind of performative self-referential contradiction to our basic nature of self-transcendence). Our deep vulnerability is our shared condition from which wakefulness and compassion is our shared possibility. Wakefulness means an intimate awareness of emotional attachments and habits of belief that govern our thought and behavior. Wakefulness includes awareness that most of what we believe is not supported by either experience or reason and that much of what we call iniquity arises from ignorance about this. Wakefulness allows clearing away illusions and insecurities such that compassion can much more readily arise. Wakefulness includes the awareness that conflict is unavoidable and that it is the motivation and path of self-overcoming that moves us toward wakefulness. Answers and truths arrest this process. The self is a construction and conflict is an artifact of the habits of craving and aversion that give rise to suffering. Emotional and physical pain is a manifestation of the same vulnerability that allows us to experience joy and pleasure and to exercise our freedom to move toward self-transcendence that is inherent to human experience. In a liberated consciousness such as Jesus and Buddha, there is nothing to impede unconditional love. The question: "Would Jesus have loved Hitler?" is a rhetorical

question. The question of blame and evil does not arise.

The problem of suffering and evil is the problem of being a self, a being to whom things matter, a co-created identity that becomes the locus of meaning who can suffer from this mattering and meaning. In the west the self has typically been something to preserve and protect. In Buddhism illusions about the self are at the base of virtually all human problems. The Buddhist deconstruction of the self is ancient and was never seen as a loss or a danger but as the very means to salvation from suffering. In Buddhism, it is the radical misunderstanding of the self that is at the center of suffering to begin with. Seeing through the constructed habits we call a self is the means to wakefulness. This is not accessible as long as craving for salvation of the self dominates one's orientation. Such wakefulness opens the possibility of living beyond good and evil, beyond blame and guilt, a life of genuine love as Jesus and Buddha seem to be living examples of. Such a life is decisive, not a belief, truth, or doctrine. Truth is still centrally important to us, but as a practical matter as well as a matter of increasing insight in the conflict of interpretations that arises in human finitude. Whenever I come to see things from the perspective of another, it contributes to my Bildungs-process of self-transcendence. This is not acquiescing to the temporary interpretation of another, which like all interpretation is *unterwegs*. It is simply always being aware of one's own fallibility and that one can learn from the perspectives of others even if not what they want us to agree to.

The question of personal identity and what and how real one takes the "self" to be is a critical point of departure in even opening the possibility of "self" overcoming. Cultural habit may make it difficult to even engage in the process in western civilization that has reified the self in so many ways. Yet Hume and Nietzsche, for example, seemed to successfully deconstruct the self to reveal it as a mere artifact of language and collective need or convenience and both of them were deeply concerned with suffering. But the *practical*

pursuit of enlightenment, which is so often inherent in eastern approaches to enlightenment, is more often than not relegated to religion in the west where the goal is not so much practical enlightenment, but salvation through truth. However, the understanding of the self as a kind of illusion is rare in the west whereas it is dominant in the East. But even so, there is a diversity of approaches to understanding the self. In Hinduism, for example, the unreality of the self is built into its central metaphysical traditions, but in its stead is the completely abstract metaphysical notion of atman or soul. For Hindus, the personality/body that distinguishes one person from another in practical life is an artifact of incarnation that ceases with death. The atman or soul, however, has no distinguishing features other than the karma it has accumulated in its chain of incarnations. It only continues in the illusion of separateness via its karma until it is freed of the cycle of cause and effect to be reunited with Brahman/Atman from which it was never actually separated (they have the problem of explaining the emergence of the first karma in this attempted metaphysical explanation of reality). In contrast, in more than two millennia of Buddhist logic there has been the highly skillful and rigorous undermining of the coherence of any accounts of the self and personal identity. In that tradition, since there is no phenomenon that corresponds to the self or soul (similar to Hume), they simply do not engage in "soul" talk or any other metaphysical talk. What we call the self and personal identity does not show up phenomenally, only the *Skandhas* (Sanskrit "bundle" or "aggregate"), a succession of conscious states that are held together through conditioned habit or karma. But karma is no longer a metaphysical notion but rather a psychological notion used to account for how the idea of self arises in language and consciousness. The word "self" is a convenient designator for this bundle of skandhas, but does not name anything real in itself. The skandhas are phenomenally real but not because they belong to a "self" that is experiencing them. Rather, it is the habit of language, the use of pronouns and the reality of

attraction and aversion that give rise to the habit of the skandhas being ascribed to a self. But the self shows up nowhere in experience. The ability to identify the temporal processes of consciousness that give rise to suffering is greatly enhanced by Buddhist logic. Such critical thinking exposes the vacuousness of many of our cultural and cognitive habits about the self and reveals them to be purely abstract. They do not map on to concrete experience at any point, but such assumptions and beliefs about the self greatly magnify suffering. These critical skills go hand in hand with the meditative exercises by which we have first hand concrete awareness of what actually takes place in consciousness as opposed to what we are habituated to believe. If one does not see the self as a set of deconstructible habits, or as an illusion, a non-phenomenon, then the serious spiritual engagement of self-overcoming and meeting the challenge of the arrogance of finitude with all its intellectual and religious idolatries, is nearly insurmountable.

We face a serious problem however: How do we protect individuals if we give up the notion of the self upon which western notions of sovereignty and justice are based and which seem to be necessary elements of morality. The proper relation between the collective and the individual is one of the oldest most fundamental questions. In this regard, it can be useful to distinguish morality as that which is imposed from without and genuine ethics as something that emerges from within the process of one's emancipation from precisely such externally imposed, even if well intentioned, constraints and obligations. Genuine ethics is a much higher level of responsibility. Genuine ethics, the ethics of love, depends on self-overcoming. It is genuine because it is truly "mine," not something from the "they" or the God of the "they" and it arises naturally as we come to not only understand but live our emancipatory potential. Such ethics of recognition of the other as myself, the ethics of reciprocity out of understanding and love, is inherent in the very nature of human experience and reveals itself in every culture as some form of the "Golden Rule."

If your entire ethics is built on the lived-felt imperative to reduce suffering and do no harm as in Buddhism, which does not come from an external "objective" morality based on divine command or Reason or both, but arises from a **practice** which can engender a transformation in consciousness, an awake consciousness, then all the metaphysical grounding of morality becomes not only useless, since it does not get us all the way to genuine lived ethics, but can be seen for what it is, a terrible impediment that plays right into the arrogance of finitude and the idolatry so often associated with it. Genuine ethics will not arise until morality and the attempt to ground it in metaphysics or calculation is eliminated or at least such legalism and literalism is set aside. I realize that pragmatically until many more humans are awake, we may need Plato's and Spinoza's noble lie (moral rules). Order is not a small issue. The movement toward the unnamable sacred is the movement away from the dishonesty and pretense of the metaphysics of presence and myth of the given, away from selfishness, pride, and idolatry, away from cybernetic thinking that is only about control in the service of efficiency, safety, security, and comfort. At its best, Christianity is perhaps the most dangerous of religions if we focus on Jesus instead of the Nicene Creed. He lived the most dangerous of lives, a life of embracing his deep vulnerability and it is so very ironic that what he discovered from this has been made nearly inaccessible by doctrines intended to preserve this precious possibility.

For Kierkegaard the self is an attempt at a synthesis of the infinite and finite, the eternal and the temporal, possibility and necessity. For the Buddhist, the ideas of the eternal, infinite, and possible are just that: ideas. They are manifestations of something prior which Kierkegaard is acutely aware of which is the struggle to achieve a functional unity (be a self) in a condition of conflict. Kierkegaard was keenly aware of what it is to be a human being struggling for peace and also keenly aware of the unifying power of commitment to transform one's identity, one's world. For him, the only hope for overcoming the inevitable despair of

conflicted individuality is a leap of utter and unconditional commitment with all one's heart in order to unify an otherwise diffracted self. This is not merely a change **in** my world but a radical change **to** my world. This is already a recognition of the centrality of meaning, of what it is to be a self, a conflict of meanings and desires. Buddhism sees the condition of being trapped in one's meaning, in one's self, as the source of suffering. But rather than a transformative total leap, one undertakes a careful phenomenological deconstruction of one's meaning both critically and phenomenologically that can at some point lead to a gradual or sudden transformative breakthrough (kensho in Japanese Zen Buddhism). For Kierkegaard one must have an infinite passion for something finite, God in time (Jesus Christ). Both are right that the truly sacred or religious experience is impossible **in** my world. It requires an utter and total loss or transformation **of** my world (self-centered habits of consciousness and meaning). But for Kierkegaard the self is now reborn as a unity that no longer struggles with a divided nature and all the associated fears in time of not getting enough, not being satisfied or fulfilled.

For the Buddhist, self is not unified. Through the practice of meditation, a powerful form of phenomenology, the self is seen as not describing anything real in itself but rather is a convenient designator for what is simply a bundle of or elements of temporality and consciousness (skandhas). Thus the wall between self and other and the struggle of the divided self are eliminated in favor of what is undeniably real, rather than the self we cling to. That undeniable reality is suffering that arises from vulnerability and meaning. The immediate causes of suffering can be phenomenologically witnessed and examined through the practice of mindfulness. The habit of belief in something called the self is gradually replaced by a much more direct and subtle awareness of what is actually happening in the temporal process of consciousness instead of what we make it mean, such as calling some features of awareness "evil" and others "good." Instead of attempting to provide abstract mythological or

metaphysical explanations of these, Buddhism concentrates on what is actually present to us and what is in our power to do about it. The dividedness brought about by selfish craving and aversion and the illusory beliefs built on these habits can be replaced by compassion which remains as the purest response to the reality of vulnerability. Vulnerability can be suffered or it can be transformed into compassion for those who suffer, those who crave control, those without a sense of the sacred. No blame, no retribution. Just an awareness of immediate cause and effect of phenomena and genuine compassion. Buddhist logic is critical thinking applied to our habits of belief that shows them to be unsustainable and then the practice of meditation allows for establishing direct awareness of what does take place in consciousness aside from our beliefs. This provides a way to rehabilitate ourselves so we are not caught in the illusory beliefs that lead to our suffering and the suffering we bring to others out of our own craving and aversion. Both Christianity and Buddhism are religions of love, but Buddhism by its very non doctrinal nature undermines the human tendency to make things mean something and then to ascribe blame and seek retribution. Jesus would have loved Hitler as would the Buddha without at all condoning what he did. This is hard for a Christian to even come close to accepting. It is not at all hard for Buddhists, at least those who really practice *bodhi* or wakefulness.

Most Buddhism is cultural in nature and often does not focus on or comprehend the core insights of the religion. But the typical Buddhist at least does not act or believe in ways that are incompatible with those insights. They are just somewhat buried in the thoughtless fog of religious habit. Christianity, in contrast, with its emphasis on truth and doctrine ironically in many of its variations is not even compatible with the core insights of its founder and I would even risk saying very few practitioners are aware of these deeply ironic incompatibilities of their beliefs and practices with the spirit of the religion and even with its

doctrines (which I have already expressed as inessential to a pursuit of the sacred). I am not a practicing Buddhist or Christian but admire in both religions the core insights of their founders of moving away from arrogance and idolatry toward a genuine experience of the sacred that can lead to living a life of genuine ethics. But one can be neither a Buddhist nor a Christian and live such a life. Any path that leads to this counts as a genuinely sacred way of life. In particular, one can take from the tradition of Buddhism an ancient practice called vipassana or insight meditation and extract it from its religious and cultural setting and thus have a secular spiritual practice in which the movement toward wakefulness and genuine ethics can be powerfully pursued without the baggage that religion always is. Founders of religions are one thing, religions are another. Founders have had a transformative awakening. This possibility is almost always antithetical to the doctrines that emerge even in Buddhism. Chan or Zen was a reaction to the buildup of such doctrine in Buddhism. Islamic Sufism and Jewish or Christian mysticisms are forms of revitalizing the core of these religions and are inherently a-doctrinal.

I consider myself a “sinner” in the sense of “missing the mark” of the insights I hold in high esteem. To the extent Judeo Christianity is taken in its powerful mythological sense of our deep vulnerability and how easy it is to “fall” into sin and to lose our way in fallibility, the religion is deeply moving. But to the extent it insists on the exclusivity of doctrine, the religion itself falls into “sin” and misses the mark of deep humility. To sin is to miss the mark of a hermeneutical awareness about this fallibility and the arrogance that impede a more full and powerful donative love to which Christianity aspires. Eros may pull us to become, to aspire to assert ourselves, even to pursue wisdom. But to the extent we are transformed by a genuine experience of wakefulness, we become gifts to others and to ourselves. I prefer to think of donative love in terms of insight, wakefulness, and compassion rather than truth and goodness. I would preserve the notion of truth only for its practical value, but am

also persuaded to embrace the idea of truth as a “toward which” of human freedom in the pursuit of our possibilities. The very core of freedom is opening to our possibilities as a response to the rupture of temporality, the rupture to our meanings such that we impose new meaning, new possibilities. Our meaning always imposes fixity upon the flux of our feeling and in this dynamic tension between meaning and feeling we find an identity. It is in the conflict of interpretations and in the rupture to our worlds that we call wonder (and horror) that we are broken open and are sufficiently motivated toward self-transcendence. This requires that we develop the skills necessary to overcome habits of meaning in order to really pursue our possibilities. Self-transcendence is our fundamental nature: the freedom to redefine ourselves and our world, the capacity to “rehabilitate” ourselves, to re-world and to inhabit a new world. Pursuit of happiness is the pursuit of fulfillment, not the satisfaction of our wants. Fulfillment is always unknown because it lies beyond the enabling horizons that open on to this possibility. At the center of the pursuit of fulfillment is an awakening to our condition so that we are no longer caught in the arrogance of finitude. But how does one pursue this awakening or enlightenment? From the early days of Buddhism, the irony that if one makes enlightenment a goal, that goal will never be reached, has helped guide the movement to selflessness. Fulfillment cannot reduce to a goal of the self that is to be overcome. Rather, the practice of mindfulness and equanimity from which insight can emerge, moves us toward fulfillment without it being a goal. Rather, mindfulness is practiced and

insight arises about the nature of suffering. When the self-overcoming process moves toward fulfillment it has something to do with our sacred core of vulnerability when it is transformed from selfish craving and aversion to donative love, love that is beyond good and evil, beyond judgment.

The sacred is anything that transforms us, brings about a rebirth of the heart beyond good and evil that leads to a way of living a life of donative love. The sacred is not this or that canon and cannot be reached by these means. The sacred is not beyond the temporal but is in the heart of temporality and vulnerability itself as the “other” of our selfishness driven by craving and aversion. It is the highest possibility open to human freedom and the self is the *means* to this, not an end in itself. Thus, a metaphysical “soul” and any doctrine of salvation and permanence would be the highest example of the anathema of the life of Jesus and ironically the term “antichrist” (the greatest adversary of the life of Jesus) would be the appropriate label for any such thinking and craving for salvation. Doctrinal religion is the antichrist. This does not refer to religious communities organized to promote and support wakefulness. This can be done without doctrine and in fact must be done without doctrine. Once chronophobic doctrine is introduced to “preserve” a “founding experience,” the move to arrest impermanence and temporality has begun its insidious ascent. This is a movement of fear and insecurity rather than trust and love. And that is precisely the difference between morality and genuine ethics.

VIII. Concepts and Intelligibility From Plato to Wittgenstein

Early philosophers, such as Plato (5th-4th century BCE) and Aristotle (4th century BCE) identified reality with intelligibility. Intelligibility means that something can be recognized and known **AS** something. A tree can be recognized as a thing but especially a kind of thing, a tree. In other words, it has identity and unity, it can be grasped as distinct from other things, it had its own particularity, a particular tree, and it can be understood as a member of the class, tree. For Plato, if something was identifiable and recognizable, it had reality in some way. The question was, what was this reality that made things intelligible? For Plato, this source of intelligibility was a permanent and unchanging purely intelligible realm that could only be approached via our ability to reason. For Plato and most Greek thinkers reality was thought to be unchanging. The things we experience with the senses undergo change and cannot be the source of their own intelligibility and reality. In Plato's view, they merely reflect the orderliness or Form of this other more real realm, so there must be two realms, one of unchanging reality and one of the senses which only reflects this in a changing and therefore imperfect way. Later, Plato's dualism became the foundation for the Christian doctrine of the duality of heaven and earth, body and soul, Creator and created.

Aristotle also thought that reality is unchanging, but rejected the idea that there are two realms, a perfect and real one and a derivative and less real one of the senses. For Aristotle, there was one reality which was rational and orderly and knowable by human reason. Each thing that exists is real but has its intelligibility because it is a kind or category of thing. A particular tree would not be intelligible without being rationally identifiable as a kind of thing, a member of the class tree. Everything is a kind of thing and all things either occur naturally, such as trees, or are artifacts or products, such as tables. All the natural kinds of things there are, living or non living, have

fundamental or essential characteristics and play a role in the totality of nature. The ultimate source that moves all things toward their purpose and potential, such as an acorn becoming an oak, or a piece of wood being made into a bed by a human being who has a purpose for making the bed, is what Aristotle called the unmoved mover. This was absolute perfection that gave all things the impetus to undergo change in their achievement of their own perfection or goal. If an acorn gets the necessary light, moisture and nutrients and becomes an oak, it has achieved its *intellechy* or indwelling purpose. Aristotle's philosophy became the basis of Christian doctrine through the appropriation of his works by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century and continues as the doctrinal basis of the Catholic Church.

In the 18th-century, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant developed a new view of knowledge and truth in which the way we understand the very concepts of reality, truth, thought, and language was revolutionized. The great Scottish philosopher David Hume (17th-18th centuries), brought philosophy to an impasse by a devastating demonstration that these fundamental concepts were hopelessly confused. In his revolutionary philosophy, Kant showed that the traditional view of truth that even Hume still used, often called the correspondence view of truth, was not viable. The traditional assumption was that our statements about the world are true if they correspond to an independent reality (a material world, Plato's Forms, Aristotle's particular things, the Christian God etc., as the source of reality and order.) With Hume this was a correspondence of statements with immediate subjective states of consciousness, called immediate [sense] impressions, which he called matters of fact.. Kant showed that no such knowledge is possible, that the meaning of the term knowledge could only refer to something about the way our consciousness of things and our thinking gives order and unity. The source of the intelligibility of everything was inextricably a product of the ordering process of

consciousness, what he called the *forms of sensibility* and the *categories of understanding* that shape raw sensibility into conscious awareness of things. The concept of reality, for example, which previous philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Descartes had taken to refer to something independent of us that our thinking can grasp, was for Kant one of the ways in which consciousness organizes and brings intelligibility to experience, likewise with the concepts of causality, substance, possibility, plurality, negation, existence, limitation, necessity and contingency. This is not a form of relativism, that all truth is relative to how we experience. It is a form of absolutism that tells us why truth is the same for all of us, because we have the same structuring of phenomena, something Hume's phenomenology could not make sense of, other than calling it a habit universal to all human consciousness. For Kant, space and time, cause and effect, etc, are the ways that phenomena are set up. People can make mistakes in their reasoning about these phenomena and may not be fully informed about them. But they will always have certain fixed conditions and limitations that make anything knowable at all. These are the conditions of truth that are identical for everyone, the conditions of the possibility of consciousness at all. Hence, we can rationally know when we have arrived at truth or not, but truth and knowledge now are understood entirely differently than they had been under the correspondence view of truth.

What is important here is that Plato's Forms, Aristotle's natural kinds and categories, and Kant's categories were concepts that were taken to be the basis for the intelligibility of the world. These concepts can be grasped and reflected in human thought and language. Humans were thought to be distinct from other species of life because of this ability to contemplate and act on the rational structure of the world, hence, Plato's emphasis on rational choice as basic to the meaning of morality and Aristotle's definition of humans as the rational animal. The concept was the basic unit of meaningfulness.

At the end of the 19th century a German mathematician and philosopher, Gottlob Frege, in his investigation of the foundation of mathematics, realized that words and the concepts they represent cannot have meaning outside the context of their role in the grammatical unit we call a sentence. Sentences that can be true or false express an assertion or proposition. For Frege the proposition was the basic unit of meaning.

In the 1930's the philosopher Wittgenstein showed that language is not made up of units of meaning called concepts represented by words or propositions represented by sentences, but is inextricably bound up with a way of life. Language is something we do. And the basic unit of meaning is our whole way of life and language. Concepts and propositions have no meaning apart from this though we often mislead ourselves into thinking so. According to Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word is its use, how it operates in a language.

About 50 years before Wittgenstein, Friedrich Nietzsche had already powerfully exposed many of our assumptions about language and meaning as erroneous and argued that every perspective is the result of an interpretative process. He did not deny that there is an actual world, only that we can never avoid interpreting it, and in doing so we usually reveal more about our needs and motives than anything "true" in itself. According to Nietzsche, a genuine pursuit of truth and the courage this takes is rare.

Today it is acknowledged by all philosophers that language is basic to everything we say about anything. As the American logician and philosopher of language W.V.O Quine said, "We can never talk about anything except what we say there is." Quine was a proponent of the so-called "coherence Theory of Truth." According to this view, truth is the product of the interrelation of the statements that make sense in a conceptual scheme or system. According to Quine, there are always beliefs that are so important to us that we can manage to hold on to them by interpreting the data we have in such a way that they are

consistent with our “core concepts” and most cherished beliefs.

The science of linguistics which developed in the 1930's is one of the last modern sciences to emerge. It attempts to investigate the empirical features of language, those features that can be observed, measured and tested. The question of how language emerged, the relation between sounds, signs and meaning, the structural characteristics, the semantical features, and many other issues of language can be investigated in linguistics.

The point of all this is that words and the concepts they represent and the structural roles they play do not have meaning as we once thought. It is an entire way of life, as

Wittgenstein would say, or an enframing that arises in and from the lived world, as Heidegger tells us, that is the place, condition, and basic unit of meaning. The very idea of reality only makes sense in this context and cannot be made sense of or investigated apart from this. Reality is not anything metaphysically basic as we once thought. It is a function of language and the prelinguistic conditions in which or from which language arises. Science, for example, does not investigate anything we can call reality in itself, but is an investigation of a domain of meaning and discourse which is made possible by a particular way of approaching what shows up in consciousness, which is always mediated by language.

IX. Decidability and Reflexivity

The famous logical problem of decidability demonstrates the basic reflexive nature of language and meaning. This is the problem of being able to say of any (not a) particular thing that it belongs in a class or not by means of an algorithmic procedure. An algorithmic procedure is an entirely mechanical and finite procedure carried out according to a precise set of rules. The "diagonal problem" of the set of infinite sets (denumerably infinite sequences of zeros and ones) demonstrates the problem of decidability. Such a set would itself be infinite but could never include itself in the set, i.e., would always generate an additional infinite sequence that is not indexed by the algorithmic procedure. All the vertical and horizontal sequences can be accounted for, but the diagonal sequence of these sequences is left over and does not correspond to a natural number. So the set of denumerably infinite sequences of zeros and ones cannot be put into a one-to-one correspondence with the natural numbers and is hence not denumerable. In truth-functional logic, for example, truth trees always tell us if an inference is valid by seeing if negating its conclusion and carrying out the tree rules completely, leads to a contradiction. The set of valid sentences in first order logic (that is, all the valid sentences) is recursively enumerable but the set itself is not recursive, i.e., take any sentence, there is no function which can tell us if it is valid or not. Hence, undecidability. If there were such a function it would itself have to be recursive (abacus computable), given Alonzo Church's thesis which shows that all algorithms are abacus computable. So, if something isn't abacus computable then it isn't an algorithm. Likewise, the famous "Halting Problem" in logic is a way of demonstrating by means of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument that there is no program that can algorithmically determine if something is an algorithm, i.e., if we assume there is such

a program then it turns out by self-contradiction that there can be no such program. So, deciding if something is an algorithm, is not itself an algorithmic task. The Halting Problem indicates something fundamental about the logical laws by which we guide thinking: To determine if something is an algorithm *is not itself an algorithmic task*. Any particular mechanical or clerical routine, such as an abacus program, can be defined quite precisely. But the term "clerical routine" itself cannot be, because there is no limit to the variety of forms that purely mechanical or clerical routines might assume. Such a definition would be necessary for a mathematical proof of the thesis. The thesis could only be refuted by showing that there is some clerical routine that can compute some function that no abacus can compute.

Church's thesis, if correct, provides a fundamental insight about the nature of human thought: It is fundamentally a creative and intuitive task which can operate and self-regulate by algorithmic thought only "after the fact." It bridges something abstract and precise with something concrete and vague in human thought. The very recognition of this feature of human thought, however, also depends reflexively on the very structure, limits and rules by which our thinking about all this is guided. Reflexivity has no end as we attempt to move outward to any final limit or perspective that will logically entail what has made any perspective possible. What is exciting to logicians is that Church's Thesis is taken to be an apriori result for all human thought, i.e., it is a truth of human thought not arrived at by empirical evidence. Nietzsche would certainly have something critical to say about this, but the point made here is that Nietzsche's insights about reflexivity are born out by an unlikely alliance in this case with 20th century logic and mathematics.